

DAVID ROSKIES

MASTER - REHEARSAL COPY

H I N E N I

Script by David G. Roskies

"After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him,  
"Abraham!" And he said, "Hineni -- here am I".

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance):

✕ Tema Katz	a teacher
Clerk	
<u>Narrator</u>	a physician now living in Tel-Aviv
✕ First Man	
First Woman	
<u>Zelig Kalmanovitch</u>	a scholar
✕ <u>Aba Kovner</u>	his wife. a partisan
<u>Itsik Vittenberg</u>	Commander of the partisans
✕ Dina	his wife
✕ Joseph	a partisan
Second Man	
<u>Yakov Gens</u>	Chief of the Jewish Police
✕ <u>Teo</u>	his mistress

PLACE: The Ghetto of Vilna, Poland.

TIME: June 1941 - July 1943.

Lights come slowly up on Narrator, sitting at a desk. First Man is sitting - barefoot - in the dark. First Woman is crouching in the dark. Second Man is kneeling in the dark.

✓ NARRATOR: It is night. Thoughts are disquieting and memories astir. Like my grandfathers before me, I rise at midnight to weep for the Destruction. It is the ancient ceremony of nocturnal reverie in a new form and with a new content. I recall verses from Jeremiah who wandered over the graves of my forebears, those verses which my father and grandfathers used to chant, and my mind goes back to the graves of only yesterday. I hear voices from the Beyond, asking me: "We are gone but you are alive. How did you manage to survive?"

TEMA KATZ: (Voice offstage) Late Saturday evening we went out into the ghetto  
x and ~~we~~ barely made it to the courtyard of Strashuna 14. The courtyard was full of people. It was raining and everyone sought cover for himself, for his children and near ones. I, my husband, son and two daughters went into a cellar and cuddling up one against another, we fell asleep. (Enter Tema Katz) When I heard that there was a large commotion in the courtyard, we went out and saw that everyone was preparing himself for a journey.

NARRATOR: The hour of confession. I burn to tell everything, to open my heart. But there is no one to whom I can pray. I would like to do penance for the sin of survival, of having returned to life. *omit*  
Now I understand those who used to go to the saintly Baal Shem Tov, and following him to the mountains, implore: "Master, tell us how to do penance. How can we quiet our souls?"

TEMA KATZ: We collected our belongings and started moving along the road.  
x Then we <sup>saw</sup> ~~see~~ that <sup>we</sup> ~~we~~ were being driven back into the city. The whole length of the street groups of Jews were plodding along, accompanied by soldiers. On the street there were signs of some horrible ruin. Scattered, torn bundles and valises obstructed the normal passage through the street. The middle of the street was full of linen, laundry, shoes, remainders of abandoned or stolen belongings. Incomprehensible to us were the solitary figures that we saw hidden  
x in the gates, or sitting on a bundle, isolated from <sup>every</sup> ~~anyone~~. They looked at us with fear in their eyes, and as if undecided, they did not understand whether they should be jealous of us or of themselves. Some things they already understood and some things they did not know yet. Nevertheless they decided to keep at a distance.

✓ NARRATOR: Not a friend remains. They are resting on the slopes of Ponar, in the unmarked fields of Germany. I have only my conscience left to commune with. I plead with my conscience. I am at the same time judge and defendant, prosecutor and accused.

I am cleft in twain: I live in the present, my conscience in the past. (Stands up, goes to window)

TEMA KATZ: At Lukishki they separated us, my husband and son on the side of the men, I and my two daughters remained among the women. The courtyard was already filled with thousands upon thousands of Jews, who had been brought from the neighbouring regions.

X What ~~would~~<sup>would</sup> they do with us here? No one dared think other than that - sooner or later we would return to the ghetto.

We spent two nights under the clear sky. On the third day they led us, barely alive, into a chamber. Only here, in the locked prison chamber, did we find out that the groups that were led out of here ~~was~~<sup>were</sup> brought to Ponar. Nevertheless, we didn't dare think that so many people were being sent to their execution.

We remained there in this manner until 2:00 a.m. on Thursday. Suddenly the prison yard was illuminated by strong projectors. X ~~They~~<sup>we</sup> ~~started~~<sup>were</sup> pushing and loading us onto trucks. In every truck there were several armed Lithuanians and 50-60 people. We jostled along, hurrying in the direction of Ponar.

