
Chapter 1

The Last Night Before the Hurban of Ozerow

By Rabbi Ben Zion Wacholder
Ed: Shifra Goldenberg

Everyone in the town knew it—tomorrow the Hurban¹ of Ozerow would take place. Ozerow would cease to exist. People recalled the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and that of the Second Temple by Titus, the wicked emperor of Rome. People recalled the other Hurban, which had taken place 28 years before, almost to the day. On that October day of 1914, a tzarist commander, mimicking the parched earth policy of the Russian general Kozukow in the war against Napoleon, sprayed the houses with naphtha, and burnt the entire town to its foundations. “Got wet hubn rahamunes,” God will have pity on the remnants of Israel. Was not Ozerow rebuilt, replacing the rotten wooden houses with those made of white rectangular stone, with a new synagogue, sporting intricately carved pillars and a large Beth Hamidrash,² which had become the envy of the surrounding shtetlach?³

This time, not a single building was to be destroyed. Only the people would be taken away. There were some 5,000 souls whose ancestors had lived in this town since the 16th century. In addition, many newcomers, mostly young people who had somehow escaped from the liquidation of the Nazi ghettos of Warsaw and Lodz, or who were exiled from Vienna and Vlatzlavek (Włocławek) by the Germans.

Frequently in my nightmares, I find myself conversing with my father and mother, my younger brother and sister, and many of the townspeople. All were to be taken to the railroad station at Yashitz and loaded into freight cars for transport to the “East.” At that time, no one in town had an inkling of the existence of Oświęcim, Majdanek, or Treblinka, or imagined the existence of extermination camps. Tomorrow nearly the entire population of the town—men, women, and children—would disappear. They would be slain or shipped to place from which, to my knowledge, no one, not a single person, escaped to tell the story of exactly what happened to them. The eyes of the people mirrored the quiet hope, the unexpressed confidence that they were leaving their ancestral home only for a brief interval.

Millenia of Jewish history had embedded into the Jews of Ozerow a faith in God’s love of Israel. Just as God had vowed never to destroy the world He had created, so He would

never impart power to the tormentors of the Jews to destroy them utterly. God knows, the people of Ozerow had sinned. They had ceased to study His Torah—even before the war the hadorim⁴ were becoming empty. Only middle-aged and elderly people attended daily Mincha⁵ services regularly and lingered on to listen to the local Talmudic⁶ lecturer. But God would not forget his people. Tomorrow will be what it will be: today was Sabbath and the joy of the day of rest emanated from their faces.

The news of the impending transfer to the East came bit by bit. Around Passover of 1942, eye witnesses reported the slaughter of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, presumably as part of the resettlement of Jews to the conquered lands of the Ukraine. At first these reports hardly affected the mood of the people. Ever since late 1939, waves of Jews had come or been sent by the Germans to Ozerow and neighboring shtetlach. First came the Jews of Vlatzlavek (Wloclawek), then those of Vienna. They brought Jobian⁷ stories of the terror perpetrated by the Arian race against the lowly Semites.

The Jews of Ozerow thought that a similar fate would befall them. But nothing except some minor incidents seemed to happen. In fact, in 1940 and 1941, Ozerow seemed to witness a revival. Nay, there was even a feeling that Ozerow was somehow a privileged place on this earth.

True, nearly every day in the town square soldiers posted new ordinance promulgated by Frank the General Governor announcing restrictions on the kosher slaughtering of animals, eating meat, wearing felt coats, growing beards, leaving the town's limits, buying or selling sugar, salt or coal, and on contact between Jews and Gentiles. Another announcement decreed that Jews had to wear armbands with stars of David at all times. The penalty for violating any of these decrees was death. But in fact few of these ordinances were enforced in Ożarów. Germans never took up permanent residence in the town. Enforcement was in the hands of the Polish police and the subsequently founded Jewish police. Even before September 1939, the Polish police of our town prospered from anti-Jewish prohibitions promulgated by the then-Polish authorities. In 1938, the Sejm (pronounced “same,” Polish legislature) prohibited kosher shehitah⁸ in Poland, under the pretext of humanitarian concern for the animals. This prohibition effectively raised the cost of kosher meat, as bribe money filled the pockets of the gentile police.

The town's stores remained shut and no new shipments of textiles or leather were coming in. When the war started in September of 1939, people who had hidden shoes, clothes, and other goods in their cellars started to barter them for potatoes and grain. Tailors and shoemakers found peasants who paid well for their skills in foodstuffs. Even some Gestapo⁹ and army officers sought out skilled craftsmen, paying with massive amounts of Reichsmarks¹⁰ or diamonds taken from other Jewish stores.

Culturally, Ozerow prospered from the large number of highly educated men—doctors, engineers, poets, and intellectuals—who settled in the town, which had become a haven from German persecution. With nothing else to do, the young people spent endless hours debating politics, culture, and philosophy. Marxism was a favorite topic and books on dialectical materialism enjoyed wide private and public readings. Some of the newcomers brought jewelry and foreign currency, especially dollars and pounds. With the schools closed, these educated outsiders tutored some of the children of the better-to-do families. Ozerow was receiving the reputation of a paradise in the midst of hell.

The townspeople gave different assessments to account for Ożarów's privileged position. Some attributed it to the town's hallowed cemetery, in which were buried Hassidic luminaries, known in Poland and Galicia¹¹ for exorcising dibbukim,¹² lost ghosts of sinners which find redemption by clinging to innocent maidens. The members of the Judenrat,¹³ who had grown wealthy by providing goods, services and money to the Germans, claimed the credit. Another popular explanation ascribed Ożarów's favored position to the virtue of its citizens. The big cities such as Warsaw and Lodz had become like Sodom,¹⁴ full of vice of all kinds, including prostitution and thievery. But, in spite of the rebelliousness of its youth, the traditional character of Ozerow remained essentially unchanged. Only one barber shop dared to do business on the Sabbath. On Friday afternoons, the town's mikveh¹⁵ filled with male bathers, and in the evening with women. Although reduced in numbers, khasenes¹⁶ and brisen¹⁷ retained their customary joy. The extremely poor were provided with all the necessities, including challah for the Sabbath and matzah for Passover. As long as Ozerow retained its Jewishness, Satan would not have the power to overwhelm it.

The illusion of a paradise in the midst of hell lasted about three years. Early one morning, in August of 1942, a dozen trucks with uniformed soldiers drove into town. The soldiers broke into many houses on Ożarów's main street, searching for valuables and loading clothes, leather, furnishings, and jewelry, onto trucks. What they could not take with them they destroyed. This was a replica of an old-fashioned pogrom¹⁸ unheard of since before the war. A fortnight later the trucks reappeared, but this time they carried away about 100 young men and women to labor and concentration camps. In September the town was terrorized by frequent late night raids, especially in places that served as bordellos for German soldiers. The raids resulted in many deaths, and presented palpable evidence that Ożarów's grace was sheer delusion, and that the relative normalcy of life derived from the fact that the Germans lacked the manpower to enforce the extermination of the Jews throughout the General Government at once.

The impending fate of Ozerow became clear soon after Yom Kippur¹⁹ of 1942. On that holy day the Jews of Ostrowiec, the largest town in the region, were rounded up by a collective force of local Polish police along with Ukrainian and Lithuanian auxiliaries under the leadership of German officials. Four days later the same fate befell Chmielów, a town

between Ostrowiec and Ożarów. Every four days another town disappeared. The Jewish population of the region was packed into cattle wagons, in what was labeled a transfer to the East.

On Sukkot²⁰ many Jews still covered their booths with tree branches, marking the joyous feast. But conversation revolved around one question: When will it be Ożarów's turn? The answer came in the third week after the end of the festival of Simchat Torah,²¹ when Parashat Lekh Lekha²² is recited. On Tuesday, the Jews of Tarlow, surrounded by Polish, Jewish and Ukrainian police, with their guns pointing in every direction, marched past our home on their way to the railroad station.

This was the only liquidation of a Jewish community that I myself witnessed, and it is still embedded in my mind. I watched the procession from an opening in the attic, where I could not be seen by the guarding police. What surprised me, nay what shocked me, was how easy a task the guards had. There seemed to be no fear on the faces of the marchers. They moved slowly, 7 or 8 people abreast. The gun-toting Ukrainians seemed relaxed, as if they were sure no one would attempt escape. Parents hugged their babies and younger children, who were tired after the ten-mile trek from Tarlow to Ożarów; the railroad station was still miles away. It would have been easy for some of the marchers to escape. All the marchers were healthy; the elderly, the decrepit, and the lame had already been lost. Only those who were young and strong would reach the cattle wagons.

A few people might have learned sooner. But for the general population, including myself, the date of Ożarów's impending evacuation became known on the eve of the Sabbath, after sunset, when the Sabbath candles were kindled for the last time in the town's 300 or 400 year history. The resettlement was to take place on Sunday, October 25th. We all knew that this news was not just one more of the many false rumors that swept the town.

