

QUO VADIS?



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Sigmund Knaul was born in the small town of Rajcza, Poland, on the 19th May, 1924. At the age of 15 he and his parents entered labour camp, but not before he had successfully pleaded for his father's life and rescued him from the pit where he was digging his own grave. Four of Sigmund's five brothers perished by one means or another, as did his aunts, uncles, grandparents. Sigmund and his parents entered labour camp, and then concentration camp, where his parents were finally claimed by the crematoria. Sigmund survived the K. Z. camps, and lived to marry and bring a daughter and son into this world. He died of cancer on the 1st of June, 1984, at the age of 60.

Taken from: *Gates of player*

Could I meet one who understood all...
Without word, without search,
Confusion or light,
Without asking why.

I would spread before him like a white cloth,
The heart and the soul...
The filth and the gold.
Perceptive he would understand.

And after I had plundered the heart,
When all had been emptied and given away,
I would feel neither anguish nor pain,
But would know how rich I had become.

As the moon sinks on the mountain edge
The fisherman's lights flicker
Far out on the dark wide sea.

When we think that we alone
Are steering our ships at midnight,
We hear the splash of oars
Far beyond us.

The Narrow Escape

Landeshur – Just a town in one of the German States during the war. A simple town – perhaps like the town of Kitchener in Ontario, Canada, or Gettysburg in the U.S.A. Ordinary German folk minding their own business of course, that of winning the war. Not much concerned with the camp on the hill.

And this camp was really on the hill. From the distance it could have been mistaken for a castle. Hundreds of steps had to be mounted to reach the top of the hill.

Come to think of it, the Germans housed the Jews in camps removed from the centres of cities, towns and villages. Why rattle the conscience of the ordinary folk. Not seeing and not hearing (the Germans did not even attempt to stretch the eye to see or strain the ear to hear) makes a good case for claiming innocence. No questions asked, no explanations required. And the good ordinary German folk were good at turning their heads away from the cattle boxcar transports that carried Jews to the death camps. It served their purpose to deceive themselves that these were cows on the way to the slaughterhouses.

The K.Z. crematoria – Auschwitz, Dachau – no one heard of them. Treblinka, Bergen Belsen, these too never existed. They were not on the maps – these too never existed. They were not on the maps – these were ghost towns conveniently conceived as such by the ordinary German folk. And the good German folk were good at not seeing what their eyes did not want to perceive – transport after transport, mass grave, death camps, children torn away from their mothers, husbands separated from their wives. Yes, the good German folk did not hear what they did not want to hear. It was convenient – no, we shall not be so harsh as to say cowardly – to shut the ears to the cries of the prisoners being beaten to death, to the shouting of civilians, to the pleading of babes clinging to the breasts of their Jewish mothers. No, the good old ordinary folk did not know of any atrocities then or now.

We know the mind plays tricks here and there (if we deliberately allow the mind so to do) but we also know that shame, brutality, guilt and lust, give way easily to lies, deceit and masquerade. The ordinary folk down there knew of the camp on the hill in Landeshut, as they were fully aware of who the inmates were, and what their fate would eventually be.

The collective guilt of the German people cannot be wiped out, because the camps was on the hill and access to that camps required a thousand steps to mount. Yes, true blindness may excuse the man from not being able to see, and the deaf not to hear, and the senile from not understanding. But merely turning the head away so as not to see, and placing the earmuffs on ears so as not to conceive, we did not then, have not now, and will not ever forgive or condone.

Auschwitz was there, and the camp on the hill was there, removed from the centre of the town, vibrant with lice, death, starvation, cries and prayers.

The German mind was a sinister mind. He meticulous black with the fiery red band around the left arm, was – to give him due – a consistent sadist. Before a Jew was shot, he would dig his own grave. When Auschwitz – the town of horror and crematoria – was constructed, the Jews were the architects of their fate. The camp on the hill in the town of Landeshut, was built by us. The lumber, mortar, bricks and nails, were transported by hand through the centre of the good old town, bricks, nails and mortar in pails, lumber on the shoulders of the prisoners up the thousand steps that separated the camp on the hill from the clean townspeople.

In the meantime, the prisoners were housed in the prison. I will never forget the day we arrived at Landeshut. The meticulous blacks marched us into the prison. It was a big prison, and understandably there were very few prisoners. A few old men and that was all.

The Jailman answered the knocks of the S.S. guards by arriving at the gate. He gave us one look and said 'nein'. To him this was desecration of the German prison. The Jews to be housed in the prison? Such obscenity was unheard of in the German Reich. To the Jailman this was an offense worthy of a good argument, and he but a mighty argument forward. Indeed no Jew was going to contaminate his prison, he said. He put his massive body against the gate, and so endeavoured to protect the holy place, and so bar the Jewish prisoners from entering the prison. If it was not for the fear in our hearts, fatigue from the long journey in the railroad box cars, hunger and the uncertainty that one might not be alive tomorrow, we would have found this indeed comical.

Imagine, even the prison was too good for the Jew. Of course, the muzzle of a pistol, placed to the Jailman's temple, made him decide to open the gates. Curiously enough, though not so strange if one cogitates upon it – he won a concession that we be quarantined to one special living area, so as to restrict the 'contamination' to a small designated area. After all, it was only right to protect the few old German prisoners from sharing the air with the Jews.

We never saw the German prisoners, and I would not have been surprised had I learned that the Jailman took it upon himself to set them free, and had sent them home. This would have been quite in order under the circumstances, in the town where the ordinary peace loving townspeople had to endure – temporarily though – Jews in a German prison.

And thus we marched every morning through the town. Up the steps onto the hill, and built the camp. And so we returned each evening to the prison to lay our heads to rest. The German folk did see us and they did turn their heads away. Not because of shame or anger did they refuse to see. They did not see what they did not want to see, and that is the truth, and nothing but the truth.

And the camp on the hill was finally built. But before it was completed the one thousand steps were stained with sweat, blood and tears. We slaved many months and our backs endured the strain of weight from building materials carried on our shoulders one step after another (like the Jews in Egypt building the pyramids) – a never ending ladder stretching to the inaccessible heavens. Many a back bent like a bow – the string becoming tighter and tighter – never straightened up again. Eventually the steps and one's bosom became one, the latter touching the former in one embrace, like a child clutching the mother's breast, one breast and then the other. We heaved our bodies from one step onto another, higher and higher up the hill–

Pyramids completed, sighs of relief met each other somewhere in the middle. The unforgettable, by now so familiar and yet so impersonal, cruel steps. Those up the hill sent down the steps a sigh of brotherly embrace, a prayer for yet being alive. Those below – the good German folk, ordinary people, good Christians, passive bystanders, had also reason for sighing with relief. And they did so – for they were relieved of the presence of the Jews in the German jail. No more was the town contaminated with Jewish sight, God's chosen children, Israel's spirit, Jehovah's soul. The town was now clean and the German conscience need not be troubled anymore (if it ever was) with the sight of Jews escorted by the S.S. marching through the clean Aryan streets of the town of Landeshur.

START HERE All was veiled in secrecy. I had no idea what the future had in store for me. Now that the camp was constructed, we all slept in one large hall. About thirty men huddled together in one corner. The

task completed, one had the feeling that the end was here. I lay awake night after night praying to the Almighty to reveal himself to me. One needed assurance and this could only come from God.

Hungry men long for food. Starving men reach for love. The murderer dreams of his victim. I wondered, now that I together with my fellow inmates became expendable, I wondered – had my time come to make peace with God? Will I live to see the sun tomorrow? Will I breathe the fresh morning air at dawn, I questioned my trembling heart, is it painful to be shot I wondered? What if I am only wounded and must endure slow agonizing death? Emotions of all sorts consumed me. Fear of the morrow. Uniting in death with my parents and brothers calmed me down when my body began to shake with fright. Frustration gripped my soul for being a prisoner of a prison that had no gate. Anger tore at my heart – at these people, the good German people down there at the foot of the hill.

And then one morning all was over. The gates swung open, column after column – about 2000 inmates from another world – climbed the hill to occupy the cap at Landeshut. They were welcomed, they were welcomed. A glimmer of hope appeared on the horizon. Most of them were Dutch Jews, the others were Polish Jews. Of course I wanted to know what they knew. The searching question on my mind was did these people come to work – some specific work – or were they in transit? To my great relief I was told that they were selected to work at a munitions factory, so they came to Landeshut to stay. The camp we built was to be their ‘Home’. God in heaven I murmured, we are saved for a while at least. Tomorrow I will still see the sun, smell the morning dew, may walk, breathe, smile, laugh, cry and pray.

Harry Hogstraten was a Dutch Jew. He was in his early thirties. Twice my age, he was well inclined towards me. Many times I felt he loved me like a father loves his son. He never had a son. A young daughter – really just a baby age 5 – he left behind in Holland in the custody of Catholic nuns. He used to talk a lot about the child to me. Through me he poured the love for a daughter somewhere thousands of miles away from him. Sometimes there were tears in his eyes when he spoke of how much he loved her. The Germans shot his wife before his eyes. His little girl was now a recipient of love, double love, love of a father and love of the dead mother. But all from a distance, a cold untouchable distance that Harry could not bridge by word, letter, phone or message. He lived for the day he may see his little girl. He mused affectionately on what he would buy her. The toys, the dresses were many. Harry never bought any dress for his little girl. Harry Hogstraten died in Auschwitz in 1945 consumed by black typhus, he gave up his soul, his dying breath probably calling his daughter to live, his last sigh regretting the broken promise of the girl’s dress that never became a reality. A dream never realized. Harry’s heart broke of sorrow, while the body disintegrated from uncontrollable fever.

I was a fortunate man. Harry was a friend of mine. And I cultivated the friendship with all the skill at my disposal. Harry was an important man – he was the chief cook. And so, when we eventually settled in the camp on the hill, I became Harry’s assistant.

‘Harry’s Assistant’, it sounds so banal and so trivial. How can one compare such a job? In the K.Z. to be an assistant cook was equivalent to being crowned a King, for now I had no more problems of going hungry. There was now food at my disposal to satisfy the pangs of hunger and more. ‘A Kingdom for a Horse’ – the life for being an assistant cook. Highly exaggerated? Yes by today’s standards perhaps, but no in the early nineteen forties.

Then an assistant cook was as near to the Garden of Eden as the angels themselves.

Yes it must be clearly understood that I was only an assistant cook. Harry was the chief cook. He was my boss. He was also my friend and my benefactor. I was his protégé in the strictest sense. And so there was nothing that I would deny him. His request was as good as a command. I owed him a debt – truly my life.

The inmates settled down. It is difficult to imagine how many were housed in one hall. Certainly there were no less than one thousand inmates that placed their meager belongings at the foot of the bed. And the belongings were meager indeed. An inmate's fortune may have consisted of just one additional towel, or perhaps an extra pair of socks. It is difficult to comprehend that a K.Z. inmate would wear the same shirt for one year – perhaps two years. An extra pair of pants were difficult to come by. A tooth brush was a luxury.

Looking out the window in the kitchen, I discerned Harry in the yard shaking hands with some of the Dutchmen. He embraced two of them with his powerful arms, and led them away from the crowd towards the kitchen. I was delighted to meet them, but I did not understand a word they were saying. I did not speak Dutch. Harry and I conversed in German. To my great surprise Harry turned towards me and whispered into my ears 'tomorrow morning these two friends of mine will come here at 4:30 in the morning, before dawn, and I want you to give each of them a good hunk of meat'. Yes, I was on duty from four o'clock on, that is 4:00 a.m. My job was to cut a loaf of bread into two portions, and the butter into twenty small portions. I have no idea how much the bread weighed, nor the butter. All I know is that it was a small loaf of bread, and the butter a little square. That was the portion for each inmate on which he had to survive till the evening. The inmates would line up at six o'clock in the morning, and I would hand each his ration through a small window opening.

Harry's job was to prepare the dinner, which was normally served at six o'clock in the evening or shortly thereafter. The dinner consisted of some sort of soup and a tiny piece of meat. Harry would make the preparation the evening before – two large pots with water and meat were placed onto a stove. By midnight the meat was boiled in the soup, and Harry turned in for the night.