✓ NARRATOR: How did I manage to survive when millions perished? I don't know. I myself cannot understand it. My thoughts drive me mad. I ~~seem~~  
X ~~to feel everyone's eyes riveted on me with the question: - Why have you survived?~~

TEMA KATZ: Friday at 6:00 a.m. we passed through a woody<sup>ed</sup> hilly district. Frightened and exhausted, we were unloaded in a sandy area among the hills, as if we were on an outing. Even now, no one's imagination was ripe enough to understand our sad reality. We heard gunfire not far away. Germans gave the orders and the Lithuanians carried them out. The Lithuanians started arranging groups of ten.

They were led away to the hills, shots were heard and another group of ten was taken.

Suddenly, as if by an electric current, the real situation became clear. Women began to plead with the Lithuanians, by giving away watches, by getting undressed; some fell to their feet and began kissing the boots of the Lithuanian soldiers. Women began to tear their hair from their heads, to rip off their clothes--to no avail. The Lithuanians took everything away, they teased and joked and with blows they drove them to the execution. Around 12 noon, when everyone was convinced that his fate was sealed and that no one  
X would leave here alive, then came the change: as soon as the <sup>turn</sup>  
X arrived, they got into line quietly and ~~resigned~~, without protest  
X or pleas, and they set out in families on the last road.

omit  
NARRATOR: I seek the answer for myself. It was a combination of circumstances in which there was nothing striking or unusual. A mere succession of accidents. I always believed that I would live, that I would survive. But then all those who were led to the Ponar mountains refused, deep in their hearts, to believe that this was their last trip. And I saw death many times in the ghetto and in the concentration camps; I looked into its eyes so often. Yet always the way out would come suddenly, as if by a miracle. Always a fellow sufferer would appear to help out in a dangerous situation, by giving a hand, by offering advice, by saying a kind word; in days of hunger, by sharing a few potatoes and a spoonful of soup; in sickness, by bringing a piece of ice for my head.

TEMA KATZ: People who could not stand the tension fell into groups of ten voluntarily. I myself decided to wait--I ~~have~~ had time. Perhaps a miracle...perhaps. And I myself didn't even know what "perhaps" I was still waiting for.

The place became sparser. Some people, in their insanity, dragged their faces through the sand; some sat quietly, as if nothing were happening. I, petrified between my children, oriented myself to be among the last.

My turn came at 5:30 in the evening. I set out with my daughters. On the way between the hills we met more groups who, like us, were waiting for their fate. We were placed in a line and I ~~only~~ felt ~~how~~ my oldest daughter's hand was slipping out of mine...

NARRATOR: I waited for death, many times, in the garrets and in the hiding places, during the early days of the Vilna ghetto, in 1941, when the gunmen of the Gestapo were already knocking at our hideout. One more knock and we would have been discovered--but we were not discovered.

I expected death in the summer of 1944, in the Goldfilz camp as we marched for "selection," and the chief physician of the camp looked deep into my eyes and declared: "You are too old," and pushed me toward the left side, ~~for~~ death--  
x but the SS Leader of the camp said, "He hasn't any gray hair  
y yet," and pushed me back toward the right side, ~~for~~ life....

NARRATOR: I awaited death in January 1945, in the hospital of a camp in Southern Germany, where I lay suffering from general blood poisoning and a broken arm caused by the blows of a labor superintendent. Near me lay the intellectual leaders of Vilna Jewry, whose lives went out like candles one by one. Of the twenty Jewish physicians in Vilna who were my school-mates, only four remained in the camp, and each one wondered when his turn would come....But my turn failed to come.

I waited for ~~it~~<sup>death</sup> in April 1945, during our camp uprising, on the road to Dachau, when SS bullets pursued those who fled into the forests, and stricken comrades fell by the wayside, in the last hour before liberation--but the bullets did not strike everyone.

TEMA KATZ: When I came to, I felt pressed in, that people were walking on me, that I was wet and covered with some kind of acid.

I understood that I was lying in a pit among corpses. I realized that this was a communal grave, that I was wet from human blood, that I was alive but wounded. And although it was already late in the evening, a young boy was spraying us with lime, was searching and inspecting. I lay there holding my breath. Lying there I listened to every sound and movement. Sighs and quiet moans could still be heard in the grave.