To an outsider, the davening²³ at the Kabbalat Shabbat²⁴ services two evenings before the expected deportation probably seemed almost normal. A score or so of men had hardly missed a single morning or evening prayer service at our house since we finished sitting shivah²⁵ after the burial of my older sister, Sarah Hendil. She had been slain by a German motorcyclist on September 8, 1939, the day of the Occupation of Ożarów. The Germans used the town synagogue for a manger for the horses, and most of the Shtiblech²⁶ where the various Hasidic²⁷ factions davened before the far were now closed. So, ever since Rosh Hashanah²⁸ of 1939 when a Sefer Torah²⁹ was brought to our house, our home had served as a subterranean little shul.³⁰

During services, the front entrance was shut off with a heavy wooden bar that extended the width of the door. The worshippers always entered through the back of the house. But that Friday night the front entrance remained unlocked. As usual, my father's chanting of the

Lekha Dodi³¹ was out of tune. But his shaking forward and backward was more intense, his eyelids more tightly closed and his pinkish face redder. His reading of the Roze de'shabbos³² conveyed a uniquely sad joy that I had never heard before. The Zohar's³³ mystical words, personifying the Sabbath as the Bride or Shechinah³⁴ who was united with the Groom, evoked the search for meaning, for right, and for justice. Somehow his rhythmical reading imparted the presence of universal harmony and peace, interrupted only by a deep krechitz³⁵ accompanied by a tear, heard from the kitchen where my mother was sitting reading her Tzenah Urenah.³⁶

After kiddush³⁷ Father made it clear that the impending deportation was not to be mentioned at the dinner table. It was his custom to speak on the Sabbath on in Loshon Hakodesh,³⁸ not in the mundane Yiddish reserved for the weekdays. "Shalom Aleichem,"³⁹ peace unto you, ministering angels, became the refrain that evening, hinting perhaps that the enemies of the Jews could do nothing to him save bring him closer to his Creator. Mother had spent the last ten zlotys to purchase chicken for that Sabbath and it was worth it. The chicken and the soup tasted exceptionally good as they contained a great deal of fat. There was enough food to invite two young men who had detached themselves from their families as they were marching from Tarlow. They had not seen a house of prayer since the beginning of the war, but tonight they came to pray, hoping to be invited for dinner. They had a long story to tell—they planned on joining the partisans, rumored to frequent the forests. Father forbade them to describe their experiences at the Sabbath meal. The table is a sacred altar, and the food a korban,⁴⁰ which may not be desecrated by profane chatter. The only fitting words are the zemiroth⁴¹ that open the gates of the future world.

The hub of Ożarów's social life centered on the walks on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons in the only paved street of the town, which passed right by the door of our house. Usually, young people of all classes strolled the street, debated the issues of the day and exchanged gossip. One could distinguish the various political and religious factions by their peyes,⁴² head coverings, and the length of the women's sleeves and skirts. There were the Agudah-nicks,⁴³ the Mizrahists,⁴⁴ Shomer Hatzairniks,⁴⁵ Bundists⁴⁶ and Communists. The war brought an end to all these social, religious and economic divisions. What mattered now was whether you were an insider or outsider. Members of the Judenrat and their families and friends, even the lowliest of them, were the insiders. They were excused from the exorbitant looting and taxes, which was the cost of satisfying the regional Gestapo and Wehrmacht officers, whose appetites for fine, expensive clothing and other luxuries were insatiable. Insiders were also free from the forced labor to clear the roads from snow in the winter and to repave the roads leading to the East in the summer. The insiders received warnings prior to the customary forays to snatch young men and women who would be sent to concentration camps.

This week, the town's deportation was the only topic of conversation on the street. Stories circulated of this or that person having paid 50,000 zlotys for a position in the German labor camp. Overnight the situation had turned upside down. The labor brigades now consisted almost entirely of the insiders, who believed that they could save themselves by assisting in the German war effort. The preferred labor brigade, for which outsiders paid heavily, wove baskets for storing bombs.

The town's youth could not agree concerning the fate of the deportees. A persistent rumor, probably planted by the Germans, had it that someone had received a postcard from relatives in the resettled territory, and that they were doing well in their new location. Communists and philosophers argued that the German war machine needed forced labor from the conquered lands of the Ukraine to prepare the ground for the German settlers. Others insisted that the Germans, even the SS, were a cultured and civilized people and that the stories of mass murder must be lies. Someone whispered of reports that the youth of Warsaw was arming itself in preparation for a Jewish resistance. It was too late now to acquire arms in Ożarów. But why not refuse to cooperate by refusing to leave the houses? Let them shoot us there! But this was regarded as irrational chatter. In their heart of hearts everyone believed that they would live. Evil flourishes because the good refuse to believe in its reality.

The faces of some of the members of the Judenrat and the Jewish police were the most depressed. Feeling privileged, they had rarely joined in the Sabbath walks until now. But that evening of October 23rd, nearly everyone came out to say good-bye. Even the most inaccessible person, Leibele Halpern, whose forename was now Leo, greeted me: "How are you, Bentzy?" "It's more than three years since you have asked," I said. "Listen to me, Bentzy, for the sake of the old friendship between our families and our old close relationship, I can help you get a place in the basket factory..." "Many thanks," I said, "As a Jew, I will not accept favors from the Germans or their lackeys." As soon as I left him I was surrounded by half a dozen people: "What did he say? Will the deportation be rescinded?" When I told them that he had offered me a position at the basket factory, they begged me, would you please, please beseech him to give it to me, to me!

The next morning Father commented on the first line of the weekly Parashah,⁴⁷ which he was wont to do only on rare occasions. "The Lord said to Abram, Go thee from thy land... to the land which I will show thee."⁴⁸ Our forebear left his country not knowing whither he was to go. God is testing us again by making us leave our birthplace. Let us suppose that Abram would have responded to the divine command and said: "No, my Lord, I love my ancestral place, I shall not leave." Suppose, the ram would not have been there as a substitute for Isaac.⁴⁹ Abram would have brought the korban to fruition. Like Abram we must sanctify God's name by going to the unknown, the promised land, as foretold to Abram. The sacrifice that began by the binding of Isaac comes to full fruition tomorrow. The sacrifice of Israel

attests to God's mercy. Tomorrow we are all marching to meet the Messiah. God has hidden his face from us by letting Satan rule the world.

Citing intricate Gematria⁵⁰ on "Satan," my father showed that the forthcoming events had been long foretold in scripture and mystical texts. He went on to explain that Hitler embodied Satan, who had tested the patriarch's faith in God when Abraham was told to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. To this very day, Abraham is still looking for the place where his sons and daughters will be offered up as a sacrifice for the sanctification of God's name.

The people did not understand what he was saying.

Father kept his absolute serenity throughout the afternoon. Nothing could be done or said to disturb in the slightest his enjoyment of the Sabbath. On other Sabbaths Mother would usually join neighbors for a chat, or, if the weather was nice, for a short walk. Now she held on to her copy of the Ze'enah Ure'enah, reciting in a sing-song her favorite tehinot.⁵¹ She wore her jewels, the diamond-bedecked earrings, the heavy gold chains around her neck, the bracelets and rings. She was paying homage to the Sabbath, thanking God that she had withstood the temptation of selling some of her mother's valuables during the many months of deprivation and even hunger. Decades of abject poverty had not diminished her certainty that she was the Princess of Ożarów. More men came to the Minhah service than ever before during the three-year-old minyan.⁵² There was none of the habitual chit-chat. The worshippers' shaking back and forth grew in intensity as the service progressed, peaking at the recitation of the Kaddish.⁵³ Perhaps they were reciting the Kaddish not only for their forebears and families, but for Ozerow and hundreds of similar towns across Eastern Europe.

The flicker of the Havdalah⁵⁴ candle marked the end of the Sabbath, the departure of the extra souls present during the seventh day, and with it the end of a civilization.

With the Havdalah over, the time of decision came. Should the family stay together and let things happen as they would, or should we split up to increase the chance of survival for some of us? The reasoning for keeping the family together seemed most persuasive. The Germans hated all Jews, but they reserved their fiercest venom for the bearded Jews, with who wore their long peyes folded behind the ears. Father hadn't left the house even once since the Nazi occupation, because the German soldiers liked to torture pious Jews, cutting off their beards with their bayonets. At 47, he could not walk straight, dragging his leg as a consequence of having broken a bone in his thigh when falling off a ladder. Judging from what happened to the Jews of Tarlow, there was little hope that he could maintain the pace in walking the five kilometers to the railroad station. He did not utter many words, but I had the feeling that he would refuse to leave the house, come what may. Mother, two or three years his junior, adored her husband, a "lo yutzlach"⁵⁵ in supporting her, but the

biggest “talmid hokhom”⁵⁶ not only of Ozerow but of neighboring shtetlach as well. If he decided to stay in the house, she would not budge either.

If Father and Mother stayed put in the house what were my two siblings to do? There had been four of us at the outbreak of war. A German bullet from a passing motorcycle had killed my older sister on the first day of the occupation. Even as a teenager she had helped to support the family. Father earned some income by acting as a borer,⁵⁷ an expert in rabbinic civil Halakah in the capacity of an advocate, but most of the time he just studied and studied the sacred sefarim.⁵⁸ Mother assisted in going every morning to the village where she bought the milk from the peasants and resold it at a slight profit to the town’s people. Hendele earned some income by giving lessons to youngsters in the reading and speaking of Polish.

In our household, hunger reigned supreme, and satiety was an infrequent guest. As a child I used to receive severe punishment for eating the bread that belonged to my siblings, and was envious of the older sister who received more generous portions than I. The only time, before and during the war, that I could have fresh rolls with butter was in my dreams. During the occupation I would frequently go to the village, carrying milk and rye to exchange for other food.

My brother Aaron, not yet Bar Mitzvah, became an apprentice to a carpenter, earning a subsistence salary, and thereby helping to ease our family’s burden. Then there was Shifrah, the jewel of the family, born three years before the war.

Neither Aaron nor Shifrah were mature enough to be expected to make a responsible decision in normal matters, and how much the more so in the affairs at hand that were beyond anyone’s experience. But if Father and Mother could not protect them, ought not I go with them, come what may?

I had another option. In 1941, I met with a number of Christians, one of whom had been studying for the priesthood. They were connected with the Polish underground run from London, whose military arm was the Armia Krajowa.⁵⁹ They asked me to be their listening post, informing them of what was happening in Ożarów. I asked my friends two questions: First, what was the truth about this deportation? Second, was the Polish Underground willing to help organize a Jewish branch that would serve as auxiliary to the Armia Krajowa?

The answer to the first question was unequivocal. There were no settlements in the East; all Jews who were transported away from their home communities were put to death. The answer to the second query was equally obvious, if not as blunt. The Armia Krajowa was not interested in a Jewish auxiliary and would not on its own recruit Jews. Poland was occupied by the Germans, but Nazi philosophy permeated the Polish government in exile as well as the native population. What the Polish authorities in London practiced was bluntly

expressed by some Christian acquaintances to me: “The Germans are terrible, but they are serving a useful purpose in liquidating our Jewish problem.”

The destruction of the Jewish communities created an opportunity to make money. For 1,000 zlotys, the Polish underground could furnish anyone with forged papers consisting of a Kenkarte,⁶⁰ identifying an individual as an Aryan, together with his baptismal certificate. A member of the underground would steal some Kenkarte forms from an office, which could then be filled out with anyone’s photograph and signature. “Why don’t you get yourself such papers, Bentzi?” my friends asked me. There was no way that I could obtain 1,000 zlotys at the time, little as that amount of money was worth.