The Kommandant of the camp was a Volks German. He came from a middle sized Polish city. The city was called (in Polish) Bielsho, and in German Birlitz. The man spoke both Polish and German fluently. He had a violent temper and was totally unpredictable. Many a time he spoke to me Polish in jest. I feared him because he would go into a rage at a moment's notice – uncontrollable rage. This would dissipate after he was totally exhausted from shouting and constant movement of his arms and hands.

Anne Marie was Herr Kommandant's girl friend. She was a full blooded German. Her job was to cook for the German guards, and for the Kommandant. In addition to being the Kommandant's mistress and the cook, she would every so often engage in sexual intercourse with Harry. This she would do in the cellar about ten o'clock in the morning. That was the time that Anne Marie came to our kitchen to allot to Harry so many pounds of meat for the next day's dinner. The moment they were going down into the cellar was the signal for me to stand guard and watch for the Kommandant. While I gladly obliged Harry, I stood there in trepidation and wonder. Harry had guts and a good sense of humour. He took the German meat surrounded by chunks of meat hanging from the ceiling. He was indeed getting an orgasm and a chuckle.

Anne Marie treated me like I was her son. Of course there must have been at least twenty years difference in our ages. She did look, though, young and desirable. For me standing guard was indeed a torture. Harry was taking his time – he had a good laugh at it. Yet there was nothing I would not do for Harry. I had the feeling that the Kommandant suspected Harry's adventures.

And so that fateful morning Harry's two friends arrived, but not at 4:30 a.m. as arranged, but at 5:00 o'clock. I obligingly cut two large pieces of boiled meat, and as I was handing the meat to Harry's two friends,

the door unexpectedly opened and the Kommandant walked in. I was caught in the act undeniably, there was a knife in one hand and two pieces of meat in the other hand. I froze, I was dumbfounded, speechless, utterly and hopelessly lost. The meat dropped back into the pot, the knife slipped out of my hand onto the floor, and the two Dutchmen disappeared and were no more. I was alone with the Kommandant. I looked into his eyes, totally oblivious to the act, for I was under Harry's spell – he asked, I did. The Kommandant's face became pink, then it turned purple, then red and then scarlet red. I stood frozen, he began to shake. His hands started to vibrate slowly like a steam engine, and then took speed like a tornado. I do not remember how many times he hit my face. I was oblivious to his beating, for after a while the pain was there no more. Every so often he would stop and shout 'why did you do it?'. I was numb and kept silent. But at one point I blacked out. 'Herr Kommandant I am innocent, it was an order I followed'. Then the bands turned into a machine in constant motion. He landed his right hand on the right side of my face, and the left hand on the left side of my face. 'Who gave the order?' he demanded. 'I do not know' I whispered. He had an inkling and wanted proof so as to dispose of Harry. I would not give in, and he would not stop his hands, ever in motion, reducing my face to a pulp. I would not yield the ground, and he would not stop.

At 6:30 a.m. Harry walked in. The Kommandant was exhausted. Pointing his finger at me, he turned to Harry and said 'I want to see this thief at 7 o'clock in the guard house'. The Kommandant walked out, and I, no more human, was left alone with Harry. Or was I alone – No, God was with me.

I whispered to Harry that his friends came late and that I was caught in the act of handing the meat to the two Dutchmen. Harry was silent and would not comment. I continued, telling Harry that I blurted out 'it was an order'. Harry turned pale, but I assured him that I did not betray him. Harry relaxed but still kept silent. I pressed, telling Harry that the Kommandant wanted to know who gave me the order. Harry still kept silent. I pressed on, telling Harry that my life was probably at stake. Harry began to ponder, but kept silent. By that time the clock was showing 6:55. 'I must go' I whispered. Harry kept silent, and I believe he must have lingered, thinking of his daughter. As I was closing the door behind me, I heard Harry saying 'would you like me to come with you?'. I did not reply and kept walking slowly to the outside fence. The Guard House to me felt like a thousand kilometres away, and when I opened the door to the Kommandant's office, I began to sob. The room was large and sparsely furnished. At one corner a mammoth desk faced the door. The Kommandant sat behind the desk, his face without expression. I stood at attention and he focused his bulging eyes upon a pistol lying on the desk at his right hand side. Slowly, very slowly, he loaded the magazine into the womb of the weapon, and when that was done he aimed the pistol straight at my heart. 'Who gave you the order' he shouted. I stood there, motionless and numb with pain. My face by now was puffed and my lips swollen – the upper lip fused to my nose, and the lower lip touching my chin. I stuttered, the words did not come easily to me. It was my willpower not my brain that addressed itself to the Kommandant. I said 'if the innocent blood of a Jew must flow, then let it be done, I have nothing to say or add to what I have already said'. 'I will shoot you' he warned me, and I discerned that fury was taking possession of him. I began to pray silently, making peace with my God.

I felt a door open behind my back. I did not dare turn to see who it might be. I thought it might be Harry. No, it was Anne Marie. Though I have known her and seen her each day almost a year, she did not recognize me. A puzzled look on her face gave me a hint that my face was beyond recognition.

She turned her eyes to the Kommandant, and spoke softly 'who is this man?'. 'That is him, Harry's assistant, the thief' he blurted out. 'And I am going to shoot him' he shouted. Anne Marie gazed at me long, and I discerned not only pity in her eyes, but also warmth and affection. 'You poor devil' she whispered. I cast my

eyes to the floor, and when I regained some measure of composure. I was transfixed by a scene that made me forget momentarily my miserable condition. Anne Marie began to strip in front of the Kommandant like a professional strip teaser, the like of which I do not desire nor will I ever see again. She managed to relax the Kommandant's murderous desires, and in fact, he began to laugh hysterically. His hands dropped the pistol and gripped Anne Marie's breasts. She winced, he squeezed harder. She put her arms around his neck and virtually dragged him to the door behind me.

I stood there alone with my God, forlorn, not knowing what to do. My eyes were frozen to the pistol, but I was petrified. My hands reached for the pistol, but my feet were frozen to the floor. I thought my brain would explode as thoughts culminated, much like a pressure vessel, in my mind to kill the Kommandant. I agonized, but I could not make the step forward to grab the gun. Something inside me was holding me back. 'There is time, there is time yet to do that' a voice within me commanded.

Time was of the essence. I heard the door open from behind. Anne Marie and the Kommandant appeared from nowhere. I realized that in that room behind me sex, sadism and compassion were melded into one purpose. My life was placed into a pair of scales. It was balancing on the precipice of the deep abyss. Sex was determining whether I live or die. I, the passive bystander had no say in the determination of events. And so, I therefore did pray.

And my prayers were answered. Anne Marie placed her hand on my shoulder and kissed me on my bloody cheek. The Kommandant sat behind the desk and removed the pistol from the top of the desk, placing it into the drawer. His face relaxed, his body limp and weary with sexual satisfaction, his voice normal and subdued. He, the murderer just minutes before, addressed me the Jew, with respect. And he said 'I know bloody well who gave you the order, but I wanted to hear it from you'. He stopped for a moment, gazed at the window, and with difficulty resumed talking 'while I hate you Jews, I must admit that I respect you for placing your life at stake for a friend. You were saved by the skin of your teeth, and now go before I change my mind'

I slowly walked out of the room accompanied by a grateful smile from Anne Marie, her large misty blue eyes looking into mine as I opened the door and ever so slightly turned my head towards her.

Janosz

He was a tall handsome athletic man, perhaps 30 or 32 years old. His features reminded me of Jesus Christ – a loving man without a beard.

On June 2nd, 1943, we were awakened one hour earlier. Four o'clock in the morning, several S.S. men stormed into the bunker yelling 'arise you swine'. We arose to the tune of the whistles that tore the eardrum. The customary arising at five o'clock was broken. We knew, we felt that something new, something uncertain, frightful is to happen.

I suppose that defining fear blogged the minds of many men for centuries. In the K.Z. camp one was not concerned with the definition, one was preoccupied with the means of conquering fear. To the best of my knowledge I do not believe that anyone ever succeeded.

Constant uncertainty bred fear after that only ceased with death.

Surely, many men resigned themselves to their fate and became lethargic to the tomorrow. These men, however, were not free of fear. I believe that for these men the fear in their hearts was greater than for those who had some spirit left in them – they wanted but could not die.

I further believe that persecution is the greatest fear for all fears – and more intensified than fear of death. The indefinite cannot compare with the finite. Some men want to live and cannot; some would want to die and are not allowed to. So the fear of wanting to live and knowing that death is definite if not today, then tomorrow, if not tomorrow, certainly it is there lurking from a bullet, starvation, disease or deprivation – such fear is a great fear. Yet I suppose that the fear of living, whereas one wishes to die, must be the greatest fear of all.

Exactly as demanded, we gathered at five o'clock in the yard of the Auschwitz camp. We were told that we were marching out. Each man in his heart envisioned his own destruction. Some saw the gates of life, some saw the gates of death. Whether life or death, the fear was visible on each face – persecution in marriage with uncertainty – was a centuries-long known tool of the master over the slave.

Whatever pathetic possessions one had, were with him, a towel, or a toothbrush, or both. A handkerchief, a spare pair of socks, a thread and a needle – insignificant, perhaps banal items by today's standards – but in that time priceless possessions.

I was the wealthiest man – no boy – after all I was only sixteen. I was rich beyond any man's grasp, beyond anyone's imagination. I was ashamed of my wealth. I felt a thief amongst honest men. Riddled with guilt, my hands were cold. Afraid to lose my wealth my poor heart thumped as if it were to explode at any moment. Two bitter tears, reluctant but warm, escaped my eyes and fertilized the bloody soil. My eyes were affixed to my shoes as if to guard them. My hands were clutching my heart as if to stop it from bursting out. I was so ashamed for being rich. A diamond, my mother's engagement stone, plucked from its setting, slept many a night under my tongue. Yesterday I parted with this last vestige of memory. I cut the embryonic cord to live; the diamond was traded with the German Kapo for a pair of leather shoes with wooden soles and two pieces of bread two fingers thick. My fingers were not clutching the heart; they were embracing the two pieces of bread hidden under my prisoner's garb. My tears were not watering the earth, they were hiding my shoes. I was afraid, I trembled, I was ashamed to be so wealthy among the hundreds of hungry barefoot men.

What of you, do you remember, do you want to remember, do you want to hear?

The journey was murder. Like sardines in a tin, packed into railroad box cars we travelled standing up four days and three nights. Only after I disembarked I realised that my boyhood friend was dead. He fell to the

floor, must have been dead for quite some time. I did not know that I was embracing a corpse. We did not speak. Without water and food the tongue forgets the mother's language, and the mind goes blank. There were about thirty box cars. Only a few from each box car crawled out. It was a long journey, it was truly a murder.

The night had mercy upon the prisoners. The only element in the entire universe unleashed its powers to aid the sick, hungry stumbling men; the one and only one that still believed them to be human beings. As it were, the night commanded the moon to shine bright to bear witness to the bestiality of men over men. The night wanted to see the faces of the executioners, to report them to God. How naïve the night was to believe that these faces were faces. The night did not know that they were masks not accountable to anyone, not even the Master. But how good the night was to the victims. It commanded the air to be tempered, slightly on the cool side, to strengthen the befallen. A summer breeze fanned the feverish hollowed cheeks. The night was good and the moon was sweet, and the S.S. lined up the road, sentry on each side thirty paces apart, ready to shoot on sight any of the wretched prisoners who might attack him with hands that could hardly lift, with fingers that had no blood to squeeze, legs that did not move but dragged the ground, bodies that were reduced to skeletons. Oh yes, the faceless were very much afraid of the faces.

Except for obscure shouts of the executioners, the night was still. The prisoners laboured the difficult march in silence. They did not speak to one another, and yet there must have been the same question gnawing on each prisoner's mind – where to? In K.Z. one learned to discipline the tongue and not exchange views, fears, not even hopes.

Uncertainty embraced with both arms and heart. It was the lover, soothing and tender. It spurred one to another effort, another step forward. Uncertainty helped to endure the pangs of hunger, the burning thirst, the bitter cold. It uplifted the sick for another day of life.

Uncertainty and hope were almost one and the same to the mind that was no mind, to the will that was no will, to the man who became no man. Certainty belonged to the mighty, it was cuddling the conquerors, the executioners. To them certainty meant victory, conquest of the whole world, destruction of all that is not Teutonic and Aryan, rape, murder, burning, sadism, massacre, wine, woman, life – inferno.

