

93 CHOOSE SUICIDE BEFORE NAZI SHAME

**Jewish Teacher and Students
in Warsaw School Foil Plan
to Force Prostitution**

LETTER DESCRIBES ORDEAL

**Women Provide Themselves
With Poison and Pray as They
Await Germans' Arrival**

11 August 1942

My dear friend Mr. Schenkalewsky in New York,

I do not know whether this letter will reach you. Do you know who I am? We met at the house of Mrs. Schenirer and later in Marienbad.⁷ When this letter will reach you, I will no longer be among the living. Together with me are ninety-two girls from Bais Yaakov. In a few hours all will be over. Regards to Mr. Rosenheim⁸ and to our friend Gutman,⁹ both in England. We all met in Warsaw at our friend Sholeman's, and Sholemsohn was also there. We learned that the land to which this letter goes has sent us bread.¹⁰ We had four rooms. On July 27th we were arrested and thrown into a dark room. We have only water. We learned David¹¹ by heart and took courage. We are girls between 14 and 22 years of age. The young ones are frightened. I am learning our mother Sarah's¹² Torah with them, [that] it is good to live for God but it is also good to die for Him. Yesterday and the day before we were given warm water to wash and we were told that German soldiers would visit us this evening. Yesterday we all swore to die. Today we were all taken out to a large apartment with four well-lit rooms and beautiful beds. The Germans don't know that this bath is our purification bath before death. Today everything was taken away from us and we were given nightgowns. We all have poison. When the soldiers will come we will take it. Today we are together and are learning the confession all day long. We are not afraid. Thank you my good friend for everything. We have one request. Say kaddish for us, your ninety three children. Soon we will be with mother Sarah.

Yours,

Chaya Feldman from Cracow¹³

תלמוד בבלי מסכת גיטין דף נז עמוד ב

אמר רב יהודה, אמר שמואל, ואיתימא רבי אמי, ואמרי לה במתניתא תנא, מעשה בארבע מאות ילדים וילדות שנשבו לקלון, הרגישו בעצמן למה הן מתבקשים, אמרו, אם אנו טובעים בים, אנו באין לחיי העולם הבא? דרש להן הגדול שבהם, "אמר ה' מבטן אשיב, אשיב ממצלות ים". "מבטן אשיב", מבין שני אריה אשיב. "ממצלות ים", אלו שטובעין בים. כיון ששמעו ילדות כן, קפצו כלן ונפלו לתוך הים. נשאו ילדים קל וחמר בעצמן, ואמרו, מה הללו שדרךן לכך - כן. אנו, שאין דרכנו לכך - על אחת כמה וכמה. אף הם קפצו לתוך הים. ועליהם הכתוב אומר, (שם מד) "כי עליך הרגנו כל היום, נחשבנו כצאן טבחה".

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel, or it may be R. Ammi, or as some say it was taught in a Baraita; On one occasion four hundred boys and girls were carried off for immoral purposes. They understood for what purpose they were wanted and said to themselves, If we drown ourselves in the sea we will we have a share the world to come? The eldest among them expounded the verse, The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring again from the depths of the sea. [I will bring again from Bashan,] from between the lions' teeth. [I will bring again from the depths of the sea,] refers to those who drown themselves in the sea. When the girls heard this they all leapt into the sea. The boys then made the following argument for themselves, saying, If these for whom this is a natural act – so (killed themselves) , we for whom it is unnatural act should certainly kill ourselves? They also leaped into the sea. Of them the text says, for Your sake we are killed all the day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. (Talmud Bavli Gitten 57b)

זכור אשר עשה צר בפנים.

Remember what the enemy (Titus) did inside

שלף חרבו ובה לפני ולפנים.

He drew his sword and went inside the holy of holies

נחלתנו בעת כטמא לחם הפנים.

He kicked aside our heritage when he defiled the showbread

וגדר פרכת בעלת שתי פנים:

And he pierced the curtain which was double sided.

יְתוּמִים גַּעַל בְּמַגֵּן מְאֻדָּם.

He caused disgust to *orphans* with his blood soaked shield

וַיִּמְדַּד קוֹ כְּמִרְאֵה אַדְמָדָם.

And he drew (measured) a line the color of *blood*

מִיַּמֵּינוּ דָּלַח וְהִשְׁכִּיר חֲצִיו מַדָּם.

Our water was sullied as his arrows were full of *blood*

כִּיֶּצֵא מִן הַבַּיִת וְחָרְבוּ מְלֶאֶה דָם:

When he left the house (Temple) his sword was full of *blood*

עַל הַגּוֹתוֹ הוֹוֹת גְּבַר. וְנִטָּה אֶל אֵל יָדוֹ לְמוֹלוֹ לְגִבֹר. מִצָּרִים וְכָל לֵאמֹר אֲשֶׁר בָּם עָבַר

(נִיֵּא אִם בָּם גְּבַר). וְאֲנִי (נִיֵּא אֲנִי) בְּתוֹךְ אוֹוִיו אֲרוֹץ אֵלָיו בְּצִוְאָר:

אֲבוֹתֵינוּ זָרָה כְּהַכְנִיסוֹ בְּחוּרָיו אֶכְלָה אֵשׁ.