A kind of miracle happened. On the day after Yom Kippur my little sister Shifrah called me aside, when Father was davening and Mother was cooking potatoes for dinner. She had a secret which she had not shared with anyone. Would I betray her? I assured her that I would not, that I would not even tell Father or Mother.

She then pulled out a little bundle from under her dress. The bundle was rather light and was wrapped with an old issue of the *Volkischer Beobachter*,⁶¹ and tied with a string. The two of us took a walk behind the house where we unwrapped the little bundle. It contained 40 banknotes of 100 zlotys each. She had been playing hide and seek with her friend Liebele next door. When she was hiding under the table, she noticed that the bottom of the table was covered with wooden planks, over which there was another cover with a tablecloth on it extending the full length and breadth of the table bottom. A naturally curious child, she became intrigued with the table’s false bottom. Opening it up, she discovered neatly piled packages spread over the width and length of the table bottom. She became curious as to what these little bundles contained. The next time she was under the table she pulled out one of these bundles, whose contents had just been revealed to me. She had not told Father and Mother because she was afraid they would spank her.

I told her that I would keep her secret, that she was not to tell anyone what had happened. She could go on playing with Liebele, but under no circumstances was she to take any of these little bundles or anything else from the neighbor’s house. We shook hands; a promise is a promise. Israel Moshe Goldshtein, our neighbor to the north, came to Vienna in 1930 at the age of 14 where he was apprenticed as a tailor. He remained there until 1938 when he returned to his native Ożarów. He imported fine English cloth which he fashioned into men’s suits according to the latest styles shown in the fancy magazines. Just before the outbreak of war a heavy shipment of cloth was delivered to him, and he prospered even more during the war. The German officers as far as 100 kilometers away would come to Ozerow to have a suit made by him. They showered him with all kinds of goods, including paper money, which for them had little value. He was their favored Jew. To hide his money and at the same time have it easily accessible in case of emergency, he hid it under the table and under false

paneling on the walls of his house. It was from this hiding place under the table that Shifrah had stolen the little bundle.

It was too late to purchase a Kenkarte. My two Polish friends had disappeared. It was rumored that one had been arrested by the police and the other had left town without a trace. There was apparently to be no Kenkarte.

On the eve of Sukkot, Father's first cousin, Avrumtze Liberman, of Zwolin, came to visit us. Travel by Jews was a capital offence, but he disregarded danger, engaging in the making and selling of leather. He told us that he could procure a Kenkarte for 500 zlotys, half of what my Catholic friend had asked. His contacts had prepared such identification papers for his two sons and for himself, which he showed me. I gave him 5 of the banknotes which Shifrah had taken from the neighbor, plus a photograph of myself, and within a week he delivered the Kenkarte.

No decision was taken by the family as to whether or not I should leave them until the eve of deportation. The lengthy discussions about what ought to be done always ended inconclusively. My parents and brother and sister, together with the great majority of the town's people continued to cling to the belief that life would somehow continue. Mother was certain that if death overtook her and her husband she would be seated at his footstool in the Gan Eden.⁶² Her husband would be seated near the head of the table on account of his piety and profound Talmudic learning, and now, since she was sure he was always ready to be martyred for the sake of sanctification of God's name, she too was prepared for the coming Messianic feast. I do not fear death, Father said, simply, and neither ought you, my son. And I was not going to abandon them without my father's permission.

That Saturday night, my Father had a complete change of mind. It was Mother who repeated it to me: He is not to stay with us: he has to take his fate in his own hands, and God will help. To me, my father cited the Talmudic passage from Avodah Zarah 8b⁶³ which related the deed of Judah son of Baba during the Hadrianic persecutions, which included the prohibition against studying the Torah. All those who dared to teach or study Judaism were slain by the Roman authorities. There was an acute danger that the chain of tradition—the Kabbalah⁶⁴—would be severed forever. What did Judah the son of Baba do? He took four young scholars of the tradition and brought them into the mountains, where he placed his hands on them, granting them Ordination. "Come to me, my son, I shall put my hands upon you" said my father. This he did, giving me a kiss.

It was time to take leave of my family. I was to catch the train that stopped at Yashitz (Jasice) at 10:48 p.m. and I had to allow three quarters of an hour for the walk to the railroad station. In 1914 when my parents were expelled from their homes and forced to cross the Vistula, they returned to find their homes reduced to rubble and ashes. Building on this experience,

my parents had decided to protect our few valuables from the elements. We all went down to the cellar, which extended the entire width of the house, and the five of us witnessed the disposition of the few remains of the past wealth of our forebears. These consisted of my mother's mother's jeweled earrings, pearl necklaces and bracelets. There were also golden goblets, charoses⁶⁵ and maror⁶⁶ plates, which used to adorn the table during the Passover Seder.⁶⁷ Shivering in the cold, Aaron and I quickly dug a hole in the ground of the cellar about two feet deep, deposited the items therein and covered it with earth, placing coal and potatoes on top of the soil. At that moment we all felt that the separation was only temporary and that whatever were to happen, all five of us would soon be reunited again.

Mother, who handled the money in our family, then unwrapped her little bundle of single zlotys which she had put together for a time of crisis, and handed it over to me without counting it. Take it, Bentzy, you may need it. I counted it and found it to be 68 zlotys, just enough to buy a single loaf of bread. I returned the paper money to her, telling them that they could make better use of it. I said that a miracle had happened and I had found 5,000 zlotys, out of which I had paid Avrumtze the 500 zlotys for the Kenkarte and an additional 2,000 zlotys for a pair of boots, which should have fetched 5,000 in the market place, and that I felt rich with the remaining 2,500 zlotys. I gave five 100 zloty notes to Aaron and five to Shifra, keeping the remaining 1,500 zlotys for myself, enough perhaps to buy a ticket and to live for a day or two and a night's lodging. I was grateful that Father did not ask where I got this money from, and Shifrah never betrayed the secret. Had he known its true source, he would not have rested until every groshen was given back to its legal owner.

I changed into the new boots, marking the beginning of my parading as a Goy.⁶⁸

By now it was after nine o'clock, almost time to part. Father was helping Mother make up a small bundle for my journey while watching me dress as a Goy. None of us, however, had the foggiest notion how Gentiles dressed. Sure, we could distinguish a Hasid by his shtreiml,⁶⁹ long kaftan, and sleeved high shoes; a Misnagged,⁷⁰ by his Goyish jacket and pants. And you could always distinguish a Jew from a Gentile by the way they wore their hats. But how exactly the Goyim wore their clothes we did not know.

Fortunately, our next door neighbor, to the south, Meylech, was a hat maker. I knocked at his door. "Meylech, could you sell me a goyyisher hat," I said. "Here," he said, "are all of my hats, take as many as you want." His wife, Ruchele, asked, "What kind of Goy will you be, a puritz (gentry) or poyer (peasant)? Why should a Jewish boy like you act as if he were a Goy anyway?" I asked her whether she had heard of the deportation pending within a couple of hours. She said she had, but that she didn't believe this could occur in Ożarów, a town guarded by the heilige Tzadikim.⁷¹ She then picked out what was the most peasant-like hat, made of thick, checkered cloth with a long brim, and gave it to me. I gave her a ten zloty note. "When you come back, you'll be my Gitele's khosen."⁷² "Yes," I said, thoughtlessly.

My cap resembled the kind worn by the peasants. The dark brown jacket and pants were typical of the dress of Ożarów's young men. Were these typically Jewish garments or do educated Gentiles wear them also? There was no point answering these questions since I had no other suit. I then put on the new hip boots for which I had paid half of my newly acquired fortune. These, my mother said, make you look like a real Goy. Father corrected her. He is a Jew—he will never look like a Goy. He's just dressing for Purim.⁷³

By now the bundle I was to take with me was neatly packed. It contained a shirt, a blanket, shaving equipment, two pairs of socks, and a pair of Tefillin. "We did not pack the Rabbenu Tam Tefillin," Father noted. Rashi's Tefillin would be enough for one parading as a Goy. I said nothing, not wishing to shock him with the news that as a Goy, I would no longer wear Tefillin.⁷⁴ My little sister Shifrah asked whether she could reveal our secret. Aaron wanted permission to wear my discarded shoes. Mother put a shawl around my neck, "You have been sickly since your birth."

It was a dark and overcast night as I left the house and the town of my birth. Except for three and a half years in the Yeshivah,⁷⁵ academies whose only subject of instruction was Talmud, my entire world consisted of Ozerow and its surrounding villages and forests. Now I was leaving my birthplace, going to the railroad station to purchase a ticket going nowhere. At that time I did not know that there existed tables that listed all the stops of the train. I decided to listen carefully to the people who preceded me in buying the tickets, asking for the same locality. I had already crossed the street when I heard my younger brother and sister calling me. With the tears in her eyes still unwiped, Shifrah told me that I had forgotten to take my false identification papers, which she proceeded to put into my pocket, while giving me a final kiss.

On Saturday nights young people usually filled Ożarów's main street, strolling and talking incessantly. Tonight the streets were completely deserted. A lone Jewish policeman saw me cross the way to the railroad. The previous time I had seen him was when he had kicked me with his right boot for failing to show up for a labor brigade sent to help pave the roads. "I apologize for what I did to you a month ago," he said. "My advice is that you return home. Gangs of shkotzim,⁷⁶ some armed with knives and others with revolvers, are killing anyone fleeing the town and robbing whatever they can find." "But I have false identification papers," I said naively.

Leaving him, I reached the town's last major structure, the mill, which formerly belonged to my Grandfather. This reminded me of an anecdote he had told me when I was about ten years old. A certain Hayyim Yankel Rochwerk had borrowed my Grandfather's Russian passport, using it as identification for smuggling vodka from across the border to Galicia, which was not far from Sandomierz. Intercepted by the gendarmes,⁷⁷ he was asked for his

full name. But his mind blanked out and he could not remember Grandfather's name at all. Neither could he identify the Cyrillic alphabet to refresh his memory. He finally blurted out: "I swear by God, I can't tell you my real name but it isn't Hayyim Yankel Rochwerk."