Uncertainty belonged to the prisoners – blotting out certainty, deprivation, hunger, pain, pain, pain – death.

It was a strange sight indeed. The S.S. men in full combat gear lined up the winding road leading to the castle. How afraid these executioners were. Their bloody hands were nervously and constantly in motion; rays of light from the flashlights danced crisscrossing the road to the music of Satan himself. They never looked into the faces of the prisoners. They shouted into the stillness of the night, tearing apart the darkness – not the prisoners' hearts – demanding fresh and anew that the bodies move faster the winding ever steeper road. On and on the executioners were bellowing, and on and on feet were moving to the dance of the nervous tunes from flashlights. Every so often – and very often – a shot pierced my ears. I never looked back – I did not want to see. Many a survivor of this march would argue that he endured more pain than Sir Edmund Hillary, and some would say that they conquered a mountain more treacherous than the majestic Himalayas. When the heavy iron doors of the castle swung open to receive the chosen people, it was a prison not a castle that swallowed a handful of Jews.

We were lined up in the yard and decreed to identify ourselves by numbers. I was last to scream into the night under the dancing rays of the flashlights – number 26. It dawned upon me only then that the march of death was generous, very generous indeed. Some thirty box cars of Jews, numbering several hundred human beings, began the journey – but the prison gates of the castle embraced only twenty six survivors. I do not remember the

name of the castle. I do not recall the town or the city. Who cared?. After all I was not a knight – I had no armour – I was prisoner, a boy sixteen years of age, Jew with two slices of bread and leather shoes with wooden soles. But I shall always remember Janosz. My story begins with him and shall end with him.

From nowhere a full majestic figure stepped forward with rich booming voice, full of melancholy, yet strong and confident, and addressed the executioners. “Gentlemen S.S.” he said “I am No. I, my name is Janosz. My number is B.I0948 and I declare myself the leader, the modern Moses of these people”. Laughter interrupted the man’s sincere assertion. “You are a Jewish swine” shouted a German S.S. gentleman, and the prison walls echoed “Jewish Swine”. Some fifty S.S. men now joined in the hilarious laughter, the executioners had indeed a merry time.

Undaunted, Janosz paced forward two or three more steps, and now his voice, even stronger and more confident than before, averred into the night “I demand” he spoke “that your leader come forward and that I declare myself before him Leader Prisoner of these fellow Jews, and that I guarantee with my life that none of them shall endeavour to escape this prison. Any infraction of a prisoner shall be deemed my infraction and I accept your punishment now and here whatever it may be, and in whatever fashion you shall decree to mete it out. I declare myself the leader of this people, and I assume full responsibility for them”. And this is how it happened. A modern twentieth century man was born not to follow God’s orders and lead the Jews out of Egypt. No, this Moses was determined to defy God and save those He, in his anger, decreed to destroy. For how otherwise can one describe the Holocaust?. A Father whose infinite power can preserve life, and life, unequivocally and irrevocably decree to have his loving children destroyed in most cruel ways and by inhuman means.

God turned mad – he broke the covenant with his children. He lost his powers of reason. His anger consumed him and destroyed all vestige of love for his chosen children. How can God become mad? If he has the attributes of love then he must also be capable of hate. God neglected to place automatic brakes on hate, and let the hate become the better of him. Hate is like fire, uncontrolled it will eventually consume itself and destroy the innovator. That is how I explain why the handful of Jews survived the crematoria. God’s hate, not the innovator, was eventually destroyed and replaced by love. Perhaps after all He may be human, and so He must be forgiven. It is to forgive God that the Jews will have to pray for millenia to come. In fact children are loving and do forgive their father.

I have the feeling that God and the angels have their own Yom Kippur, and since God cannot be destroyed, he prays to be forgiven for the transgressions he committed. For his sake and for the sake of the survival of Judaism and Jews, he is being forgiven.

The Shower

The gates flung open. One could imagine that in this vast universe somewhere a farmer also pushed the gates aside and let the herd into the pasture. These gates, however, were opened for the human herd – these days considered lower than cows. One wonders what powers on earth deterred the Germans from cannibalism. Surely only perverse consuming hate kept in check such aversion.

There are many gates in this universe, gates of the house, gates to the bird's cage, gates to prison and even gates to heaven – all these are ordinary gates.

These gates, however, that swung open, were not ordinary gates. Nothing was ordinary that day, the times were not ordinary times, the herd of people were not ordinary people. Certainly the gates were extraordinary – these were the infamous gates of Auschwitz. Like a womb they opened up, deceptive, cold cruel iron, no more the gates of freedom than the still born child.

The gates though now open like an arch, did not erase from our view, nor mind, the famous narcotic inscription – “Arbeit macht das Leben suess” (work renders life sweet). One must admire the German ingenuity, be this in science, art, music, war machinery, destruction of Jews, but above all the ingenuity of letting the world know that it is sweet to work in the K.Z. camp. One inmate – ingenious by his own rights – composed a poem – but “Suessheit vertrag ich nicht” (I abhor sweetness).

The gates of Auschwitz stood now wide open. Inmates – four in a row – began the march, crossing the line millions did enter before. One, two, three, four, they murmured, where to where to. Column after column – thousands – who knows how many volunteered to desert the oven-hungry crematoria. In their hearts they carried the vivid picture of the red fire billowing from the chimney at night, crackling and spitting stench of burning human flesh. For them the ball of fire made it easy to leave behind the uncertain present for the uncertain future.

Quo Vadis? Where to? No one knew, no one cared. The tall chimney was like an erupting volcano, billowing Jewish smoke, vomiting Israel's blood – that dreaded stack was behind one's back and that was all that mattered.

The heat was unbearable, the air stifling. Packed like sardines into box cars, we became cows. But unlike cows we were not bellowing, and unlike sardines we were still alive and standing. To be precise though, we were not standing, not really. A body was propped up tightly embracing another body. Erect, a body melded with another body. A body was supported from falling down by another body. One chest clamming to another chest. One arm twisted around another arm. You could not fall, even if you wanted to. Body to Body – some alive and some dead – like one massive sculpture, inseparable in one embrace, in one box car. Link to a link like a heavy chain, unbreakable, indestructible, stretching from one end of the wall to another.

Here and there a sigh, a prayer, a lingering tear. But otherwise no motion – except for the train – stillness, oneness, a melded human arc.

Woe to him who was of small physical stature. Such an unfortunate man was sandwiched between two bodies. His lot was harder, on the other hand, if you were tall you were fortunate – you could rest your weary head on your comrade's aching shoulder and vice versa. The most fortunate was he who was propped against a dead body. Not only could you then rest your head on the cold shoulder at will, but you could catch a nap. You were not disturbed – no permission was required. To find oneself in such a situation must have been sweeter than wine and more bitter than a full bladder. At worst the man who would be only a head smaller than his neighbour. In such event he would be the recipient of two heads resting on either of his shoulders, and without reciprocity.

One felt guilty for not being able to resist the force of gravity. One was quite aware that by tilting one's head onto another shoulder, his lot became so much harder. Two heads at the same time made it miserable. Now, not only was the poor creature – if one may call him so – oppressed by heat, crushed by bodies all around him, but now he bore some extra weight – sometimes dead weight – on his shoulders.

It was a voyage of life and death. A dead body was welcomed body. Not only could you rest your sweaty hundred kilogram head upon a comrade's shoulder, but you felt that your guilt was dissipating. To be sure, often one wished the comrade give up the ghost so that one may ever so slightly tilt the head and risk no resentment. And thus being endowed physically as tall or medium or small, became a matter of life and death. Heaven forbid if nature endowed you with smaller or small stature. Then your lot was a thousand times harsher. A small sardine in a tin box, if it was not dead prior to being tucked in the tin, must have died a thousand deaths before it really died.

The heat was extracting the eyes from the sockets. The stench of dead bodies was piercing through the heart of the living. The acid of the urine penetrated through the thin K.Z. cloth and made the skin unbearably itchy. To scratch oneself one could not, for there was no room for lifting the arms. Thus one endeavoured – unsuccessfully though – to rub one's body against the other body. This was just a futile attempt in the box car stuffed with 50, 100, 200 – who knows how many inmates there were.

The sweet smell of feces one inhaled like the smoke of cigars. The foul air filled the lungs and was puffed out, and sometimes coughed out with blood back into the foul air of the box car. Truly one inhaled not wanting to, and exhaled forced to.

Perhaps this was a twentieth century breathing experiment, possibly an endurance experiment, a standing test. So, I am sure, it was defensively explained by other humans outside in the free world. After all, they saw a moving train. After all soldiers in war do not ride on the roof of box cars stuffed with cows. The Germans, after all is said and done were not expected to be that methodical.

For those inside the box cars, the chamber represented torture and death. They were the beneficiaries of bestialities devised by demons.

These demons feasted to the heavy music of Wagner and sang of the fatherland surrounded by the aroma of luxurious cigars. All this while a column of some forty railroad cars quietly swayed to and fro the winding lonely track.

Whereas those inside the box cars were longing for air, starving for food, pursing parched lips for a drop of water, weeping for a moment of sleep, praying for breathing space, those outside in the attached only luxuries coach, were also deprived of a thing – one thing only – and only temporarily – women. When it comes to sacrifice and denials, comparisons after all, are healthy and necessary.

Thousands of years ago, the Jews wandered for forty years in the desert. The twentieth century column we speak of, was not lost. The train began its journey from slavery – Auschwitz – and it ended in slavery – Dachau. It took Moses forty days to come down from the mountain. The train took four full days and four full nights only to leave the inferno for the hell.

The music of Wagner died down. The feasting came to an end. The singing to the glory of the Fatherland was no more. The train came to a standstill. The heavy door was swiftly rolled ajar. Wagner's music was replaced with shrill guttural sounds “out, out you dirty swine”.

Those near the door catapulted onto ground, much like a tree that is cut down.

Now the Germans scenario in the name of which millions died – the breathing space was finally here. The fallen out bodies from the box cars created a vacuum. Those near the door were all dead, squashed, suffocated – crushed against the cold cruel iron. They gave up the soul before others did. The breathing space freed the other dead standing corpses. Like trees they tumbled down to the ground – stiff motionless emaciated bodies. Some corpses had no life to them for seconds, some for minutes, others for hours and some for days. True to the spirit of fellowship they made room for those that still could perhaps walk. As the bodies were falling out of the door and tumbling down on the floor of the box car, four emerged from my box car, five including myself.

Dachau. This was a long train, and the box cars, like towering tombstones in a huge cemetery, were many. The survivors but a few – perhaps one hundred, perhaps some more, perhaps less. For each emaciated inmate, there stood guard, with rifles and bayonets, three or four S.S. men screaming “line up line up”. Meagre column – four to a row – huddled together. The arduous march to Dachau camp had begun.

The road was narrow and winding. The night was about to embrace the forsaken and forlorn. Every fifty metres or so an armed German guard stood ready to shoot on sight any resurrected inmate that might attack the mighty Wehrmacht.

Now it became pitch dark. In place of the visible German S.S., one perceived a ray of light coming from a flashlight. Flashlight after flashlight. Flashlight on the right of the road and flashlight on the left of the road.

The mind was weary, the body aching, the heart so fearful. No one gave much thought as to why the flashlights. In retrospect, the flashlights served a purpose. For one, the Germans were always fearful of Jews attacking them barehanded, of course, out of desperation.

Secondly, it was a paramount – at all costs even risking losing the war – to deter a Jew from escaping. How preoccupied, how orderly, and how methodical the German liquidation machinery of the Jewish race really was, can be readily ascertained by the painstaking effort it took to prepare, organise and execute the elaborate procedure to guard some one hundred, feet-dragging, death-starving Jewish inmates. A remnant of a transport from Auschwitz, a handful of survivors who had not eaten, drunk or slept for four full days and nights, who felt their feet glued to the dirty country road – not men anymore but ghosts enveloped by endless time and space. These dangerous creatures were guarded by hundreds of battle-able S.S. men with loaded rifles and brilliant flashlights. No wonder the Germans lost the war. No mistake that the Jews saved humanity from worldwide German domination and elimination of everyone and all who would not have been fit to become an Aryan. I wonder whether humanity, men and women all around the world today, deliberately want to forget this ethical debt to the Jews. Or perhaps whether the Jews have let the Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, in fact every man, woman and child who cherish freedom in their hearts – allowed the world to forget the eternal gratitude, and never-ending debt, so richly and so elegantly, so courageously, so enduringly, so excruciatingly painfully earned by those six million, now resting for some nearly four decades in unmarked graves.