I felt a pain in my thigh and realized that I had fallen wounded into the pit. I could no longer see my two children. Anyway, I didn't even look for them. Late at night I felt that someone was dragging himself through the corpses. It turned out that a woman was looking for a way to get out of the grave. Both of us dragged ourselves to a barbed wire fence and from there to the gate. Even here there was no one. The gate was tied with a piece of wire, which was easily removed. From the field to the road and from the road to the neighboring forest. ~~Here~~ we made bandages out of our shirts, wrapped our wounds and decided not to move until the morning. As soon as it became light, we managed somehow to clean off some of the blood and lime and ~~we~~ carefully set out for the nearest village Novosolsk, six kilometers from the forest. Here in the home of a peasant, we got washed and cleaned and we ate. Later, another peasant led us to Sork-Tatar where we remained from Saturday until Monday. On Monday I returned alone to Vilna and went back to the ghetto.

NARRATOR: And that is how I survived. Then how am I to blame?

✓ VOICE: But if you are too cowardly, to be able to tell the whole truth of how you survived, or if you are still too blind to be able to see everything that happened, and if you are still concealing something from me, your own conscience, I shall come to you in the quiet nights, awakening you from your sleep, searching you, demanding and asking, and I shall pursue you through life even as Saul's evil spirit pursued him....

✓ NARRATOR: As the prophet, Jonah, could not escape his mission, even so I cannot escape the questions which pursue me.

Like Khoni ha-Maagal who, according to the Talmudic story, slept for 70 years and on awakening, walked around in a strange world, so do I walk around now as if I did not belong to the life around me. Outwardly I am here, but my thoughts are with those who are no longer here.

[ Enter Clerk; Exit Tema, first lighting a candle ]

entrs K. + wife

x CLERK: For months Tema Katz tried desperately to get working papers in the ghetto-- without success. She did not want to return to Ponar and fought with her last remaining energy, dragging herself from bunker to bunker. In 1943 she was deported to Estonia where she perished. [ Exit Clerk ]

NARRATOR: When the Germans came, they were like the lava of a volcano that floods everything. We were trampled underfoot, humiliated and shamed, without honour, without weapons, not knowing what was going on in the world around us. And our neighbors, the Poles and the Lithuanians, with but a few exceptions, showed fiendish joy at our misfortune, jeering and laughing as they saw us go into the ghettos, robbing our houses; and submissiveness reigned all around us.

On the third day of the Vilna ghetto when we called a meeting of the comrades of our Movement, we thought that the clandestine nature of our activities made it a resistance movement.

And when during the days of sorrow in the ghetto we came to the despondent and discouraged Jews with a vision of a dignified Jewish existence, in a national home of freedom and labor, and with a vision of a free world, a world of justice and equality and human brotherhood-- and when we appealed for courage and endurance and preached contempt for the enemy-- we thought we were doing resistance work.

x And when other groups arose in the ghetto and when all of them together helped to build up a Jewish school system, a theater, a choir, an orchestra, and carried on cultural activities with lectures and literary symposia, at a time when every vestige of cultural activity among the non-Jews had died, we felt proud of it and we thought that that, too, was resistance.

NARRATOR: For there were poems:

FIRST MAN: (Sitting barefoot on stage.)

A CARTLOAD OF SHOES

The wheels hurry onward, onward,  
What do they carry?  
They carry a cartload  
x Of ~~clattering~~ <sup>clattering</sup> shoes.

The wagon like a canopy  
In the evening light;  
The shoes-- clustered  
Like people in a dance.

A wedding, a holiday?  
x Has something ~~dazzled~~ <sup>blinded</sup> my eyes?  
The shoes-- ~~so familiar~~ <sup>so familiar</sup>  
I ~~recognize~~ <sup>seem to</sup> them ~~again~~.  
^

The heels go tapping!  
With a clatter and a din,  
From our old Vilna streets  
They drive us to Berlin.

I should not ask  
But something tears at my ~~heart~~ <sup>tongue</sup>:  
Oh ~~tell me~~ shoes, the truth,  
Where are they, the feet?

The feet from those boots  
With buttons like dew--  
And here, where is the body  
And there, where is the bride?