While trudging along the way I was memorizing the following refrain: "I am not Ben Zion Wacholder, my name is Waclaw Jazcec Kaczynski, Wacek for short." My father's name is not Pinehas Shelomoh, but Jozerf Kaczynski, and my mother's name is Marysia, not née Lederman, but née Solsky. Ozarow was not my birthplace but Brzec Litwski. Remember, Bentzy, I repeated to myself. From today on, what is true is false: what is false is true.

Having walked about halfway to the station, my musings were interrupted by cries mingling with Polish curses. The cries were from fleeing Jews being burglarized and beaten by Catholic gangs. Shaya Fried, the policeman, was right. The rats fleeing the ship are being trapped by the Poles. Ożarów's few Catholics and those from the surrounding villages had made vodka in joyful anticipation of the deportation of the Jews. Not only would they get rid of the hateful infidels, whose death hardly mattered, since they would go to hell anyway, but they believed the deportation would bring a chance to rise from rags to riches. They did not believe that Ożarów's houses were almost completely bare, and that even prior to the war this was one of the most destitute Jewish towns in the region. Now, three years after the war began whatever wealth there had been was almost exhausted. The only thing Ożarów's Jews had

in abundance were rats and lice. But these Goyim were themselves desperately hungry, and like cannibals were awaiting the prey which would fall into their hands on the Lord's Day.

Many Poles couldn't wait for the appointed day. Some went to their former Jewish patrons with requests of money, textiles, or transfer the deeds to their houses. Others, having heard what many Jews tried to do the night before the deportation, laid in waiting for any Jew who was approaching the way to the railroad station.

Before I had a chance to turn back, three youths about my age or a year older, were shouting at me: "Stop, stop pierdølony zydzie, fucking Jew, Your time has come. You will no longer kill Christian infants for Passover blood. Give us all that you have."

The attackers acted skillfully. They had observed me approaching for some time but waited until I came within ten meters before stopping me. I had not seen them because they were standing behind a barn, and I failed to notice them even as they were coming towards me. My eyeglasses with their thick lenses had been left at home, since in our area only Jews wore spectacles. By appearance alone, with my blondish hair, blue eyes, and straight nose, I could pass as what was considered Arian, but glasses indicated intellectuality, an entirely Jewish characteristic.

Even with my spectacles, my vision never attained 20/20, since I was not only severely near-sighted, but was suffering from incipient macular degeneration whose true dimensions only became clear some three decades later. As a child Father advised me against wearing glasses, in order to aggravate my vision and help free me from military service, as extreme myopia did for him. Poor vision was of little consequence in Judaic studies since I could see the print when I kept my nose on top of the page. In the public schools where I could never see what the teacher had written on the blackboard, the school regarded me as a slow learner, failing me constantly and keeping me back for two years in the second grade. Now I was beginning a new life with the severe handicap of being deprived of my thick spectacles.

One of the youths grabbed my right arm and pulled on my lapel, the other put his two hands around my neck and the third was slapping and kicking me. "Give us your money, and everything you have. Or we will kill you and take it anyway. You dirty Jew you've no right to live."

I handed them the 1400 zlotys. But they were not satisfied. Previous victims had yielded ten times as much cash. They proceeded to search and undress me, ripping off my clothes to look for hidden money. They took my money and my new boots and, leaving me half naked with my clothes scattered in the chilly night, went off looking for more prosperous victims.

By now it was after 11 o'clock and the next passenger train was scheduled for noon the next day. Barefoot, jacket torn, nose bleeding, and aching all over, I began to trudge back home. It was already after midnight when I signaled my presence by giving two loud and one gentle knocks on the windowpane in the back of the house. No one in the house had gone to sleep; the kerosene lamp was lit up full blast. My first adventure as a Goy has not gone too well, I announced, telling them what had occurred. Shifrah was overjoyed at seeing me. Aaron expressed her sentiments: It's good, you are coming with, we will all go together. He took off the shoes that had been mine before putting on the new boots.

Father cited a line from Avot: 'al deateyft....'⁷⁸ which simply rendered means: "They have stolen from you what you stole from others." Shifrah had told him how she had absconded with the package of 100 zloty notes and Father had insisted that the two of them, he and Shifrah, go ask Israel Mosheh his forgiveness. He could not face his creator with such a stain on his record.

Mother washed off my face and bloody back and sat down to repair and clean my torn jacket and pants. Fortunately only the seams were torn, and her repairs resembled machine work, at least if one didn't look too closely. Fortunately also, she found my false identification Kenkarte and my baptismal certificate in the ripped back pocket.

I lay down and fell asleep immediately. I awakened long before the rise of the morning star, either on my own or awakened by one of my parents. No one except myself had evidently slept that night. All five of us were present at the family counsel. After the dismal failure of last night, the question was whether to let fate take its course or to frustrate fate. Father's inexhaustible mastery of Midrashic⁷⁹ lore proved decisive. The idolaters believe in fate: we Jews believe in God. Abraham did not believe in fate. He left for the Promised Land without knowing of its existence. Jacob feared Esau, but he did not give up. He divided his camp into two groups. One goes hither and the other thither.⁸⁰ Our Sages teach us: If you fail, try again. God is good: he has given us hope. These were his last words as I bid my family good-bye for the second time within the same night, full of bruises, and groshenless.

When I walked out of the kitchen, this time I turned right instead of left, towards the back of the house to catch a final glimpse of my father, mother, brother, and sister watching my departure through the back window. As my eyes met theirs, I could not see much, as I was half blind without my spectacles. Still, I felt that they were beckoning me to come back. For a moment I hesitated, not knowing what to do—return home to join the family come what may, or walk away. I recalled how the two youths from Tarlow who had escaped so grieved leaving their families on their march to the railroad station, that they decided to join the deportation of Ozerow's Jews. Wasn't it cowardice to leave your family unprotected? With the recent incident at the railroad station still fresh in my mind, and my bones still aching from the beating at Yashitz, I lacked the strength to begin a new adventure.

I was so absorbed in thought that I paid no attention to the ever-increasing noise. Suddenly I heard the sound of vehicles converging not far from the front of the house. In Ozerow the main means of transportation was horse, and the passing of a motorized carriage was a noticeable event. The Germans still used cavalry, but they brought the best that they had for the deportation of Jews. There was nothing I could do to help my family or to kill the murderers.

Instead of going back into the house, I turned around and ran towards the two houses that separated our home from the open fields in the east. What struck me then was the folly of pacifism in the face of evil. Ghandi and his followers could use non-resistance as a weapon against the British, but such weapons are completely useless against real evil. Why did not the youth of Ozerow stand up against evil? Now that we had failed there was nothing to do but to run away.

I have no idea how many fled the town that night but I am sure that quite a few did. Some hoped to find refuge in hideouts they paid peasants for. Others stayed in the forests. Still others excavated their cellars, filling them with supplies. But I was not aware then of these people. As far as I was concerned, I was fleeing not only my father's house but the town of Ożarów, a community that had existed for hundreds of years, and the Jewish people as well.

Now all the Jews of the world have been wiped out. I might be the only Noah who survives in the ocean of Goyim.

The intention of the Gentiles soon became clear. When I reached the open fields I could see the light penetrating the morning mist. But I could also see what seemed to be moving torches, one of which was coming directly towards me. They were encircling the town with flares to prevent anyone from fleeing. The torch must have been quite near me since even my near-sighted eyes noticed the khaki uniforms of the Ukrainians. He had apparently not seen me. I tried to move faster and on all fours. But he heard me.

“Stop you cursed Jew,” he shouted, shooting with his Carbine. He must have emptied his entire fuselage on me because the shots were coming for a long while. But soon I was out of his reach.

Chapter 2

Alone

Running as fast as I could I soon realized that it was a race between me and them. ‘Them’ were the platoons of German, Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and some Jewish police, who had liquidated the neighboring townships of Tarlow, Ostrowiec, and Opatow, and were now moving into Ozerow. The noise of motor vehicles filled the air and a multitude of flashlights and flares lit up the alleys and passageways on this cloudy morning of Sunday October 25, 1942. The forces of the Reich, perhaps hundreds of men, were in the process of making the world Judenrein.¹ Ozerow was being cordoned off from the surrounding fields to make sure that no one could escape the trap. Long practice in dozens of Shtetlach made it easy to form a police cordon to seal off the Jewish towns from the neighboring villages. Would they get me too?

Only some 100 meters separated our dwelling from the open fields towards the east. As I ran I passed two cottages. The first belonged to Reb Rivele, Ozerow’s Rav and Rabbi, the saintly miracle man who was famous before the war for reputedly being able to exorcise dibbukim, ghosts who loved to visit the bodies of unfortunate maidens. Behind this house was the barn and cottage of the Wojtockis (Voytozkis), the peasants from whom I used to buy milk. The Rebbe’s dwelling, where I used to spend many days as a youngster, now seemed absolutely still on this dark morning. But the barn of the Wojtockis was a hub of activity. Having passed no more than 20 feet beyond the barn I heard shouting in Polish: “halt! halt or I will shoot!” Ignoring the shouts I doubled my efforts to run even faster and faster. When shots began to trail me I squatted, crawling on all fours. I must have crawled for a long time, for when I got up to take a glance backward, I could see nothing but a deep mist that enveloped the houses. The cottage and barn of the Wojtockis were no longer visible.

The deep, dark mist that covered the morning light also enveloped Ozerow. It might have been assumed that the shtetl ceased to exist. But the swishing sound of bullets fired from a variety of guns told eloquently what was happening in Ozerow. Whom did these shots murder? Not my older sister Hendele, already slain by the bullet of the conquering cyclist. Were they killing the remainder of my family—my brother Aaron and sister Shifrah? The Germans enjoyed themselves by shooting characters like my father, with his broad forehead, thick eyeglasses, unkempt blondish beard, who was in addition lame. Such Jews were anathema to the Christians, even ones who were not members of the Nazi party. My father presented them with a figure of the Old Testament who must be uprooted. I knew that my father’s chances of surviving the collection of the people into the market was nearly nil. As the shooting continued I wondered which of the shots penetrated his body.