For after all, it took inhuman German effort and energy to exercise vigilance over the dangerous Jewish inmates. Every fifty metres endless flashlights on the right, never-ceasing flashlights on the left.

Oh men around the world, men of good will, faith and heart now that the gap of yesteryear closes for the morrow, consider what must have gone on in the minds of those that did not know the hour, the time, the day, the fate. Nay, did not understand even the present, speculate, dare to do so. Perhaps the prisoners, by virtue of birth, dreamed of Hanukkah, who knows, even Christmas. After all, rays of lights at night remind one of

celebration, candles, joy of days gone. But surely some dreamed of a spring with its cool water, and some languished for bed adorned with clean white linen, and perhaps just a minute of sleep.

Other imagined a bowl half filled with hot chicken soup, and some must have visualised a hospital, longing for a respectful quiet death.

Men in my country and distant lands, men in late seventies and early eighties, what is it that your heart is longing for, what your desires, aspirations, what are your options?

I prayed for a simple thing by today's standards. These, however, were unusual times, and simple or not simple, murmured "a shower".

My thoughts in time counting one, two, three, four, marched, raised and finally melted into a hot stream of water coruscating over my aching filthy body. I dreamed of a stream of water mercilessly breaking up the dirt clinging to my skin. I really perceived ripples of steaming diamond-like drops of water soothing my sores. Drops of the blessed warm liquid dissolving the clinging caked sweat that felt like a marble pillar – the pillar and me being one.

One, two three, four – flashlights on the right, flashlights on the left. Thousands of streams shooting from the nozzle of a shower, massaging my right shoulder then my left shoulder, flowing down my back, and lower down, soothing my aching feet. Oh water, blessed water, bathing my neck, now like a crown adorned with jewels, festering with boils. Warm water relaxing my weary arms. Hot steaming water mercilessly eating into my body, dissolving dirt that now felt like an armour – water blessed, water exorcising the stench of death. Pearls of water bathing my burning eyes. Drops of water saving my soul from hell.

We arrived, we undressed. We were shoved into the general bathroom. There, there they were, hundreds of showers, nozzles and nozzles upon which my eyes transfixed. I felt hypnotized by shower nozzles, and I crawled under one nuzzle naked of heart, denude of soul. I waited a thousand hours for my dream to come true.

Finally the order came "turn on the showers". My heart began to palpitate, and then stopped beating. My dream, my dream was about to come true. It did, it did.

One, two, three, four. I was still marching, I was still counting. Flashlights to my right, flashlights to my left.

Ten icy pearls of water oozed out of the nozzle and splashed over my feverish body into a thousand fragments. No more, they died. My eyes and nozzle married to one another, I pleaded for birth of more pearls of water. The barren nozzle gave birth to none more.

I was cleansed of faith, tenderness, love. Nothingness and I entombed into one.

The Escape

It was end of April, 1945, or perhaps beginning of May – I do not remember exactly. But I do know that it was just a few days before the war came to an end.

Dachau – we sensed that something is in the air. The guards seemed nervous. And so were we. Rumours of evacuation were whipped among the inmates, and so was the fear of death felt every moment of awareness and consciousness.

And one morning it happened. The Kapos saw to it that we were all assembled in the yard early that day.

I had made up my mind, if the evacuation does take place, then I am going to make every attempt to escape. I was full of mistrust of the German mind. I knew how unpredictable the S.S. were. I have seen an experienced the brutality – I have witnessed the trigger happy German before. And I made up my mind that I

am not going to die from a German bullet. If I am to die then let it be in flight actively engaged in battle. My legs shall be my rifle, and my heart the ammunition. I swore to my God that I shall not stand passively by and dig my own grave.

Death is a noble thing and one should die in dignity I mused if death is inevitable, then at least I must not die like my parents and my brothers with my back against the wall. Give me the opportunity – I prayed to God – to die running for my life, and if I must die then let it be. Let me die in flight for freedom I prayed to God. And he did hear my prayers and he did give me the opportunity to run for my life.

The gates swung wide open. Accompanied by guards and German shepherd dogs, we left Dachau. Destination unknown. Total evacuation of the camp took place, and the march of death began.

March – when one thinks about march, one associates it with the military march or a musical march. Chopin's March comes to my mind. If I were composer I would attempt to compose a Holocaust March. Imagine listening to a march leading six million people to death. Perceive the music extracting the feeling of a mother parting from a child a suckling off her breast – a child torn away from the warm bosom and consumed by fire.

I have met a man in Dachau – an interesting man. He told me that he was born in Austria and that he lived most of his life in Paris, France. We became very friendly. I was a boy, he was a man. For whatever reasons, he looked at me as if I were his son. In true sense of word I could have been his son, for he was at least twice my age and possibly more than that. In 1943, I was going to be 19 years of age.

At the beginning he asked all sorts of questions about my past, but would not discuss himself beyond the fact that he was born in Vienna and lived in Paris. Because my father lived in Vienna for many years, my affinity for this man grew stronger as time went on.

Whenever I touched upon his private life – and I was curious – he would gently brush me aside and say 'when the time will come I will tell you'. My curiosity grew stronger each day, as there was mystery about this man that attracted me to him. I was also very fond of him.

His sense of humour was a source of great strength to me those days. I was persistent in asking about his past, but I would not press too hard, for the mystery in itself gave impetus to battling today for tomorrow.

And he seemed to sense it, and thus would only reply 'it is worth waiting, be patient. I will tell you who I really am in the right time and in the right place'. My appetite for knowledge of him was like a chunk of bread – a nourishment sorely dreamed of those days.

We 'dined' together and we slept side to side on a blanket laid out on the wooden floor. We worked side by side and we dreamed together that impossible dream – the illusive out-of-reach freedom.

He called himself Erick Bregman. I suspected that his first name was his true birth name. As to the family name, I had a hunch that it was assumed in K.Z. for reasons of life and death. I came upon this idea when I once addressed him jovially 'Mr. Bergman'. He turned swiftly and focused his eyes sharply upon my hands. His body became rigid, and in a hoarse voice he reprimanded me sharply 'My name to you is Erick and if you so insist, then it is Erick Bregman. Bregman if you please. And remember it for good nay I break your neck'. He accentuated every word. I had never seen him so perturbed, so irritated and so angry. I became frightened and ever since that day I was careful to call him only Erick. I knew then and there that the mystery was shrouded around his family name.

We were walking silently side by side. A full day and the night was behind us. Uncertainty played on my mind. I smelled death. Surrounded by the S.S., hungry and thirsty, decimated and forlorn by our God, we

were permitted to lay our weary heads on the side of an unpaved dirt road. 'Erick' I said 'we may have been walking the last road, who are you?'

'Come close to me' he whispered. I placed my face close to his. He gently spoke to me, making sure that no one could hear us. He unfolded a story that has been stored in my memory for three dozen years, and I am about to tell it now. The authenticity of what Erick divulged to me I have never verified, but neither do I have any reason to doubt its truth.

'I am not Erick Bregman' he began, 'my name is Erick Bergner. Have you ever come across the name Bergner' he amplified. I was ignorant of the name Elizabeth Bergner, and told him so.

'Well let me tell you' he continued 'who Elizabeth Bergner is. She is a famous actress, and she lives in England. I am her brother' he whispered. 'But this is not the only reason why I have disguised my true name – no by no means the only reason' he carried on.

'You see, I lived most of my life in Paris. As a young boy I was attracted to crime. Whereas my sister's talent is on the screen, I the younger brother have talent that rivalled her achievements and surpassed them in every sense of the word. I am the acknowledged King of the Criminal World in Paris, France. I am loved, and I am feared, and I have powers above that of the King. Now do not wonder that I have not been liberated by my subjects through bribes or otherwise. One million dollars in gold is but a small part of our treasure that my subjects were willing to pay the Nazis for my freedom. But just as much as I love my profession, being a criminal, and rejoice being a King of the Paris underworld, I love being Jew. I voluntarily chose my fate and never want to be a King as long as there is one Jew in Nazi K.Z. camps. Do you understand this?' he implored a response from me.

'Yes, I understand Erick' I choked my answer.

'Now as to you young man' he continued 'there is a bright future if we survive'.

'I want you to come to Paris. You will be my companion and my friend' he said. 'Anything you desire, regardless of cost, shall be given you. You shall never be asked, nor shall you be involved in any crime. You shall remain pure all your life. Except for your love I ask nothing of you, and in return I will give you food, clothing, gold and diamonds worthy of a King. I love you' he said.

I was stunned, and remained silent for quite a while. My imagination was fired up to unprecedented heights. I saw a table full of magnificently prepared food. I smelled the aroma of old wine. I saw beautiful girls serving all kinds of piping hot dishes. I heard music, I experienced tranquility and peace.

My desire for life awakened in indescribable intensity. My will to live grew stronger by the minute. I was determined to survive.

After a short rest we were on our feet again. We were walking for hours on end, and then the S.S. heard us all together into a small forest. 'This is it' I said to Erick.

There was no need to say anything more. Erick and I began to run. I heard him hissing behind me. I came to a wall, perhaps two to three meters high. I lifted myself up with all the strength that I had left, and fell on the other side heavily to the ground. 'Erick' I shouted.

I heard two shots, and I never saw Erick again. One of those two shots, perhaps both, killed my friend and the dream that did not give me wealth after all, but it did give me life.

Quo Vadis — Where to?

The river was cold; after all it was the end of April. Perhaps it was not a river. It looked more like a canal.

Crouching, my back propped against the bank of the canal, I kept my head barely above the muddy and stinking mass of water. I prayed, but I was so cold and shivering.

What is life I reflected, but one coin with two faces. Bad and good, love and hate, comfort and misery, hunger and satiation, cold and warmth, parent and orphan, God and Germans, life and death.

My thoughts wandered back to my childhood years. I recalled the studies in Heder, when a little boy; the exodus from Egypt, and me having just escaped from Concentration Camp. Both events had something in common. But I was no Moses. Did God really part the sea? Naively I mused that perhaps the great God of the Chosen People might do the same for me now. But why should he? He never had interfered with events so far. In Egypt he was an important and powerful God. With the Germans he was pitifully impotent.

Was it an hour, perhaps two hours that I kept solitary companionship with that silent canal? By that time I was a stiff corpse. A small voice within me was telling me that I was hovering over the valley of death. Hungry, shivering bewildered, isolated, I now began to take stock.

‘Quo Vadis?’ I murmured. Now it came upon me. Submerged in a canal somewhere in Germany, in the heart of the enemy country, without a place to go, with no friend to turn to, my thoughts nostalgically turned to the K.Z. in Dachau. How I longed for my hard bare bunk, and for that bunker full of stench and walking corpses. There, there I was not alone; a roof over my head, a blanket covering my emaciated body, a brotherly suffering human near me, a weak voice comforting my soul, and a voice that I could hear, a small voice, yet a voice — God, I was now so alone.

Death seemed to me a welcome friend. I was sinking, I had no heart to fight on, and my head, barely above the water, was slowly and gently pulled by a magnet to the bottom of the canal. I was meeting my Maker.

‘To be or not to be.’ Perhaps that was what Shakespeare meant. In face of death, mine was the desire to live. I was propelled from the abyss of water by a single solitary wish to tell the story. One day I will tell the story. This innocent single motive tore me away from the dark peaceful depths of the inviting bottom of the canal. I had tasted the bed of the canal, where I wanted to lay my weary head to rest. It was a soft bed, seductive, irresistible, inviting. I shivered so profusely.

To tell the story compelled me to extricate myself from the finite wet mass of water, onto dry land, and then across the country road into the dark, sinister, strange and thick forest. I was saved only to suffer more anguish, fear and torment. ‘Quo Vadis?’ I cried out into the forest. The tall trees heard my trembling voice, and they sympathised with my tears soaking the unfamiliar German ground. The trees did not answer me.