~~In those tiny shoes  
Why don't I see a child?  
Why does not the bride  
Put on her wedding shoes?~~

~~Thru the slippers & the boots  
Among this heap of shoes~~  
I recognize those my mother  
used to wear.  
She kept them ~~only~~ <sup>the Sabbath</sup> for ~~Shabbos~~  
Her favorite pair.

And the heels go tapping:  
With a clatter and a din,  
From our old Vilna streets  
They drive us to Berlin.

A vogn shikh voice)

Di reder yogn, yogn,  
Vos brengen zey mit zikh?  
Zey brengen mir a vogn,  
Mit tsaplendike shikh.

Der vogn vi a klupe  
In ovntdikn glants;  
Di shikh-- a fule kupe  
Vi mentshn in a tants.

A khasene, a yontev?  
Tsi hot mikh ver farblendt?  
Di shikh-- azoyne nonte  
Oyf s'nay ikh hob derkent.

Es klapn di opstasn:  
Vuhin, vuhin, vuhin?  
Fun alte vilner gasn  
Me tratbt undz keyn berlin.

Ikh darf nit fregn vemes,  
Nor s'tut in harts a ris:  
O, zogt mir, shikh, dem emes,  
Vu zaynen zey, di fis?

Di fis fun yene tufl  
Mit kneplelekh vi toy--  
Un do, vu iz dos gufl,  
Un dort, vu iz di froy?

In kindershikh in ale  
Vos ze ikh nit keyn kind?  
Vos tut nit on di kale  
Di shikhelekh atsind?

Durkh kinderhikh un shkrabes--  
Kh'derken mayn mames shikh!  
Zi flegt zey bloyz oyf shabes  
Aroyftsi- en oyf zikh.

Un s'klapn di opstasn:  
Vuhin, vuhin, vuhin?  
Fun alte vilner gasn  
Me traybt undz keyn berlin.

Where is the child  
To fit those shoes?  
Why has the bride  
Gone barefoot?



NARRATOR: And there were songs  
FIRST WOMAN: Unter dayne vayse shtern

move into position

Unter dayne vayse shtern  
Shtrek tsu mir dayn vayse hant,  
Mayne verter zaynen tremn,  
Viln ruen in dayn hant.  
Ze, es tunklt zeyer finkl  
In mayn kelerdikn blik,  
Un ikh hob gornisht keyn vinkl,  
Zey tsu shenken dir tsurik.

Un ikh vil dokh, got mayn trayer,  
Dir fartroyen mayn farmeg,  
In mayn hartsn brent a fayer  
Un in fayer mayne teg.  
Iber kelern, in lekher  
Veynt di merderishe ru,  
Loyf ikh hekher, iber dekher  
Un ikh zukh-vu bistu vu? *enter*

Nemen yogn mikh meshune  
Trep un heyfn mit gevoy,  
Heng ikh a geplatste strune  
Un ikh zing tsu dir azoy:  
Unter dayne vayse shtern     Shtrek tsu mir <sup>dayn</sup> vayse hant,  
Mayne verter zaynen tremn,  
Viln ruen in dayn hant.

NARRATOR: There was Zelig Kalmanovitch, the writer, scholar and linguist who turned sixty in the first year of the war. (Enter Kalmanovitch; he goes to ~~the~~ podium.) (Kalmanovitch prepares to speak.....)

x And there was the poet Aba Kovner who was hiding in a nunnery and came to a meeting in the ghetto on New Year's Day with a proclamation. (Enter Kovner, who goes to a lectern.)

KALMAN: Our song and our dance are a form of worship.

KOVNER: We will not go to the slaughter like sheep!

KALMAN: Our rejoicing is due to Him who decrees life and death.

KOVNER: Jewish youth, do not believe the false promises of the assassins or believe the words of the traitors. Of the eighty thousand  
x Jews in <sup>the</sup> Jerusalem of Lithuania only twenty thousand remain.  
Before our very eyes our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers and sons were taken away.

KALMAN: Here in the midst of this small congregation, in the poor and ruined synagogue, we are united with the whole house of Israel, not only with those who are here today and with the tens of thousands of the pure and saintly who have passed on to life eternal, but with all the generations in which life was worthwhile.