I wondered about the fate of the two cottages that I passed by while running away. Calling one of these houses Reb Rivele's is a misnomer, since Rabbi Reuben Halevi Epstein had died in early 1940 and the house was now inhabited by his children, his son Rebbie Yehiel and daughter Hannah. As far as the people of Ozerow were concerned, however, Rebbie Rivele was still among the living. If he had died before September of 1939 there would have been a massive levayah,² in which every inhabitant of Ozerow would participated, even the town's most outspoken apikorsim³ (of which there were many) and Jews from neighboring towns. When he died on Hol Hamoed⁴ Sukkot his son Rebbie Yehiel succeeded him, but no one knew the difference. But I did. Even as a child I loved to frequent this house where more often than not the servant would give a half fresh roll with a thick layer of butter which to me seemed the height of good living.

Rebbe Rivele's deeply melodious chant of his recitation of the Zohar revealed to me the mysteries of the universe and the three souls that reside within every being,⁵ even the beasts of the field. When he intoned the mysteries of the Zohar during Shalosh Seudot,⁶ the heavens opened and the angels joined in the chanting, although as was well known, angels are handicapped since they have never mastered the Aramaic language.

Years later, when I had become an apikores, my thoughts continued to linger in Reb Rivele's house. His son Rebbe Yehiel was a sharp contrast to his father. Rebbie Rivele's face looked as if it was illumined by the sun of the Gan Eden. Although the Book of the Holy Zohar was always kept open in front of him, Reb Rivele's blue eyes frequently turned towards the window panes, with his wife the Rebitzin often hurling charges that he was watching the female passers by.

Rebbie Yehiel's face had none of the "hadrat panim"⁷ of his father. His pale face with its grey eyes and his whole body was stooped towards the print in the oversized large folios. Unlike his father, whose entire shelf of books was limited to of Tikkunim,⁸ Zohar and a mass of booklets which told miracle stories performed by the Hasidic Rebbes, Reb Yehiel had a study that consisted of two rooms. All the walls of both of these rooms were filled with the folios of Talmud, the Vilna Shas⁹ and Poskim,¹⁰ commentaries, super-commentaries, and super-super-commentaries.

Ozerow had quite a few libraries. In the Beit Hamidrash tomes of the Talmud and the like could be found, but the sefarim were uncared for. The various youth organizations housed Yiddish books, including various classics, such as Dostoevski and Tolstoy, along with the trashy novels that flooded Western Europe. The Bundists and the Communists possessed large quantities of volumes that dealt with dialectical materialism and other Marxist literature. But only Rebbe Yehiel had a whole library to himself. Walls and "shanks" of sefarim¹¹ that dealt with the minutiae of the Halakah.¹² So, while Rebbie Yehiel was never

my favorite, his library was. We used to sit on opposite sides of the large pine table and without acknowledging each other's presence.

I soon noticed that while I would sit and peruse the tomes in Reb Yehiel's library his sister Hanaleh, whose face resembled her father's, with large brown eyes, would find an excuse for being in the adjoining room. The two of us played when we were two years old. Now we merely exchanged glances when we passed each other. Each of us was too timid and inarticulate to even hint that we were deeply attracted to each other.

For a moment as I glanced for the last time at the Hurban of Ozerow the thought of Hanaleh and Rebbie Yehiel lingered in my mind. What will happen to the hundreds and hundreds of sefarim, those huge tomes that covered the walls and filled the closets? What will happen to the house where I could always find refuge from the prosaic world and enter into a world of mysticism and rabbinic scholarship?

As for Pan Wojtocki's cottage and barn, I remembered best the cow. She calved in January and soon thereafter I would come every sunset to watch Wojtocki milk her. Mr. Wojtocki was a kind peasant philosopher and a pious Catholic. "Have you seen the full face of the full moon," he would inquire. "Yes," I said. "But if you watch intensely, he insisted, you will see the face of Christ." Quoting both Aristotle and Maimonides which I had read in Reb Yehiel's library, I responded that that was impossible. Jesus was a mortal whereas the moon formed part of the heavenly bodies that are made up of a special element, not found on the earth. Earthly matters consist of the four elements: the heavenly of a fifth element called helium. Wojtocki could not quote Aristotle, so he asked his priest how to respond to the Jewish boy to whom he sells his milk. The priest advised him not to sell milk or talk to the Jewish infidel who are getting what they deserve for killing God.

Now, this barn served as quarters for the Polish police in the operation of the resettlement of the Jews of Ozerow. It was from there the bullets that almost killed me had come.

It then occurred to me that the cows could offer better protection than the forged Kenkarte tucked securely in my pocket. Loosening the cows' ropes from the trees, I tied the two ends together. The cows followed me willingly as I lead them downhill towards the open road that connected Ozerow with the neighboring villages. Motorized vehicles carried Germans toward Ozerow to participate in the deportation. They simply drove around the presumptuous peasant boy who paid them apparently no attention as he was leading two cows to the bull. One vehicle did stop for a moment and the driver shouted at me to get the hell out of the middle of the road or else he would order his lieutenant to do to us Polish peasants what they were about to do to the verfluchte Juden.¹³ I said nothing, merely smiling to his face, as though he had complimented me on my fine cows.

The three of us must have traversed some two or three kilometers, for we soon came to the spot where the road forked off to Zawichost. Up to this point I was running away from Ozerow without ever considering where I was going. Now I was facing two signs, one which pointed to Annopol (or in Yiddish, Rachev) and the other to Zawichost. Rachev was somewhat nearer, but I had never been there. Besides, to reach that town one had to cross the bridge over the Vistula, which was an important route for the military vehicles going to the Russian front, and sometimes was heavily guarded. Zawichost lay on the western side of the river, and as far as I knew its Jews had not as yet been deported. Zawichost was my father's birthplace, and I had visited the town on my way to catch the steamboat to Warsaw, on my way to the Yeshivah at Baranowicze¹⁴ some years earlier.

The cows were good company. I recited to them. They seemed to listen intensely to recitations of Isaiah Chapter 1: "The ox knows its master and the ass..."¹⁵ the cows at first paid no attention to the peasants on horse and wagon as well as on foot going en masse to Ozerow. It was clear that these peasants were not going to church. They went to share in the booty—scraps left over from the destruction of Ozerow. Two youngsters about my age approached me to advise me to let the cows stay with some peasants. There was no way I could drag the two animals, or even one all the way to Zawichost.

The cows had served their purpose, diverting any suspicion that I was running away from the German. I released them in the middle of the road to their own devices, and I hurried on my way to Zawichost.

As a child I frequently had overheard Father relating what had been told to him about his mother's death at his birth, and his father's death two years later. Grandfather Mendil Wacholder prospered as a merchant of timber, logging trees from the surrounding forests which were shipped on the Vistula to Danzig. Scattered books containing endless tables of logarithms were the only physical remains of my paternal grandfather. These volumes frustrated me since I used to memorize every tome in the house, but I could not understand the meaning of sines and cosines. My father could make sense out of these tables, since prior to my birth he had engaged in the business of cutting timber, an occupation, I was told, that was founded by the patriarch of the Wacholders who owned large estates in the Lipsk and Krasznik. In my days, my father's cousin Meylech Wacholder (who had seven daughters) still owned a woodcutting factory.

Orphaned in early childhood, my father and his sister Simtche were brought up in Zawichost by grandmother's brother Zalmen Guthotz, who also took possession of my grandfather's patrimony, acting as the "apitropes"¹⁶ of the underage children. He quickly lost the fortune entrusted to him, compelling him to leave the timber business altogether and earn his living as a bookkeeper in the Zawichost bank.

Zalmen's other children now lived in Warsaw but his youngest son Eli inherited the position

of bookkeeper upon his father death. Uncle Zalmen used to visit us from time to time, but I had been to Eli's house only once, on my journey to the yeshivah. Some years later I slept in that house for two nights and was fed dinner once but I had failed to adequately express my thanks for this hospitality, taking it for granted that cousins are in this world to could fed and house unhappy family members. Recollections of years gone by ought not to count now that I was coming to Eli ravished, with my pants and shirt covered with cow's urine and excrement. But somehow they did. Seeing Eli's bank and the waterfront where I took the boat to Warsaw made a deep impression on me.

In distance Zawichost was some 20 kilometers from Ozerow; in civilization some hundreds of miles away. Zawichost only had one main street, unlike Ozerow, whose main street branched out into lesser streets, alleys and side roads. The houses in Zawichost were all wooden. Many of them were of a pre-first world war vintage, with interiors dominated by huge wood burning ovens upon which the younger members of the family would sleep in the winter and summer. The Yiddish spoken there was pronounced like the Jews of Galicia, especially in Sandomierz, and people would shake more intensely¹⁷ when reciting the prayers. Unlike Ozerow, which went through a transformation starting in 1918, when Poland was detached from Russia, the people of Zawichost, especially its youth, retained their ancient way of doing things. Thus Zionism and socialism which so deeply affected my native town had made few inroads in Zawichost.

I felt an immense relief as I knocked on Cousin Eli's door. I had started out before dawn as a Jewish youth escaping what seemed to be hell on this earth and had been reduced to an animal and peasant shepherd for some hours. In spite of the kenkarte tucked away in my pocket, I was a Jew again, really my name was still Ben Zion Wacholder who was going to visit his not too favorite cousin in Zawichost.

Nothing had prepared me for the deep shock of having to lie about your own name. From my mother's breast I had imbibed the certainty that Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob, Leah and Rachel¹⁸ were my parents and grandparents, no less than my own father and mother. The Torah of Moses and its dozens and dozens of commentaries and super commentaries, much of which I could recite without a book, had opened me to a glorious world that had made the Jew the most exalted being on this earth.

Each word of the Torah could be interpreted seventy times, nay, perhaps seventy times seventy. There is not enough paper in this world to write all the meanings of the first of the Torah. Take the word "Bereshit."¹⁹ Ibn Ezra,²⁰ Ramban,²¹ Ralbag,²² Seforno,²³ not to speak of the Rambam,²⁴ each gives a different meaning for Bereshit. There are even some like Spinoza²⁵ who believe there was no beginning, no such thing as Bereshit.