Totally disoriented, I managed to climb a tree. Hungry and wet, I found the will and the unstinting desire to live and tell the story. Cold, emaciated and forlorn, I had found a home there in a tree, dispersing strong branches that served as my bed. I made myself as comfortable as I could, and exhausted, I fell asleep.

When I awoke, the night had descended upon me and my meagre shelter. The trees looked so menacing. I felt close to the stars now brightly shining upon my head. The moon stood high, illuminating the pathway below me; the rays coruscated between the branches, playing hide and seek with my weary eyes. I was so cold, and so painfully hungry. Heightened by the night, the darkness engulfed my soul as if I and the night were one. Quo Vadis?, it rang in my ears.

To tell the tale propelled me to descend the ladder from heaven, down upon the earth. The crackling noise of the branches supporting my 90 lb. body, heightened my fears, but I pressed on, for there abode in the distance some kind of civilization I hoped would hear my tale.

Dazed, I was walking towards a light. My heart was divided in two. One half belonged to the forest, the other half — there inside that house with the neat gate in front. I opened the gate ever so slightly, and immediately regretted to have done so. I began to run, retracing my steps into the forest, Exhausted, I came to a crawl and fell to the ground. There was no use.

For a moment, I lost touch with time. A large dog tugged at my pants, and a piece of blue and white cloth found its way from my leg into the vicious mouth of a German Shepherd dog. He towered over me, I was trapped. His barking roared into the night and was so loud I feared it would wake up the entire German village, and the demons of the night.

A man came running from the house, urging the beast not to harm me; the very first kind word, I had experienced since many years past. I was astonished that there was kindness, any kindness, left in man. As the man approached me, I moved my body closer to the dog. I felt more at home with the beast. Men to me represented the lowest of creatures, much less to be trusted than the German Shepherd dog.

The dog began to lick my face, and I managed to speak up ‘Do with me whatever you like Sir, I am at your mercy.’

He must have been ten years older than I. Twenty eight or perhaps thirty years old. Powerfully built, with broad shoulders, ruddy face and hazel eyes, the man’s face was serious. He tilted his head gently towards me, and commanded the beast to release me from its grip.

‘I know who you are, and I am not here to harm you believe me. The bastards were still searching for you half an hour ago. They went through my sisters’ house with a fine tooth comb. I do not think they are gone yet.’

He stretched his hand towards me, and clasped mine. His was strong and firm mine weak and wet. Gently he pulled me off the ground towards him, and embraced me. It was years, ages, millennium, since I was embraced by a human. My tears were flowing freely down my haggard face. Fertilizing the German soil. Hos were trickling from the clear radiant eyes on the arm clad in the ragged blue and white striped K.Z. uniform. We did not speak for a while. The dog respectfully kept his distance, stretched out on the soft mud covered ground, his jaws were long and still. With curiosity he examined the scene, his master embracing another strange animal clad in mud-covered torn blue and white stripes. He approved, whimpering softly.

The master took my thin face into his massive hands, and with gentle, but firm voice endeavoured to convey to me trust, caution and humanity. He obviously knew that an emotionally starving man must be fed the human food in very small doses and with a teaspoon.

‘I will save you. I have seen you sleeping up there on the tree, and I did not want to frighten you, but I would have come for you once the village was clear of these... these...’ He did not complete, at least not that I understood, the final word. His face was red — beet red — but I nodded my head, beginning to comprehend.

‘Come let me take you to the same tree, and I promise to fetch you as soon as I can.’

He held me closely, and I shivered, being so cold. Many things were beyond my comprehension, though I tried to understand. Events had moved so fast that easiest and most welcome course was to resign myself to the inevitable.

'Wait here' the man said. 'Please wait for me.' Do not move boy, I will be back in a jiffy with a blanket and some food.

The dog ran behind the master, and I was alone. I wondered what of my fate? Is this man an angel or a devil, I searched for an answer. Is he sent by God or by Reichfuehrer Himmler? My mind raced at unbelievable speed. I calculated the odds. Seconds became minutes, minutes, hours, time a millennium. What to do my God, I asked? Run for the forest, or stay. Doubt began to eat at me.

I have seen the Germans feeding children candies and gently pushing them into the crematoria. I have heard the best chamber music being played, the mighty Beethoven Number 5, easing the steps of those that entered the portals of the fire-billowing furnace in the infamous Auschwitz. How can I trust a strange German in the face of all these atrocities?

One part of me urged me to run from the uncertain future of entrusting my fate into the hands of this stranger. Run boy, run for your life, a silent voice was telling me, look, he is now telephoning the S.S. You have still the chance to save yourself; the voice was urging me on.

The other part of me counseled caution — you do not have the strength — the second voice was counteracting the first one. I felt feverish, cold and hungry, weary and resigned.

But the will to live was unabated. I began to run as the first voice took mastery of me. Then I abruptly stopped. The second voice reminded me of my mission to tell a tale, and that I should tell it tonight before I expire. To whom, the first voice questioned? To this man, the second voice replied.

Sense and proportion came back to me, and I realised my alleged benefactor had not urged the dog to keep watch over me. Why? If he meant me harm, he would have made sure that the beast makes me stay put.

Yet my suspicion lingered on, and I was like the Boy Friday. Unable to trust. Denude of contact with kindness, I could not eat, nor could I choose the meal from the rich menu. I hid behind a thick bush, and I prayed.

Before me unfolded, I knew, life and death. My fate was being decided here and now, and I recalled the High Holy Days, when together with my father, we prayed in the little Synagogue in the Polish village. I reminisced on the particular prayer when the Maker inscribes the soul in the Book of Life or the Book of Death. From memory I chanted the best I could.

'Our Father our King (you who have forsaken me I thought but did not whisper it) you decide who shall live and who shall not be uplifted by you into the sphere of living. I could not stop and I carried on talking to myself, 'and who shall bite the dust, die of starvation in the forest, who to hunger, who shall live by the daily bread, who shall sleep in a soft bed, who shall die lying on the rotten bunker, who wear clothes infested with lice, and who be covered by clean white linen, who bathed in clear clean water, and who washed off by a rain, who covered from head to toe with boils and sores, and who be of clean body, who embraced by warmth in winter and who perish by cold, who breathe clear air, and who submerged in stench, who to have a decent burial, and who to leave his corpse to disintegrate exposed on the lonely country road.'

What appeared a very long time passed, and there, there I saw him emerging from the house. He carried a couple of blankets and some other things in a small basket. The dog ran out of the gate and headed towards the place where I was lying on the ground.

'Boy, boy, where are you?' I heard him speaking in a controlled voice. He did not shout. The dog began to bark loudly, and the master admonished the animal.

‘Quiet, quiet Wolfe, you will bring the S.S. upon us, quiet, quiet’ he urged the dog. The dog picked up my scent in no time, and that was not difficult, for after all I smelled incredibly as a result of not having washed for weeks. There, the animal was on to me, licking my hands. His master followed the dog.

‘Come boy, come’ he gently urged me to emerge from my hiding place. Yes, they spoke as softly and gently when they cremated my father and mother and my brothers and my friends.

I was transfixed, glued to the bush, and I could not move. He came closer toward me, laid his strong hands lightly upon my thin and bony shoulder, and sneaked his arm softly into mine. Gently he eased me forward, and placed a thick blanket upon my shivering, emaciated body. I almost sank to the ground under the weight, but he was prepared, and held me firm, his arm in mine. Uplifted he walked me slowly toward the forest.

‘My name is Seppi, what is yours?’ I spoke fluent German, but I was not about to tell the tale. Not yet anyway.

He obviously knew the forest well. Without hesitation, he picked out the tree I had so recently abandoned. Softly he urged me to climb it. While I did this, he handed me that blanket, and said lovingly ‘goodbye my friend, I will be back. Come Wolfe, come along.’

It was pitch dark, the elements were unfriendly, the slightest sound rustling through the branches and smuggling through the leaves — these noises alarmed me, and my heart beat fast and irregular.

My thoughts went to a tale a friend of mine, who was an inhabitant of the Krakow Ghetto, told me in Dachau. He related to me a fascinating, but a tragic human story.

My friend had a cousin, a girl in her early twenties. This girl every so often ventured out of the Ghetto into the centre of the city, to trade some valuables for food, with a friendly Pole. The Pole lived in the building she inhabited before the Germans herded the Jews into the Ghetto. She carried a Gentile passport, and did quite well for some time.

One day, as she entered the old apartment, there she encountered the German police and the Polish nursery maid. The woman pointed an accusing finger at my friend’s cousin, and shouted ‘that is her, she is a Jewess, and I should know, for I fed her, clad her and washed her since she was a baby.’ The cousin froze, and insisted she was Gentile.

‘I know her,’ the Quisling woman insisted. ‘She has a birthmark on her left breast. I nursed her, she is a Jewess disguised under a Christian name.’ A policeman brutally ripped the girl’s dress apart, and exposed her breasts.

Among the men in the apartment building, was a young Polish policeman. The German arrested the young girl, and handed the prisoner, handcuffed, to the young Pole.

What followed is a human tale, full of love and decency. There must have been in all Krakow no more than ten just Poles, and the young policeman was one of them. He knew my friend’s cousin, for he was a playmate of hers when they were children. And so, when they were a fair distance from the place of arrest, he escorting her to the prison, the good Pole told the prisoner ‘run for your life, escape’. As he was releasing her from the handcuffs he added ‘let me not be your executioner’.

And so he did run, but not before she made a date one week hence with the Polish policeman, to meet him at the same place and at a specific time. She expressed the desire to thank the young man in a tangible form, and she promised to bring with her a diamond.

She made her way to the Ghetto, overcome by this simple human act of decency. For a full week she languished over her promise, and the decision, wavering whether to keep that date, or whether it would be not

wiser to forget it. Tormented, unable to resolve her ambivalent feelings, she struggled between a sense of profound gratitude and intense fear.

Unable to reach a decision, having taken long counsel with herself, and also seeking advice from her friends, she turned to her Rabbi for guidance. The holy man, having been probably motivated by the promise and commitment made by the girl, advised that she meet the young policeman. And so she did go to meet the young policeman who saved her life. She recounted her experience in a letter smuggled to her family, written while languishing in prison.

She met the young man, and when she handed the diamond to him, he would not take it. What followed was a drama of pen defying magnitude. Evil over good reasserted its ugly head, and the hand of the Angel of Death wrote the verdict.

Evidently, the Polish nursemaid, the denouncer, followed the couple, and witnessed, hiding of course, the scene when the policeman, motivated by a humanitarian heart, let the girl go. Deprived of her vindictive appetite for killing, she promptly reported this humanitarian act to the Gestapo. The young man's head was on the block. He was given the alternative either to bring the Jewess back, or to forfeit his own life.

And so he told the girl he must take her in. As she said, it was either her or him. 'My life for yours, or yours for mine.' No pleading no begging would do. This time it was for real. She was re-arrested, languished in a prison for a while, and heard for no more. She was shot.

I wondered, would I too encounter a change of heart? Is my new freedom of temporary state, and will I suffer the same fate that befell my friend's cousin. Should I meet my benefactor, or should I run. 'Quo Vadis?' My inner voice asked.

The night was dark, and the elements very unfriendly. I had nowhere to go. I was dead tired without one ounce of strength left to resist the inevitable. At that moment I was quite prepared to submit to eternal sleep as long as the means applied would not be too painful. And so I could now understand why the poor Jews, the number of whom died staggers the imagination of any mortal, did not resist, did not rebel, and did not strangle with bare hands the necks of the armed guards, but entered the portals of Auschwitz crematorium singing 'Ani ma-amin' — 'we believe'. Let no man be arrogant and point his finger at the defenseless mutilated Jew, dare to even ask the question why we did not resist the killers. You who have not been there, are not expected to understand, but neither are you allowed to ask.

I fell into a deep sleep. It must have been past midnight — I had no watch — when I awakened and heard his footsteps. Seppi came, but he was not alone. He was accompanied by another man. I was alarmed. 'This is mi friend' Seppi said. 'Do not be afraid', they are gone. My friend here came along to help me just in case. He and I are buddies, recent deserters from the mighty German army now crumbling before your feet boy. 'Come boy come, my sisters are waiting for you.'