Our forefathers brought in a strange fire they were swallowed by fire

וְזֶה צֶעֶה זֹנֶה (נִיֵּא זֹנֶה צוֹעָה) הַכְּנִיס וְלֹא נִכְוָה בְּאֵשׁ.

And this one strolled in with a *harlot* and was not burned by fire

עֲבָדִים חֲתוּ בְּתוֹכוֹ לְבַת אֵשׁ. וְעַל מָה בְּבֵית אֵשׁ מִמָּרוֹם שְׁלַח אֵשׁ:

בְּנַפְשֵׁנוּ טִבְעָנוּ כְּהוֹצִיא כָּלִי שָׂרָת.

By our souls we drowned when the *holy vessels* were removed

וְשָׂמָם בְּאֲנִי שֵׁיט בָּם לְהַשְׂרֵת (נִיֵּא לְהַשְׂרֵת).

They were placed on a *ship* there to be used

עוֹרְנוּ נִמְק כְּהַשְׂכִּים מִשָּׂרָת.

Our skin crawled when the server (Kohen) awoke

ולא מצא תשעים ושלושה כלי שרת:

And did not find the 93(holy) Temple utensils

נשים כשרו כי בא עריץ. בקרקע הבית נעליו החריץ. שרים לפתו כבוא (ני"א כבוא) פריץ.

בבית קדש הקדשים צחנתו השריץ:

And the holy of holies he sprayed with his filth (semen)

[בחורים מבחוץ צגו מחזקים. ותרו כי יזק בששים רבוא מזיקים. זקנים נבעתו

כהרשוהו משחקים (ני"א מחזקים). עשות רצונו והוא אסור בזקים:

שבת סוטן ויבא אדמון. ויסבב חומה ויעות המון. נפלה עברה על ניני פצל לח ולוז

וערמון. עד כי נטש מדוק ארמון:

על פתח הר הבית החל לבא. ביד ארבעה ראשי טפסריו להחריבו. על צד מערבי לזכר

השריד בו. וצג אחר כתלנו ולא רב ריבו:]

אתה קצפת והרשית לפנות.

You were angry and allowed an expulsion

ילדים אשר אין בהם כל מאום משם להפנות.

Children without any blemish from there were expelled

למה רגשו גוים ולא שעת אל המנחה פנות.

Why do the nations storm in, and you paid no attention to the mincha offering

ושלחום לארץ כוש (ני"א בארץ עוץ) בשלש ספינות:

They were sent to the land of Kush (or Utz¹) in three ships

השיבנו שועו כבאו בנבכי ים.

"bring us back" they pleaded, as they entered the depth of the sea

¹ Utz is mention in Megilat Eicha 4:21, as well as Iyov (Job) 1:1, the book which deal with suffering of the righteous.

וְשִׁתְּפוּ עִצְמוֹם יַחַד לַנְּפוֹל בַּיָּם.

And they joined (conspired) to *throw themselves into the sea*

שִׁיר וְתִשְׁבַּחוֹת שׁוֹרְרוּ כְּעַל יָם.

Song and *praise* they *sang* like upon the sea

כִּי עָלִיד הוֹרְגָנוּ בְּמַצּוֹלוֹת יָם:

For your sake we were killed in the depths of the sea

כִּי תִהוּמוֹת בָּאוּ עַד נַפְשָׁן.

For the water came and *took their lives*

כָּל זֹאת בְּאַתְּנוּ וְלֹא שָׁכַחְנוּדָּ חֵלוּ לְמַמְשָׁן.

“All of this happened to us and You we did not forget” – they began to murmur

תְּקוּתָם נְתָנוּ לְמִשִּׁיב מַבְשָׁן.

There hopes were given to return from the Bashan

וּבַת קוֹל נִשְׁמָעָה עוֹרָה לְמָה תִּישָׁן:

And a voice rang out from heaven “awaken why do you sleep”

מִשְׁנֵה מִסַּכַּת תְּמִיד פֶּרֶק ג' מִשְׁנֵה ד'

נִכְנָסוּ לְלִשְׁכַּת הַכִּלִּים וְהוֹצִיאוּ מִשֵּׁם תִּשְׁעִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה כִּלֵּי כֶסֶף וְכִלֵּי זָהָב

See Judith Tydor Baumel and Jacob J. Schacter, "The 93 Beth Jacob Girls of Cracow: History or Typology?," in *Reverence, Righteousness, and Rahamanut: Essays in Memory of Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung*, New York: Jason Aronson, 1992, pp. 93-130). I was first introduced to this topic by Professor Baumel The article can be accessed [here](#)