But surely Spinoza betrayed his master Maimonides,²⁶ surely he deserted his people by

denying Bereshit. Did not the ten hours that passed from four o'clock in the morning to two in the afternoon testify to the truth of Bereshit? What was occurring this moment in Ozerow except Tohu Va-Vohu?²⁷ By changing a single letter in the word Bereshit (the “sh” into a “ch”), we can find the word “Aharit,” (end) in “Bereshit” (beginning).

What a fool you are, Ben Zion, I said to myself. You are changing from a pure rationalist into a sheer mystic.

Yes, but your name is now not Ben Zion Wacholder, as given to you at your birth, but some stolen appellation, Waclaw Kaczinski, a forged baptismal certificate of a non-existing Christian. Who am I, Ben Zion or Waclaw? Is this the beginning or the end?

For the time being, I was both Bereshit and Aharit. Starting from nothing and returning to nothing. If I could turn into a goy in ten hours, surely there must be some truth in metempsychosis.²⁸ Now, however, the Zelem Elohim²⁹ was returning into my neshome.³⁰ I was Ben Zion again, visiting his cousin in Zawichost, a fellow descendant of Abraham.

It was after two o'clock in the afternoon when I entered cousin Eli's house. The wealth of this place—the carved furnishings, thick rugs, highly polished chairs, mahogany desks—contrasted sharply with broken furnishings I had just left behind for the Polish occupiers. Before the war this front room served as a bank and three years of German occupation hardly touched the household's apparent prosperity.

Unlike Ozerow, which was located on a main route, the road to Zawichost required a detour to a town which lay on the Vistula but had no bridge to cross the river. The Germans hardly ever ventured there so the town was left alone, much like Ozerow. Ozerow had become populated with people from Vienna, Warsaw, Lodz, and Wloclawek who related some of the brutalities being perpetrated against the Jews. Zawichost being a *ferworfene*³¹ place was immune from this influx. Zawichost was markedly less wounded than the surrounding towns. It would have been unimaginable in Ozerow to display a typewriter to whoever entered the front room. The German's recent excursions into the town for rape and destruction would have long taken care of such luxuries. But here they were standing on immaculately polished desks.

The deep layers of animal and human excrement that covered my body from top to bottom and the emaciated face behind the dirt made a poor impression on cousin Eli and his wife. Cousin Eli's first words were: What are you doing here? Why didn't you use the back entrance or the basement? His wife added that she had never seen anyone dirtier than me. I did not say a word, but indicated with a motion of my head that if they if I was not welcome I was ready to leave. Of course, I had nowhere to go. I was penniless, thoroughly exhausted, famished and absolutely shocked from the preceding events. Still, it was not in my nature

to beg. I'm an akshan³² who stubbornly eschews submission or humiliation. I would sooner steal than be humiliated by begging.

I turned around and began walking to the exit without saying goodbye.

In a way this scene expressed the family feud that had grown between my father and Eli's father. My father never failed to mention Uncle Zalmen's squandering, not to say misappropriation of aunt Simtche's naddan³³ and the inheritance due to him. Uncle Zalmen in turn must have felt that Father and Simtche were not sufficiently grateful for the care that he had bestowed upon them.

I barely opened the door to the outside when Eli and Gittele called out for me not to go. I washed up a bit and was offered freshly baked rolls, butter, herring, sardines, Swiss cheese, cookies, milk and ersatz coffee, a sumptuous meal and as much as I wanted. Food never meant much to me but after a day of nearly fasting, my stomach demanded nourishment. While I was eating, Eli and Gittele never ceased asking me what took place in Ozerow, but I would not respond. After the meal, I briefly outlined what had happened yesterday and what I thought was happening this moment in Ozerow and what will no doubt take place in a few days here in Zawichost.

As if my words were bullets Eli and Gittele began to shout incoherently, crying in a voice that reminded me of the women who would come into the Beth Hamidrash, where we were deeply engrossed in the Talmudic tomes, open the ark wherein the sacred scrolls of Scripture were standing, and hysterically ask God's forgiveness for their unforgivable sin, as long as their beloved husband or child be spared death. I tried to calm my cousins, in vain.

Gittel, or Genia as she preferred to be called, grew up in Warsaw during the World War and had become deeply imbued with Germanophilia, evident in the freshly oiled editions of glossy leather bound editions of Goethe on her shelves. Years ago, when passing by Zawichost, returning from the Yeshivah, how much would I have given to read the Gothic letterings in the neatly arranged volumes of German Classics.

Some five or six years older than Eli, Gittel married Eli when he came to visit his brother Motel in 1933. The recent events hardly altered her conviction that all the stories about German unspeakable atrocities were lies. Human beings are inherently good, and Germans are better than anyone else. Whatever his wife said, Eli also believed. Zawichost's isolation of what was occurring around it sheltered them from reality.

Gittel and Eli now saw that they too would be swept away by what the nation they had believed for a long time to represent the zenith of human achievement. It was as if the earth under them suddenly disappeared. They began shouting at me and insulting me as if I was

the lowest under the earth and responsible for the sad state of the world. They could not forgive me for what to their understanding reflected a betrayal, by providing myself with counterfeit baptismal papers.

I had hoped to get some sleep at Eli and Gittel Gutholtz's before moving on the unknown but could not stand the hysteria which went beyond anything I had experienced before. Shouting goodbye, I left them. I could have knocked on the door of any house and after identifying myself could have found shelter for the night. But I lacked the strength to do so. Instead I walked the main street to and from the Vistula. I may as well begin to learn how to manage without any resources, somehow manage to survive in places where everyone you see is your my mortal enemy.

I am now alone, a hunted criminal condemned to death by the mightiest armies of the world. These armies have killed my sisters and brother, my father and mother, not in the course of war or passion, but part of a deliberate rational policy. The outward reason was that this reflects fascism or Nazism. But his was too facile a reason. Cousins Eli and Gittel, who in their own way drove me out, were neither Fascist nor Nazis.

I must have walked back and forth for more than an hour. The full moon was hiding behind thick clouds and the first drops of rain were harbingers of the heavy rain.

Whereas one aspect of my being urged me to search for aloneness to train myself in self sufficiency, another side told me that I was fooling myself if I thought I could live by myself. Trying to live alone would only make me desperate, which would sooner or later hand me over to the Poles or the Germans.

What I needed even more than protection for my body was protection for my soul, that is to say my Jewishness. The only piece of paper in my back pocket scandalized me. A baptismal certificate affirming my Goyishness made me more miserable than the elements that seemed to conspire against me. Rain, wind, darkness, the cold mud were not unbearable. In Ozerow having the forged documents seemed an external matter, something that would not touch me internally: my inner Jewishness seemed too self evident. Here, in the midst of solitude, having abandoned my father and mother, brother and sister, and my friends, I felt disgusted with myself for being prepared to act like a Marrano,³⁴ a Mumar,³⁵ a Meshumad.³⁶

To be a Goy was bad enough, but to become an acting Goy seemed to be the most horrible thing that could happen. Did not Maimonides rule that whereas it was permissible to violate 610 of the commandments³⁷ in order to save one's life, there can be no excuse for transgressing the remaining three: murder, incest, and idol worship? I did not doubt for a single moment that the actual baptismal act or the affirmation of the divinity of Jesus violated the letter and spirit of the first and second commandments. The matter seemed less simple

with regards to carrying of counterfeit scraps of paper asserting that I had participated in such an act or asserted such a belief. Of course even in Ozerow, I had believed myself freed from the Torah and I had begun to doubt the existence of God. Spinoza's pantheism, with a universe that had no beginning and no end appealed to my mind. What then did it matter whether I was presently acting in violation of the Torah?

Certainly a few medieval rabbis tended to believe that Christians were not idolatrous. On the other hand, there are persuasive arguments that the worship of Jesus as a god is the most pagan creed ever known to the world. Is not therefore carrying of a baptismal paper ipso facto an idolatrous act? For one to whom Jewishness forms the core of his life, does not the pretense of being a Christian constitute a denial of God as well as his own self? For the first time the words of the Sages that declare the act of denying one's Jewishness equal to murder made perfect sense.

It occurred to me that this mode of reasoning stemmed not from my fear of the abominable idolatrous papers of mine, but from weakness, the lack of strength to face the world of pagans, who tend to murder without any reason. How many Jews have been murdered in Ozerow during the last three years? No one of the Jewish victims or their relatives ever retaliated in the slightest. No German was ever killed. Even more shameful was our restraint from doing anything that might arouse anger among the Germans. Miles upon miles of rubber covered wire served as the communication nerve of the enemy. I now happened to step over one. In Ozerow, we would never cut them. It would only irritate the Germans, but it may arouse them to retaliate against the whole community. This expressed the inner fear which the Germans exploited. By fearing retaliation, we made it easy for the Germans to make Poland Judenrein.

Now that I am a goy, if only on paper, I could begin acting like one. I took the little blade out of my small knife which I had in my pocket, bent down to the ground to the telephone wire and began to cut. First the rubber that covered the wire and then the wire itself. The little blade did well with the rubber but was powerless against the copper wire itself. But pulling the wire with my bands back and forth a few times effectively severed the telephone line. What I had dispassionately desired to do in Ozerow but was too timid to act I carried out now fearlessly.

Somehow I did not feel alone. To be sure, the house of my birth existed no longer. I had never had any possessions and certainly have nothing now. I had been walking back and forth for more than an hour. Thick clouds had hidden the full moon from which drops were beginning to fall. There was no one I was going to beg from, not even anyone or anything I could steal from. But I felt no desperation. The reaction of the cousins I had witnessed some hours ago was still incomprehensible to me.

Years of reading Haskalah and philosophical books such as Feuerberg's *Whither*³⁸ and Spinoza's *Ethics*³⁹ had led me to the verge of a kind of agnosticism, even to the verge of atheism. Man is part of nature. Supernaturalism rests on fancy and delusion. Man's only salvation rests on the path of humanism, universalism, the noble ideals of either communism or liberalism. Somehow I never really trusted communism. The books preaching dialectical materialism bored me with their shallowness. The trials of the old Bolsheviks before the war whose significance I did not understand, suggested that the Communists were more dangerous than the Fascists. The Fascists have advocated brutal power, building up a natural resentment against themselves. The Communists teach an ideal state of humanity, but in fact are no less bloodthirsty than the Nazis. But the liberals were the most dangerous of all modern ideologies. Ready to do battle with Fascism, the liberals are blind to the [TEXT ENDS HERE.]