As I descended my friendly tree, weakness overcame me, and terror took its toll. I was unable to walk. Seppi carried me like a baby in his arms, after all I was light, only 90 lbs., with wet clothes sticking to my boil-infested flesh.

Just as I will never forget the atrocities, so I will always remember the human kindness. Indeed I was warmly welcomed by two sisters.

One must have been just turning twenty. The other, middle thirties.

Two angels descended from heaven that night, and attended to me. I was gently stripped of my filthy shirt that I must have worn for the better part of one year. My concentration camp garb was removed from me — I had no

underwear — my boots, with wooden soles, undone and thrown into the garbage. I was placed in a hot bathtub, perhaps the first in five years. Gentle womenfolk washed my sore back, and attended to my many boils and sores. I have, for the first time in six months, made friends with a bar of soap. I was fed real food, (the food in the basket Seppi left me I gobbled down and vomited all out) small doses at time. The feeding must have taken a good couple of hours. I was a babe in the hands of two concerned and lovingly attendant mothers.

Unable to comprehend, I fell asleep many times, and when I awoke each time I was bewildered. No questions were asked of me, and I would not speak. Silence seemed for now my best friend. In the early morning hours I was eventually cleansed of the lice, my sores and boils attended expertly, and then I was led to a warm, clean white bed with white linen. I was disoriented, but I knew by now that I was safe. I was tucked in, kissed on the forehead, lightly but affectionately, guarded by two angels sent by God. And so I fell into a deep sleep, the kind of which I had not known for five years. I slipped into a world of peace, aware that I truly, this time was embarked on the journey to freedom, surrounded, for the first time since I had been uprooted from my native home, with kindness and love. Two women and one man — Germans — did not that night vindicate the entire nation, but did open the portals of trust, and led me, by my hand, past the countless graves into the fluffy green meadow among the living.

For two weeks I was tended by two pair of angel hands. To the two sisters I told my tale, each day a little bit more. Tears and love mingled together in a wave of compassion I knew not existed. By the end of the two weeks the tale was told.

The Americans came in, and Jewish lieutenant of German origin, insisted that I be attended by an American doctor.

I was to stay one more night with the sisters. When I was about to fall asleep, the door opened quietly, and the younger of the two sisters stood before my bed. She slipped off her nightgown and sneaked under the blanket. Her young warm body soothed my sores and quietened my trembling limbs. I was embraced, not only by gentle arms, but by a heart full of love and compassion of such innocence and intensity, that I was jolted from the graveyard into civilization. Having drunk from the river of death, I considered my return to the living — a miracle.

After all, I was less than human.

In the early hours of the morning, I left the home of the two kind sisters as inconspicuously as I had entered it, enriched by human love and kindness, the like of which one experiences only once in a lifetime.

International Refugee Organization
 International Tracing Service
 Hildesheim
 APO 91 US Army

Organisation Internationale pour les Réfugiés
 Service International de Recherches
 Nige Centre

Certificate of Incarceration
Certificat d'Incarcération N: 5013/7.10101
Beschneigung über Inhaftierung CI - 727

I. Reference your enquiry for certificate of incarceration for:
 Référer votre demande de certificat d'incarcération pour:

Name KRAJE	First names Siegfried	Nationality not given
Date of birth 10 May 1924	Place of birth Wlosta/Poland	Prisoner's No. 10049 in Auschwitz, No. de Prisonnier 119132 in Dachau

It is hereby certified that the following information is available in documentary evidence held by the International Tracing Service:

Name KRAJE	First names Siegfried	Nationality Polish
Date of birth 10 May 1924	Place of birth Wlosta	Nationality Polish
Last permanent residence "Bulowa, Pilsensky 107."		
Was arrested concentration camp Dachau		Prisoner's No. 112132
on 27 October 1944	came from Auschwitz Con. Camp	Pris. Nr. not given
Reason given for incarceration: "Sch. J." (Schmittstadt, Jude)		
Transferred to the Concentration Camp Kaufering (Kommando of Dachau)		
liberated/Rescued by the US Army - in Kaufering (Kommando of Dachau)		
Rescued on Dachau "Beschneigungsbogen" is given "Verhaftet am 5.8.42 in Dachau."		

I. Reference of documents: **"Beschneigungsbogenkarte, Fragebogen Nr. 120, Beschneigungsbogen"** of the Dachau Concentration Camp documents.

Avon 19th December 1949

Aug. 21, 1945

To whom it may concern,
 Siegfried Kraje has been known to myself for the past 3 months, during which time he has been of invaluable service to myself in my work with the military forces occupying Westphalia. He has helped in obtaining knowledge of the people and businesses in this town. He is an important lad who lost his parents in Auschwitz (they were executed there). He has been for 5 years in concentration camps, his last camp was Dachau from where he escaped 3 days before the American forces arrived. Any further help which may be given him will be greatly appreciated.

James Bloom
 Capt. P.S.
 U.S.A.
 469th AAA. AW. BN.



A Jewish Child and the German Summer

Summer gathered his belongings,
Ready to depart on the mighty wings of the wind,
Glad to leave the tiny German village
Anxiously awaiting the arrival of Autumn.

It was not the usual happy Summer,
Gladdening the hearts of little children,
Resignation heavily imprinted on his face,
Summer hugged Brother Autumn.

'Autumn, my dearest of Brothers,
How I longed to see you this year
A weary Summer's voice roared through space,
With the unusual quality of sadness and pain.

'Why so sad my Brother' asked Autumn,
'I have never seen you so distressed before;
I have never heard so much sadness
Coming from you ever heretofore.'

'Autumn, my younger Brother
I am guilty of a crime;
There is blood on my weary old hands.'
Summer's voice was subdued and sublime.

'I, who through ages and millenniums
Have protected children all over the world,
Black, white, red or yellow,
I have failed one five summers old.'

'I, who know not what religion means,
I, the custodian of all the children
No matter from which kind of womb they came,
Brother Autumn, I have failed a Jewish child.'

'When I arrived rather late on Sunday,
Tired, I dozed off;
No need to watch over children, I thought,
Whose parents celebrate mass there on the hill.'

'Suddenly two shots rang in the valley,
I awoke, and to my horror, I saw
A man and a woman shot dead
On the edge of the forest down below.'

'A handful of men in uniform,
Searched the forest for more lust;
They did not find a little boy
Frightened, hidden under the brush.'

'Brother Autumn, I sustained the child
With berries, rain and sun;
Now I beg of you to do the same,
To ease the burden of blood upon my hands.'

'And I beg and instruct you
To pass the word to Brother Winter,
And Brother Winter to instruct Spring to do the same,
So that I find the child alive when I return.'

The Brothers embraced each other
And kissed one another upon the cheek;
The people in the valley took it for a thunder,
So mighty they never heard the like before.

And when Brother Summer did return
To the Godforsaken German village,
His first steps into the forest
Found tiny bones scattered, broken and chewed upon.

Yom Kippur Last

Yes, we did pray on Yom Kippur
Old and young we huddled together
We prayed, we chanted, we cried.
And you, how did you pray Yom Kippur last?

Ours was a small Synagogue,
Adorned with a ceiling of pen-defying beauty,
The benches though, were hard, the air stifling.
And you, what discomfort have you experienced Yom Kippur last?

Ours was a prayer pleading for an end to pogroms,
Reaching the heavens to protect Jewish lives,
Stretching our hands to clasp his hand.
And, you what did you ask for Yom Kippur last?

Ours was a murmuring for the Synagogue
Nay we find the holy place burned down.
A pleading that the bird of a Jew be not torn or signed.
And you, what thoughts crossed your mind Yom Kippur last?
And later we prayed that death be painless,
But tomorrow may we be blessed with bread and water,
Just a tiny slice more than the ration today.
And you, what kind of hunger prompted your prayer Yom Kippur last?

Hunger for more wealth, more comfort?
Larger home, larger slice of the stockmarket?
Bigger car, caviar, Persian rugs?
What need prompted you to pray Yom Kippur last?

We prayed for ways to forgive
Those who tormented our body and soul.
We prayed for the lost hope of freedom.
And you, whom did you wrong, asking forgiveness Yom Kippur last?

The Meticulous Black

One a lovely summer morning he came,
Like a plague he descended upon the camp;
The expected angel of death arrived onto the scene,
In a black uniform meticulous; but of ugly face and mien

Oh no that he was a stranger,
No, not at all; he was seen before,
His fame galloped ahead of him
And the people felt his presence nightly in a dream.

Oh not that he came onto the horizon suddenly,
No, for his shadow, shadowed one, day and days,
His sickly embrace so very much unmotherly
Made the people forget the sun and its rays.

He came, he saw and began to spit murder,
His lust was limitless just like a tide of lava and flood;
It was obvious that he will not surrender his license
Until the black will submerge in the sea of blood.

Infanticide

From a mother, they took them away,
But mother, they said, must stay,
That day in heavens was written,
Death to one, death to the other kitten.

Children, merely three and four,
Thrust into gas chamber door,
Yes, in heavens that day was written,
Death to one, death to the other kitten.

No pen shall dare to describe the pain,
When they took the children from her domain,
But in heaven that day was written,
Death to one, death to other kitten.

No, no oceans, no million drops of rain,
Shall succeed ever to erase the stain,
When in heaven that day was written,
Death to one, death to other kitten.

Age three and age four,
Last kiss, there be no more,
Because in heaven that day was written.
Death to one and death to the other kitten.

Age three and age four,
Last hug there be no more,
Answer! Why that day was written,
To slaughter one and the other kitten.

Age three and age four,
Last smile there be no more,
I command! why that day was written,
To kill one and the other kitten.

Age three and age four,
Last tear, there be no more,
Speak! Why you decreed to be written,

To murder one and the other kitten.

No! no million drops of rain,
Shall obliterate that bloody stain,
For the last time explain,
Why you inflicted this terrible pain.

Age three and age four,
Torn from her bosom they are no more,
Silence! Why in heaven that day was written,
To pluck the life of one and the other kitten.

The Chosen People

We all stood there,
Depraved, the whole lot,
We were, but didn't know where,
We trembled, denude of clothes naked of our God.

We turned our inner thoughts to Him,
Why and wherefore we knew no more,
In despair, aware our destiny is grim,
We shivered, denude of clothes, separated from our God.

We strained our reddened eyes to heavens,
What for, we didn't care anymore,
The first heaven, long behind, we finally reached the seventh,
We quaked, divested of clothes, severed from our God.

We kept enlarging our swollen ears,
To catch a glimpse, but a whisper of hope from Him,
We discerned rifles, heard the sound of gears,
We froze, stripped of clothes, forgotten by our God.

We murmured silent prayers,
Why, to whom, whereto we knew no more,
For a millennium now, they were falling on deaf ears,
We just stood there, naked of clothes, forsaken by our God.

We stopped thinking, we stopped feeling,
We ceased hoping, discontinued praying,
We did not know why, but knew what for,
We were dead, our God he was there no more.

The day God Died

From nowhere there was a German shrill whistle
Loud enough to cause God to die,
The invincible, mighty Hebrew God.
Laid to eternal rest with a heavy sigh.

The day was sweltry, unique for June 21, 1941,
And the funeral was to be held an hour later.
The almighty, all-powerful, the only One,
Was overcome by a Whistle that was greater.

A German whistle killed Jehovah,
Annihilating Him not to bear witness to murder
Of a handful of Jews, just a small lot
Was killed too, after they bore witness to the murder of their God.

The funeral took place: time and the place were the same,
Dead God and his chosen Children huddled together,
Dead lips murmured their dead God's name
Why and how, what for, only today the Christians cannot gather.

Regret, remorse, unbelievable, but true;
On a clear blue skied summer day
Only the elements bore witness to the death of God: and they say
Moments only after the German whistle cut through.

Silence

It was not that we could not speak
It was that we were mute, pained,
It was not that we did not want to hear
We were deaf to such pity, stained.

Besides, the stage was 5 years old,
The audience stiff frozen, emaciated, dead,
Those who could understand were no more
Ah, and those who pretended still pretend.

So we chose to extract from the ashes
What others burnt from out of their hearts,
Whatever we salvaged we tried to build upon it
And drawing strength from that which others abhorred.