ALONE (Autobiography)

Running as fast as I could, I soon realized that it was a race between me and them. 'Them' ~~were~~ ^{was} were the platoons of ~~of~~ German, Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and some Jewish police, ^{who} had liquidated the neighboring townships of Tarlow, Ostrowiec, Onatow, and was now moving into Ozerow. The noise of the motor ~~of~~ vehicles filled the air and ~~and~~ the multitude of flashlights and flairs lit up the ~~the~~ alleys and ^{passageways} ~~streets~~ on this cloudy morning of ~~the~~ Sunday October 25 of 1942. The forces of the Reich, perhaps hundreds of men, were ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ the process of making ~~executing the order to liquidate~~ ^{the} the world Judenrein. Now Ozerow was being cordoned off from the ~~area~~ ^{surrounding fields} to make sure that no one escapes the trap. Long practice in dozen of Shtetl'ich made it easy to form a police ^{neighboring} ~~border~~ to seal off the Jewish towns from the ~~surrounding~~ ^{neighboring} villages. Would they get me too?

Only some 100 meters ~~was~~ separated our dwelling from ~~the~~ the open fields towards the east. As I ran I passed two cottages. The first belonged to Reb ^{Rivke} ~~Rebe~~, the home of the Ozerow's Rav and Rebbi, the saintly rabbi ~~and~~ and miracle man who ~~could~~ ^{was} reputedly ~~before~~ ^{to be} able ~~to~~ ^{to} exorcise dibbukim, ghosts who loved to ~~to~~ inhabit the ~~the~~ bodies of unfortunate maidens. Behind this house ~~was~~ ^(Noy's - his) the barn and cottage of the Wojtackis, the peasants ~~where~~ ^{from whom} I used to buy milk. The Rebbie's dwelling, where much ~~of~~ of my youth ~~was~~ ^{was} to spend, ~~many~~ ^{many} days as a youngster, ~~was~~ ^{was} now seemed absolutely still, on ~~this~~ this dark morning. But the barn ~~of~~ of the Wojtackis seemed a hub of activity. Having passed ~~the~~ the barn ^{no more than 20 feet beyond} ~~some~~ ^{barely 20 feet} I heard ~~the~~ shouts ~~of~~ of the in Polish, 'Halt! halt! or I will shoot!' Ignoring the shouts I doubled my efforts to run even faster ^{and} faster. When shots began to trail me, I ~~swatted~~ ^{swatted}, crawling on ^{all} ~~my~~ four's. I must have been crawling ~~for~~ for a long time, for when I got up to take a glance backward, I could see ~~nothing~~ ^{nothing} but ~~the~~ a ~~deep~~ ^{deep} mist that enveloped the houses. The cottage and barn of the Wojtackis were no longer visible.

Page from BZW's original version of Chapter 2, *Alone*

Glossary to Chapter 1

Hillel Adler, another Jewish survivor of occupied Ożarów who survived World War II, has published a book about life in Ożarów, *Memories of Ozarow, A Little Jewish Town That Was*.

1. **Hurban:** Destruction.
2. **Beth Hamidrash:** House of study.
3. **Shtetlach** (plural of Shtetl): “Little town” (Yiddish). Before WWII, Eastern Europe was dotted with small Jewish towns called shtetlach; almost all were destroyed in the Holocaust.
4. **Hadorim (plural of Heder):** A traditional Jewish elementary school where students study Hebrew and Torah.
5. **Mincha:** The afternoon prayers. This is the second of the three daily Jewish prayers.
6. **Talmud:** A central text of the Oral Torah, a compilation of Rabbinic discussions of law, Jewish lore, and interpretation of the Torah.
7. **Jobian:** Job was a wealthy, successful, and righteous man. In the biblical Book of Job, Satan bets God that if Job loses all of his wealth he will lose faith in God. The Book of Job recounts Job’s reaction to this bet and ultimate fate.
8. **Shehitah:** Kosher slaughter.
9. **Gestapo:** The secret police of Nazi Germany.
10. **Reichsmarks:** German currency from 1924 to 1948.
11. **Galicia:** A region currently split between Poland and Ukraine.
12. **Dibbukim** (plural of dibbuk): Evil spirit that possesses a person.
13. **Judenrat:** The Nazis forced the Jews to create administrative bodies in German-occupied territories. The members of these groups often received privileges unavailable to other Jews, but were eventually also going to be exterminated by the Nazis.
14. **Sodom:** A city renowned in the Bible for its wickedness.
15. **Mikveh:** Ritual bath. Learn more.
16. **Khasenes:** Weddings. Learn more.
17. **Brisen:** Plural for “Bris,” the circumcision ritual performed on all male Jewish infants.
18. **Pogrom:** A violent mob attack. The term is used to refer to attacks against Jews during the 19th and 20th centuries, most famously in Russia or in the Kristallnacht (night of glass) Pogrom in Germany in 1938.

19. **Yom Kippur:** One of the holiest days of the Jewish year, the Day of Atonement. It falls on the 10th day of the Jewish month of Tishrei. In 1942, it fell on September 21.
20. **Sukkot:** Begins on the 15th day of Tishrei, 5 days after Yom Kippur (September 26, 1942).
21. **Simchat Torah:** An annual holiday celebrating the completion of the annual cycle of reading the Torah, and immediately beginning the cycle anew. The holiday takes place on the 23rd day of the Jewish month of Tishrei.
22. **Parashat Lekh Lekha:** Parasha is the name for the weekly Torah portion. Lech Lecha is the 3rd Parasha in the book of Genesis, and tells the story of Abram leaving his homeland to go to Canaan, the Promised Land.
23. **Davening:** Praying.
24. **Kabbalat Shabbat:** Translates to “the receiving of the Sabbath,” the formal evening service on Friday nights.
25. **Shivah:** A seven-day period of mourning observed after the death of a family member.
26. **Shtiblech:** “Little House” (Yiddish), a name for a house of prayer.
27. **Hasidic:** A movement within Judaism founded in the late 18th Century.
28. **Rosh Hashanah:** The Jewish New Year, one of the holiest days in the calendar. Considered to be the Day of Judgment, when God decides who is fated to live and die in the coming year.
29. **Sefer Torah:** Torah scroll.
30. **Shul:** Synagogue (Yiddish).
31. **Lekha Dodi:** One of the central prayers of the Kabbalat Shabbat service, the title translates to “Come, my Beloved.” It was written in the 16th century by Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz, a Kabbalist (mystic).
32. **Roze de’shabbos:** Literally “the mystery of the Sabbath,” this is recited on Friday evenings by Sephardic and Hasidic communities.
33. **Zohar:** The most important text of Jewish mysticism.
34. **Shechinah:** Literally “dwelling” or “residence,” refers to the divine presence.
35. **Krechtz:** Gasp or grunt of pain (Yiddish).
36. **Tzenah Urenah:** A Yiddish version of the Torah and various other Biblical texts written in the 17th century. It includes many homilies and interpretive sections. It was intended for both genders, but was commonly read by women.
37. **Kiddush:** The blessing said over wine on the Sabbath and other holidays.

38. **Loshon Hakodesh:** “the holy tongue,” meaning Hebrew.
39. **Shalom Aleichem:** Literally “Peace onto you,” a song greeting the angels who accompany a person home on the Sabbath eve. Traditionally sung before Kiddush.
40. **Korban:** Sacrifice.
41. **Zemirot:** Songs sung at the table during or after Sabbath meals. Hear some here.
42. **Peyes:** Sidelocks traditionally worn by many Hasidic men.
43. **Agudah:** Agudat Yisrael was the main Orthodox anti-Zionist organization in Europe at this point. Applied strict interpretations of Torah to secular politics and social issues.
44. **Mizrahists:** An Orthodox Zionist movement founded in 1902. It’s motto was “the Land of Israel for the People of Israel according to the Torah of Israel” (YIVO).
45. **Shomer Hatzairniks:** Followers of the earliest Zionist Youth movement, HaShomer HaTzair. Had far-left, but not Communist leanings.
46. **Bundists:** A group that envisioned “the creation of a modern, secular and culturally autonomous Jewish society which would strive for the ideals of Socialism and for the rights of the Jewish working class.” (YIVO institute) Significantly, the Bundists represented a non-Zionist Jewish national movement. In Inter-war Poland it was more popular than the Zionists.
47. **Parashah:** The weekly Torah portion read every Sabbath.
48. **“The Lord said to Abram, Go thee from thy land...to the land which I will show thee”:** Genesis, 12:1.
49. **Suppose, the ram would not have been there as a substitute for Isaac:** A reference to the famous story of the Binding of Isaac in Genesis Chapter 22:1-19, in which God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. At the last moment, God provides a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in place of his child.
50. **Gematria:** A coding system that turns words into numeric values. Each letter in the Hebrew alphabet is given a value according to its place in the alphabet, and the letters in each word are summed to give the word its value. Gematria values are considered meaningful in several schools of thought, especially by Kabbalists (mystics). Learn more.
51. **Tehinot:** Devotional prayers recited by women. They were written in Yiddish for people unable to read Hebrew.
52. **Minyan:** A group of 10 adult Jews, required to recite certain prayers. (In pre-WWII Poland, the 10 adult Jews would have been required to be males).
53. **Kaddish:** Literally translates to “sanctification” (Hebrew). Kaddish is a prayer recited only when praying with a minyan. A specific version of the Kaddish is recited by mourners for a set period of time after the death of a relative.

54. **Havdalah:** Literally “separation” (Hebrew), a prayer said at the end of the Sabbath to make a distinction between the holy Sabbath and the mundane weekdays. Learn more.
55. **“lo yutzlach”:** Not a success (a failure).
56. **“talmid hokhom”:** Literally a “wise student,” (Hebrew) refers to a respected Torah scholar.
57. **Borer:** Literally, “choose,” “select,” or “clarify,” (Hebrew), an expert in rabbinic civil Halakah, who was brought into Jewish courts to serve as a judge/advocate.
58. **Sefarim:** Books.
59. **Armia Krajowa:** Translates to “Home Army,” (Polish), the Polish resistance army in WWII.
60. **Kenkarte:** The civilian identification card used by the 3rd Reich.
61. **Volkischer Beobachter:** The official newspaper of the Nazi party.
62. **Gan Eden:** The Garden of Eden, Paradise.
63. **Passage from Avodah Zarah 8b:** “the wicked Government of Rome issued a decree that he who ordains a rabbi shall be slain, likewise he who is ordained shall be put to death, the town in which an ordination takes place shall be destroyed, and the tehum in which the ordination is held shall be laid to waste. What did R. Judah b. Baba do? He went and sat down between two mountains and between two large towns between two tehums, namely, between Usha and Shefar’am and there he ordained five elders: R. Meir, R. Judah [b. Il’ai], R. Jose, R. Simeon, and R. Eleazar b. Shammua (R. Awia adds also R. Nehemiah). On seeing that they were detected by the enemies, he said to them, ‘Flee, my children!’ but they said to him, “And you, O Rabbi, what about you?’ ‘I,’ he replied, ‘will lie still before them, even as a stone that is not turned.’ It was stated that the Romans did not move from there until they drove three hundred iron spears into his body and made his corpse like a sieve!” (The Soncino Talmud, Trans. Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein)
64. **Kabbalah:** Literally “reception,” in this context the word refers to the transfer of the “Chain of tradition” of Jewish learning from generation to generation. In other contexts, Kabbalah refers to the range of esoteric/mystical Jewish activity.
65. **Charoses:** A sweet paste usually made of apples, nuts, wine, and cinnamon, eaten during the Passover Seder and placed on the ceremonial Seder plate in the center of the table.
66. **Maror:** The bitter herb (often, but not necessarily, horseradish) eaten during the Passover Seder and placed on the Seder plate.
67. **Passover Seder:** A ritual performed in the home on the first two nights of Passover.
68. **Goy:** non-Jew. Literally a Biblical Hebrew word meaning “nation.”

69. **Shtreiml:** Fur hat worn by some Hasidic Jews, especially on Shabbat and holidays.
70. **Misnagged:** Literally, “opponent,” (Hebrew). A term for non-Hasidic Jews.
71. **Heilige Tzadikim:** Holy saints. From “Heilig,” German for Holy, and “Tzadikim,” Hebrew for “righteous ones.”
72. **Khosen:** Groom.
73. **Purim:** A holiday celebrating the victory of the Jews in the Persian Empire over the evil Haman, who wished to exterminate them. One part of the celebration is dressing up in costume.
74. **Tefillin, Rabbenu Tam Tefillin, Rashi’s Tefillin:** Phylacteries, the small black boxes attached to leather straps worn by adults during weekday morning prayers. The obligation to wear Tefillin comes from a verse in Deuteronomy. Rabbenu Tam and Rashi were two early scholars who had slightly different interpretations of how the Tefillin should be put together, and so some people wore both types of Tefillin every day to be sure that they did not accidentally follow the commandment incorrectly.
75. **Yeshivah:** A school focused on advanced study of religious texts.
76. **Shkotzim:** plural for “shegetz,” non-Jew (Yiddish).
77. **Gendarmes:** The Russian Empire’s security police in the 19th and early 20th centuries.
78. **Line from Avot: ‘al deateyft’:** A line from the Mishna (part of the Talmud), attributed to Hillel (a major rabbi from the 1st Century BCE): “As you drowned others so have you been drowned, and those who drowned you will be drowned in turn.” (Avot 2:6) He is reported to have spoken this to a skull he saw floating in the water. (Ben Zion Wacholder’s use of the word “stolen” in this verse is unusual.)
79. **Midrashic:** Midrash is a version of Biblical exegesis focusing either on law or homilies. Involves careful, in-depth study of textual details.
80. **Jacob feared Esau, but he did not give up. He divided his camp into two groups. One goes hither and the other thither.** The reference is to Genesis, 32:7-9: “The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau he himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him.” Jacob was greatly frightened; in his anxiety, he divided the people with him, and the flocks and herd and camels, into two camps, thinking, “If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape.” (The Jewish Publication Society, *A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*).

Glossary to Chapter 2

1. **Judenrein:** “Cleansed of Jews,” (German). Nazi term for an area from which all the Jews had been liquidated.
2. **Levayah:** Funeral (Hebrew). (Before the war, Reb Rivele would have been mourned with a large funeral, but in occupied Poland this was impossible)
3. **Apikorsim:** Plural for Apikores (Greek), a word for someone who openly and purposefully contradicts the rules of the Torah.
4. **Hol Hamoed:** “Weekdays of the Festival” (Hebrew), refers to the intermediate days of Passover and Sukkot, on which the rules governing holidays are lightened and some work is permitted.
5. **Three souls that reside within every being:** There is a principle in the Zohar that the human soul is composed of three elements—the nefesh (animal instincts), the ruach (the moral aspect of the soul, which distinguishes between right and wrong), and the neshamah (the higher spirit that distinguishes humans from other animals, allows us to enjoy the afterlife, and allows us to recognize the existence and presence of God).
6. **Shalosh Seudot:** Yiddish for “The third meal,” The meal customarily eaten on Saturday afternoon, in order to fulfill the commandment to eat three meals every Sabbath.
7. **“Hadrat panim”:** “Majesty of countenance,” or “regal bearing.”
8. **Tikkunim:** Mystical prayers and ceremonies designed to have theurgical effect.
9. **Vilna Shas:** An edition of the Talmud printed in 1880 in Vilna (now Vilnius, Lithuania) in the late nineteenth century. It is still considered the standard edition of the Babylonian Talmud.
10. **Poskim:** Plural for Posek, a rabbi who is an authority on Jewish law. Also can refer, as it does here, to the volumes containing their writings.
11. **“Shanks” of sefarim:** Shelves of books
12. **Halakah:** Jewish law, including the written and oral Torah.
13. **Verfluchte Juden:** Damn Jews (German).
14. **Yeshiva at Baranowicze:** “Baranowicze was an important center of orthodoxy in Poland, largely on account of Rabbi Elhanan Wasserman (1875–1941), the dean of the Ohel Torah Yeshivah, which had an enrollment of more than 400 students. The Riga-born Rabbi Wasserman had studied in the Volozhin and Telz yeshivot and was influenced in particular by Rabbi Israel Meir Ha-Kohen of Radun (known as the Hafez Hayyim, 1838–1933), one of the greatest Orthodox thinkers of his age. Wasserman came to Baranowicze at the end of World War I, after stays in several communities. As an anti-Zionist he forbade his students to read newspapers other than those published by Agudat Israel.

Nor would he even allow them to participate in the Oneg Shabbat gatherings in the local synagogues, lest they be exposed to Zionist influences.”

15. **Isaiah Chapter 1: “The ox knows its master and the ass...”**: Isaish 1:3 “An ox knows its owner, an ass its master’s crib: Israel does not know, my people takes no thought.” (The Jewish Publication Society, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text).
16. **Apitropes**: Guardian (Greek).
17. **Shake more intensely**: A practice called shuckling, some Jews rock back and forth while praying as an expression of intensity.
18. **Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob, Leah and Rachel**: The patriarchs and matriarchs who were the founders of the Jewish faith. Their stories are told in the book of Genesis.
19. **Bereshit**: Literally, “In the beginning” (Hebrew). This is the first word of the Bible, and gives the first book of the Torah its name.
20. **Ibn Ezra**: An 11th Century Spanish commentator who wrote a commentary on the Bible. Learn more.
21. **Ramban (Nahmanides)**: A 12th century Spanish Rabbi who wrote a famous commentary on the Torah, among other works.
22. **Ralbag (Gersonides)**: A Medieval Jewish philosopher and Biblical commentator with a scientific, rationalist perspective.
23. **Seforno**: A 16th Century Italian Jewish commentator.
24. **Rambam (Maimonides)**: A 12th Century Rabbi who was born in Spain and lived in Egypt, the Rambam wrote some of the most important books of Jewish law and philosophy. He was also a respected doctor.
25. **Spinoza**: A 17th century Jewish Dutch philosopher. He believed that all of nature is one substance, and that God is this substance. He was excommunicated by the Jewish courts of his time, a verdict that still stands.
26. **Maimonides**: See Rambam.
27. **Tohu Va-vohu**: A reference to the first lines of Genesis: “When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void (tohu va-vohu), with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping the water—God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.” Tohu Va-vohu is the confusing emptiness that existed before God created the universe. (Translation from The Jewish Publication Society, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text).
28. **Metempsychosis**: Greek term for transmigration of the soul, or reincarnation.
29. **Zelem Elohim**: “The image of God” (Hebrew). According to the Torah, God created

human beings in God's own image. There are various philosophical consequences of being in "The Image of God," including the responsibility to behave in a way that lives up to this image.

30. **Neshome:** Soul.
31. **Ferworfene:** Related to the German *verwerfen*, to reject. Used here to mean "far-flung," "out of the way."
32. **Akshan:** One who is stubborn.
33. **Naddan:** Dowry.
34. **Marrano:** Term applied to Jews who were forced to convert to Catholicism under the Spanish Inquisition but continued practicing Judaism in secret (now considered an offensive term).
35. **Mumar:** A Jew who abandons the rules of the Torah, or converts to another religion.
36. **Meshumad:** "A Jewish person who, of his own free will, forsook Judaism and embraced another faith; in short, an apostate" (The New Jewish Encyclopedia, Ed. David Bridger, Berhman House, Inc., 1976, p. 317).
37. **Violate 610 of the commandments:** The Torah is said to have exactly 613 commandments.
38. **Feierberg's Whither:** A Hebrew novel published around 1900 that "dramatized the hopelessness of Jewish life in eastern Europe at the time, thus presaging Zionism." (The Shengold Jewish Encyclopedia, Ed. Mordecai Schreiber, Shengold Books, 1998, p. 84)
39. **Spinoza's Ethics:** Spinoza's controversial text in which he asserts that God, Nature, and the Universe are all the same, the ideas for which he was excommunicated.

Visit www.BenZionWacholder.org for more.

©2012 Shifra Goldenberg