We mustered our shattering spirits to force our fingers,
and we dug deep into the rubble of the ruined temples;
Piece by piece we began to build the forsaken altar
Upon which our brothers sacrificed their brothers.

We worked in silence and pierced our hearts
Drawing upon the last vestiges of love,
We built and built, laid brick upon brick;
In dead silence we did this all. Just to understand!

And though we still do not understand
We labour in deadliest of silence.
We sob in darkness only, and so quietly,
But our brothers... O God they still refuse to understand.

Survivors

They say we survived.
Little do they know.
Perhaps they do know
Because they think so.

They could not think otherwise
Because it would mean pain.
Conscience cannot be bribed,
But it can be made to lay still.

Quiet O Quiet you conscience,
Can't you see, I cannot bear!
Let my eyes judge alone
For what I know I am responsible.

Quiet, can't you see they live.
Do not torment, I must not feel,
I am witness to what I perceive.
They are alive, and this I clearly see.

Now you listen to me
and stop straining to see.
Your illusion is your medication
upon which your conscience lives to be.

They did not survive.
They are dead, can't you see.
These are only breathing corpses
Labouring today, gone tomorrow.

Who are then the survivors.
Who is then alive today you ask.
Look around, but look and feel.
It is only the Germans, these to be sure
Your conscience refuses to see.

Dialogue on the Holocaust

Between

Mankind — The Destroyer

and

Survivor — The Destroyed

Mankind: You live!

Survivor: I exist.

Mankind: You survived!

Survivor: No, I am dead!

Mankind: You are alive.

Survivor: My flesh is intact, my soul and spirit died in the ditch.

Mankind: Why, you do sleep.

Survivor: No, just lay down.

Mankind: But you know love.

Survivor: Sorry I do not feel.

Mankind: You do eat?

Survivor: I do not taste.

Mankind: You see?

Survivor: I do not perceive.

Mankind: You pray!

Survivor: I stammer

Mankind: You meditate?

Survivor: I wander

Mankind: You hate?

Survivor: I am confused.

Mankind: You walk?

Survivor: I touch the holy grounds.

Mankind: You work!

Survivor: I go through the motions.

Mankind: You breathe!

Survivor: I choke.

Mankind: But you do enjoy?

Survivor: I do not understand you.

Mankind: You know charity?

Survivor: I am charity.

Mankind: You know courage?

Survivor: I am courage.

Mankind: You know the meaning of forgiveness?

Survivor: I am forgiveness.

Mankind: What about death?

Survivor: I am dead.

Mankind: You recite Kaddish?

Survivor: I am mute.

Mankind: But you chanted El molei rahamim!

Survivor: I said I am mute.

Mankind: What about God?

Survivor: I am a child.

Mankind: One more question.

Survivor: If you must.

Mankind: You are my conscience!

Survivor: That is a statement. Am I?

Mankind: Release me, I beg you.

Survivor: You are confused, I am not your executioner.

Mankind: Please let me go.

Survivor: I wish I could, you know I am dead.

Mankind: Please, I beseech you.

Survivor: I am very tired, at least let me rest.

Prayer to Forgive

There must have been a modern 20th Century Abraham, who did not follow God's command. This Abraham refused to walk through the portals of the crematorium. No, this modern Abraham was determined to defy God and save what HE, the Angry One, decreed to destroy, his children. He decreed to obliterate them by most cruel and ungodly means.

Yet there were pockets of survivors.

How can one account for this phenomenon within the meaning of the Holocaust? A Father, whose infinite power can preserve life, any life, unequivocally and irrevocably decree to have his loving children destroyed.

God turned mad; he lost his powers of reason, and broke the covenant with his children. His anger consumed him and destroyed all vestige of love for his chosen children.

How can God become mad? If he has the attributes of love, then he must also be capable of hate. God neglected to recognise his own anger, and permitted hate to become the better of him.

Hate is like fire, uncontrolled, it will eventually consume itself and destroy the innovator. Since God cannot be destroyed, therein lies the explanation why a handful of Jews survived the crematorium. God's hate — not the innovator — was eventually destroyed and replaced by love. Perhaps after all, He may be human, and if so, He must be forgiven.

It is to forgive God that we Jews will pray this Yom Kippur, and the next, and every Yom Kippur. In fact children are loving, and do forgive their father.

I have the feeling that God and the Angels have their own Yom Kippur, and God fervently asks his children to forgive him, for the transgressions He committed. And He is being forgiven.

Judaism has survived because, in the true tradition of Judaism, God is forgiven by his surviving children for what, in the final analysis has been infanticide.

Written after visit to Yad Mordechai Museum

In this place
Seek and look
For what can be seen no more
Understand
What is beyond all understanding.

In this place
Seek and look
For what can be seen no more
Hear voices
That can be heard no more
Understand
What is beyond all understanding.



The Pair of Scales

I give to you,
And you give to me,
Who gives more,
This we have to see.

Why must we measure,
What is not measurable,
Why destroy pleasure,
At best render pleasure intolerable.

Why must we weigh
Matters not for the scales,
Why make nights out of days,
Destroy sun, and its brilliant rays.

Why must we compare
What is not comparable,
Only courage beyond its dare,
Renders the scales bearable.

Why, why and why,
We ask for hours and days,
Not until we die,
Shall we escape the pair of scales.

The First Day of Life and The Dark, Good Gentle Night

Tomorrow is the first day of my life;
Today is nearly almost gone.
The night is not yet here,
I feel it will however come.

Tomorrow is the first day of my life;
Today is just about no more.
The night descends upon me,
Oh God what is there for me in store?

Tomorrow I may see the sun;
For it departed today when I was born.
The past did pass — it's gone,
But the night shall be always there.

No man knows life unless he died a thousand times;
No man knows suffering, if he not suffered himself.
Who did not live yesterday knows no tomorrow,
But the night, oh, this will be always here.

'I'

I care for you,
Do you care for me?
Your answer is due,
I hear none, do not see.

I love you,
Do you love me?
Your answer is due,
You do, nay I will be.

I hate you,
You do not hate me,
Your answer is due,
Surely, you love me.

'Friend or Mistress'

Some men prefer a friend
Others a mistress instead,
Some will choose a wife,
Another, would stay alone rather.

But as things are
Mistresses come and go,
He who loses a mistress's love,
Managers to keep his head above.

Such love, more often than not, is regained,
Passion draws passion and marries again
Motivated by selfish desire,
The lovers reunite like fire with fire.

Matters of love are, though, not the same
When it comes to losing a friend,
For here hatred and bitterness
Like brothers will join hand in hand.

Such love will seldom be recaptured,
Such sentiments lost forever,
Such friendship even if regained,
Will reach the same heights never.

Whereas, friends find it quite easy
To add an ounce of love here and there —
Friends turned to foes are very much reluctant
To subtract a pound of hatred surrounding them everywhere.

And while parting lovers reminisce passion,
Separated foes relish hate and reproach.
Lovers, as a rule, will not turn foes forever,
But foe will not part from foe and turn to friends never.

Health

For the fortunate it is straight and smooth,
For the less fortunate, bent and stretched,
For the unfortunate bouncing more down and less up,
For the very unfortunate, rough intolerable and broken.

A dancer's approach to the rope is presumably caution,
A person's sentiment to health, a mixture of respect and emotion,
None dares to tamper with things so delicate,
But tamper men do in ways most articulate.

The dancer I think abuses the rope,
Twisting it, stretching and stretching to no end,
To the point that the rope can endure no more,
Abused, it causes the dancer's fateful fall to the floor.

Man I think should know better,
He should, but he does not know anymore,
He flails, hammers, abuses health to the letter,
And he stops, when health can endure no more.

He whips and weeps, he smites and is concerned at the same time,
He asks and demands to know what is for him in store,
While flesh is weak, he loves and destroys himself simultaneously,
Knowing well that health will be no more.

It is said do not bite the hand that feeds you,
I think it is prudent to do so,
Yet, how many see it in the right perspective,
And preserve the health before it is no more.

Health should be likened to the finest racing horse,
Brittle, sensitive, here today, gone on the morrow —
It demands care and guidance not to turn worse,
Death being the ultimate, health waits not for tomorrow.

Fear

Fear is not unlike a pain,
Reminding you it is there,
Pain, the more severe,
The more intensified the fear.

The remedies for pain are manifold,
You try one, then another, and then all,
One battles, courageous and bold,
And gives up when fear takes hold.

Whereas pain comes and goes,
Man being its innovator and its master,
Fear remains, no matter what man does,
And enslaves him for good and all.

Parents of Yesterday

Some parents give and gave,
Others took and take,
Oh, happy parents of yesterday,
What became of your children today.

Apart you were torn,
Just to decide, should he be born,
Oh, suffering parents of yesterday,
How very much more you suffer today.

Recall the trials and tribulations,
Remember the pounding upon your patience,
Oh, poor parents of yesterday,
So forsaken by your children today.

Will you ever forget the sacrifice?,
Stop reflecting how high was the price,
Persecuted parents of yesterday,
Look at your children today.

Wallowing in self-pity and negations,
You gave, spurred by heart and obligations,
Oh, good parents of yesterday,
Endeavour to be honest with your children today.

And so you will go on and on,
Morbid of the past moan and moan,
But truly, chastised parents of today,
Your children are, at best, your doing of yesterday.

For your sacrifice and denial
Was but selfinterest, your own peculiar style,
Oh, human parents of yesterday,
Do not wait for the dead of today.

Discover that your love knew no shield,
Realize that such love created guilt,
Oh, naive parents of yesterday,
Guilt ridden are your children today.

Poor loving deserted parents of yesterday,
Who by your own flesh and deed created your children today,
Derive comfort that you gave freely, and it was taken.
Your childrens' guilt is however unmistakable.

Children of Tomorrow

Who dares to measure the pain,
Of flesh having created flesh,
Who so bold as to gauge the strain,
Inherent in mother-child domain.

Who claims the wisdom and knowledge,
The measure of blood to create life and light,
Who is so courageous to exhibit courage,
And ascertain the labour to mould a child.

Who proclaims to know the tears,
And weigh the spirit creating spirit,
Who is so bold as to place the value,
On parental sacrifice that knows no limit.

Who can speak of the countless hours,
Given, and taken to create the youth,
Who decipher the days, months, the years,
The parents' anguish, they did not choose.

And who remembers the grand total,
Of the past, future, now and then,
Who can even attempt to count,
What it took to create the man.

And now that he is created,
What will you be tomorrow,
Oh, children of the future,
What will you return, joy or sorrow?

The Man

There is something in the man I cannot understand,
Something, illusive, I cannot comprehend,
Something, he probably himself does not know,
Something I fear, whatever I do, wherever I go.

Why is the man so complicated,
Why is his nature so obscure,
Why must I fear his deeds,
Why the shield — why is he so inure.

What makes the man what he is,
What prompts him, what motivates his deeds,
How many questions can one ask,
The answer is somewhere, beyond my task.

I wish, I beg, I pray,
Just to understand him better than I do,
Seemingly, it is beyond my ability
To understand, to see, and to comprehend.

Life An Infinite Struggle

From the time of being born,
To the last seconds of being alive,
Human being smitten and torn,
Is subjected to pain, embattled in strife.

Forced out of the familiar womb,
Thrust into the hostile surrounding,
Unaware of the unavoidable doom,
The infant's scream is hardly astounding.

3rd Dimension

Man, what are thou, you think, Oh man,
That you freely trample upon fellow man,
So arrogant, thou believe to be a superman,
God himself, I shudder, what after — what then.

Denude of compassion,
Utterly devoid of love,
You seem even stripped of feelings,
Man, you became divided in half.

Half of you turned to stone,
The other half to beast,
An island to yourself, alone,
Other creatures concern you the least.

What you call love is truly hate,
What you whisper care is but egotism,
What you shout belief is really scepticism,
What you cry compassion is just narcissism.

You think only of yourself soliciting brotherhood,
You exclude others demanding charity,
When you proclaim peace, in all likelihood
You mean war, excused being part of unanimity.

Life

Life is but a fleeting moment,
It's here today,
Departs on the morrow,
And comes back no more.

Each day is life in itself,
Each hour not to be regained,
Each minute lost forever,
Each moment to be seen no more.

Each experience is life in itself,
Each benefit not to be regained,
Each lost friendship lost forever,
Each death, to be seen no more.

Each love is life in itself,
Each pleasure not to be regained,
Each kiss lost forever,
Each tenderness to be seen no more.

Each death is life in itself,
Each memory to be regained,
Sentiment remains forever,
No death can obliterate love any more.

God Helps Him Who Helps Himself

Engulfed in turmoil,
Surrounded by rage,
We walk on foreign soil,
Reject time, space and gauge.

Confronted with aggression,
Embraced by hate,
Bewildered we question
The reasons for our fate.

Faced with never ending threats,
Wars, violence, modern pogroms,
In disbelief we shake our heads,
Estranged, disunited, away from our homes.

In despair, frightened and forlorn,
Now we turn to our God
Willing to settle for very little,
Whereas before we demanded the lot.

The Beast

Beasts do not cheer when content,
Growl, however, when in pain,
Men are ecstatic when important,
Though, when in pain, cry in vain.

Beasts, much like slaves resigned,
Patiently await a better morrow,
Men, when in pain, bitterly complain,
Drowning in self-pity when in sorrow.

The beast, when misfortune befalls it,
Takes matters peacefully in stride,
Man in misfortune not so, however,
For he reproaches everyone with all his might.

The beast is slow to anger,
But quick to gratitude,
Man today not so — in great danger
He is consumed by his angry attitude.

Revengeful he turns to a beast,
Beast of all beasts — a super beast,
No more human, no man
At best a beast in the least.

The Darkness

They say that the burnt child shies the fire
What of man who dreams death and must live?
The former likes but does not dare
The latter dares but does not like.

They say that a child is oblivious to danger.
What of man who dreams a thousand fears at night?
The former, innocent, trust man and the elements,
The latter, guilty, cannot trust himself.

O' children around the world wherever you are
Your dreams at night are but fears of the morrow,
Ferocious men around the globe you are not here,
At night your dreams of yesterday but died today.

Hate

Fire and hate, like each other,
Much in common united like brother to a brother,
Fire and hate consume animal-like unbend,
Extinguished, die only destroying all in the end.

From humble beginnings fire grows and grows,
It reaches high, leaps higher,
It never retracts, fearless, it knows
How to recreate what it destroys.

Fire will attract and draw men,
Warm, compassionate, it's like a woman,
Exhibits neither ugliness nor evil,
It is majestic, yet invincible.

It catches man's senses,
His smell, ear, particularly the eye,
None, be it beast, man or child,
Will fail to see its grandeur passing by.

Man seems to love hate and fire,
One he desire, the other he admire,
Hate and fire do not claim to be strangers,
Man, however, is oblivious to the dangers.

For a small grain of hate grows and grows,
Like fire it unfolds, ravishes and devours,
Like fire it consumes more and more,
It dies only with the man, when he is no more.

Enslaved, bitter and of passionate desire,
Man resigned, now yearns to extinguish this fire,
Frightened, not knowing what's for him in store,
He struggles, cruelly now consumed even more.

Why man, who value freedom above all,
Should embark and be stirred to such goal,
Trapped, be searching in despair for a door,
Find no exit, satiate himself more and more.

Why animals do not indulge in this passion,
Strange, but they do not imitate man's distinctive fashion,
Passion and hate is man's prerogative, his unique right,
His grandeur, his inheritance and his might.

And while man occasionally succeed in taming the fire,
I want to chain the beast they need, but not desire,
Hate, to man's chagrin, is beyond his control,
Determined not to die, before destroying him for good and all.

Light

To discern a glimpse of the future,
Just to understand the past,
Merely to comprehend the present,
And to come to peace at last.

To foresee just a little,
What's in store for me,
So that I decide for myself.
To be, or not to be.

Do I ask, Lord, much too much?
Seemingly you so decree,
To torture one's mind to no end,
Just to comprehend, if to see.

Granted to see truly,
One must strain the eyes,
Why, however, if to understand
One must suffer to no end.

If suffering, Lord, is the prerequisite
To understand, comprehend and to see,
Then, King of Kings, grant courage
To all men and, pray, forget not me.

My Kingdom for a Horse

Eternity for a grain of truth,
Whole life for one ounce of wisdom,
Everlasting suffering for a moment of happiness,
A never ceasing giving for a tiny love.

A life-time experience for one right decision,
A total stagnation born out of indecision,
The life itself for a wrong decision,
Yet, no life is life where life is no life.

A constant fear for self-preservation,
An endless need for needing someone,
One exchange for another,
One link linked to other –
That is what life is about.

21st Century

The world seems to have lost integrity,
Men are lost too, and are resigned,
Yet whenever and whatever the terror may be,
Man's final fate lies in his mind.

For the mind is the greatest of terrors,
Sometimes man's master, other times his slave,
Forlorn is the man, however,
Who yields to one or to the other forever.

This day and age men worship the mind,
Men turn to mind much like to the guiding star,
Forgetting that the mind is a lost island to itself,
Without heart, mind is nothing but a beast.

An infant loves the tender mother,
A child respects the guiding father,
Bestows its love upon both equally,
Though it sometimes prefers one or the other.

Today man turns to mind,
Determined to forget the heart,
Yet the former is just a nothing,
Without the latter – the latter being everything.

Non- Communication

O God, my heart cries to you in despair
Of your presence I am not aware
But somehow, somewhere you must be there
Otherwise, I would not be down here.

O Lord Almighty grant me courage to withstand
What I think is beyond my strength to stand
O lead me out of the anguish
I plead that your hand grasps my hand.

O Heavenly Father teach me how to pray
Nay I am lost in pain and in cries,
O God my God what can I say,
What can anyone say when everything in him dies.

For the sake of those you love
And for whose sake I love very much too,
I beg restore my health.
No one can do it except through you.



Two Little Girls

The night was still, still as a rock,
The wind died, hidden in a deep sleep.
A gentle breeze from a near ocean
Fanned the branches of a brilliant Christmas Tree.

The clear unmenacing skies above
Mantled the earth in a motherly embrace;
And the stars shone upon, and hugged
Two children admiring the illuminated tree.

Two girls no more than age five
Stood there, and measured the height of the tree;
The distance to the stars, and to the moon,
And looked upon each other in silence and awe.

The moon mercilessly threw its brilliant rays
Upon the slightly taller of the two,
Fondling her golden hair
She mirrored the penetrating eyes of deep blue.

The stars in turn coruscated
Their light upon the smaller of the two;
Lightly stroking her brown hair,
They touched, and kissed the red lips so true.

A silent night it was,
Except for the song sung by the ocean;
And save for the Christmas Tree staring at the children,
The two girls whispering to each other.

And thus one said 'My what a beautiful tree.
I wish I knew who fed the animal decorations
Onto the branches that seem to be prettier
Than I could ever imagine to be.'

'The tree' she continued, 'cannot love me
For I did not feed it any of these things;
I neglected the Christmas Tree, and I must cry,
Sad, I forgot my Mummy to ask these things to buy.'

'Do not cry' said the other;
'My Mummy has some animals left,
I shall go and bring them,
So that you no more are bereft.'

Off she went and left her companion,
But not for long, for she returned;
Her hand outstretched, she said 'Here,
Some more animal decorations for you dear.'

The blue eyes shone upon the tree,
The stars burst out in glory;
And as the child fed the branches,
The ocean sang the most beautiful Christmas story.

Two children on a quiet still night,
Met under an illuminated Christmas Tree;
Found friendship, kissed each other;
Found love that will always be.

And when the ocean finished singing,
The moon stretched its neck under the Christmas Tree
To listen, to two children whispering to one another,
'You love me, and I always will love thee.'

Morning Glory

O Morning Glory how I liked to pluck you,
Your ocean deep blue petals unnerved me.
I reached for you but my hand would not obey,
For my heart shouted let it be, let it be.

How many times in life have I been tempted
And gave into temptation when I should have not.
Little Morning Glory, you have taught me a lesson,
What life is I may have forgot.

My hand stretched out to take
As I travelled the road adorned with many a Glory.
My heart was, at times, not awake,
I gave in to fantasy, vanity and memory.

I took when I should have given.
I spoke when I should have counselled silence.
I lived but I did not breathe.
I gazed, but perhaps I did not pray.

Father

That I love you words will not describe,
How much I love you no pen ever express,
Always I shall love you and no hate love bribe,
Death alone will such love, if at all, suppress.

Do not wonder then, this love was born,
Marvel not that love so pure persists,
Not to love you so, I much would mourn,
Believe, to love you less my very life desists.

Four Seasons

If I were to live a hundred,
I shall go on loving you,
But if I should die before,
I shall love you only so much more.

For love counts no years,
No days, no hours, no minutes,
And if I die before,
Moments shall mean so much more

When I grow older,
I shall still love you,
But if I should depart before,
I shall love you only so much more.

For love knows no limits,
No yardsticks and no boundaries,
And if I should die before,
Quality shall be so much more.

When I reach maturity,
I shall still love you,
But if I were to be called before,
I shall love you only so much more.

For love abounds in feelings,
You feel less or feel more,
And if I pass away before,
I shall love you only so much more.

And if I not live,
Even one day more,
Love being infinite,
I shall only love you forever more.

Love

I thought I knew what love meant.
I thought, but truly I did not know.
Not until tonight did I perceive
Love's power that God upon me bestowed

Oh may I live so that I may love,
Drink the wine and share the cup,
Exchange heart for heart.
Take, but also give and never stop.

Lord in Heaven your ways are a mystery.
No, I shall not question nor complain.
Yesterday I did not know fully love,
But today I know love again and again.

Nostalgia

I was sitting on the edge of the ocean.
I did not know the day, nor the time,
But I had a feeling, I had a notion
That I was not alone, you were around.

I was lonely, so lonely I was crying,
My tears rich fertilizing the ocean.
I knew not where I was, nor what I was doing,
But I knew you were around, I felt the devotion.

One drop of tear, one throw of pebble,
Each motion saying good and goodbye,
My tears swelled an ocean
It was an illusion, I was alone, you were not around.

Without Title

I cannot gather my strength to say
What my heart would want to say.
A heart does not speak – it pulsates
Second after second of love and devotion.

I cannot gather my strength to say
What my mind cannot give birth to.
A mind does not speak – it ponders
Hour on an hour of what is pure and lofty.

I cannot gather my strength to say
What my blind eye cannot see.
Eyes do not see – they perceive
Year after year of beauty and purity.

I can gather though the strength to say
That an inner voice cries in me
Nay you don't speak, nay you don't see
You whole life you will love, that which is love

Reflection

As I sit alone in this house
And ponder my future,
I would like to see it green as a meadow,
Fluffy, loose, happy and full.

And my thoughts go to my wife,
Who bore the burden of the past
Not unlike the bravest of knights
Riding into the battle without murmur or complaint

I believe I shall always feel guilty,
Not for things done, but for things not done.
And my children come to mind foremost
For what I could have done before I am gone.

Whether love alone will ever
Substitute the effort I could not muster,
I shall possibly never know.
Therefore now I must ask please forgive me!
If there is no one to explain,
I should like you children to know
That your father suffered more
He ever able was to show.

If have failed you,
Blame me, but do not be hateful.
My heart was gentle and I love you
But my health was most ungrateful.

Death and Love

When the time shall come
That I must depart
I can only sigh now and pray
That I be surrounded by love.

If one only could strike friends with death,
Cultivate the friendship while alive;
So when the moment of departing is here,
Shake hands with death, as friend with a friend does.

That I shy death while alive
I shall be sorry at the time I die;
For I shall meet a stranger,
Whereas I could have embraced a friend.

Yet, when the dark night shall be here,
I will not be I, I alone;
For if I have shied death being alive,
While alive my hands constantly reached for love.

Thus, when the day arrives
Maybe death will be stranger no more;
Love will adorn death with beauty,
Answer my prayer and whatever there is in store.

Angela

Sweet angel in human form
You have taken my heart by storm
When your nimble fingers easing the pain
Entered my very crucial domain.
If I were not to know that you are human
I would but think that you are an angel
Sent by its master to ease the pain of his servant.

Farewell, farewell sweet angel,
Farewell till we meet again,
And if we do not, know thou that
I always will love thee.

(Mount Sinai Hospital – Room 1730)
28th April, 1984.