KOVNER: Where are the hundreds of men - who were deported for work? Where are the women and children who were deported on Yom Kippur? And where are our brothers from the second ghetto?

KALMAN: We feel that with our song today we sanctify the name of heaven just as our ancestors did.

KOVNER: X Anyone who passes through ~~the~~ the ghetto gate will go to Ponar! And Ponar means death!

KALMAN: And I, a straying Jewish soul, feel that my roots are here. And you in your rejoicing, atone for the aims of a generation that is perishing.

KOVNER: Jews, we have nothing to lose. Death will overtake us in any event. And ~~who~~ who can still believe in survival when the ~~murderer exterminates us~~ <sup>murderer</sup> with so much determination?

KALMAN: I know that the Jewish people will live, for it is written: "As the days of the heaven upon the earth."

KOVNER: The hand of the executioner will reach every man and woman. Flight and acts of cowardice will not save our lives.

KALMAN: And even if it were the last generation, we should give thanks and say; "Enough for us that we are privileged to be the children of those!"

KOVNER: Active resistance alone can save our lives and our honor. Brothers! It is better to die in battle in the ghetto than to be carried away to Ponar like sheep. True, we are weak and ~~without assistance~~ <sup>help</sup>, but our only answer to the enemy-- is resistance!  
(Kovner and Kalmanovitch remain standing in the dark.)

NARRATOR: At that time we also thought that every rescued Jew, every hiding place built up and every passport made to deceive the enemy, was an act of resistance.

Only later did we realize that all these things were merely aspects of the larger whole, and that the main part of the resistance consisted in taking up arms even when there was no chance of victory.

And so the Partisan Movement came into being. (~~Enter Vittenberg, Dina.~~)

On January 23, 1942, at a meeting of representatives in a secret attic in Rudnitska 6 in the Vilna ghetto, the cornerstone was laid.

At the meeting a staff of three was chosen: Itsik Vittenberg (~~enter V~~) commander; <sup>enter</sup> Aba Kovner and Josef Glasman. (~~enter J.~~)

The aim of the United Partisan Organization, the U.P. O., was to prepare armed resistance in the ghetto in order to defend the honor and the lives of the remaining Jewish population.

NARRATOR: They were also to sabotage German factories and enterprises, and to establish contact with the partisan movement in the forest.

(Partisan Headquarters) (Enter Dina)

VITTEN: Hope is what I want to save. A living person hopes. I want the ghetto to come out in armed resistance. I do not want any man, woman, or child to feel that he is perishing. When you fight for your life, you're alive ...and when you're alive there is always the possibility of escaping death. And do you know something else? No one will punish the Germans, if not us. No one's punishment will hurt them as much as ours. That's what I want...understood?

DINA: I want us to live.

VITTEN: That's precisely why you should want to fight.

DINA: Do the Germans want to ~~liquidate~~ <sup>destroy</sup> the ghetto?

VITTEN: Kozlovsky broke down <sup>under</sup> during the interrogation. He gave us away. Now the Germans have set a condition.

DINA: That the UPO should give itself up?

VITTEN: Less than that.

DINA: The leadership?

VITTEN: Not even that. They demand only the commander.

DINA: ITZIK!

VITTEN: Control yourself. We don't have much time.

DINA: I don't understand.

VITTEN: Did you ever play with a kite? I was a kite: I still am one... but I have a strong rope and when necessary, it pulls me back to earth... I always carried a yoke on my back. First my parents', later my own, then humanity, the working class, the party and now...the ghetto. You know, it's only here in the UPO that my responsibilities have ceased being a burden. My inner life and outer life have become one. My dreams of the past and my dreams of the future have met here...in my acts. Everything has become clear and comprehensible.

(Enter Joseph; Kovner joins him.)

JOSEPH: We decided long ago that the UPO would begin the resistance only when the entire ghetto is in danger of extinction. A premature encounter could mean the end of the UPO. The Jews would consider us provocateurs. Thus we have only one question to ask ourselves: is the existence of the entire ghetto in danger, is our appearance premature?

KOVNER: Premature? We may even be <sup>too</sup> late.

VITTEN: Are we approaching the liquidation of the ghetto or not? That's what we must answer, comrades.

DINA: <sup>x</sup> Let us first decide whether the UPO <sup>itself</sup> is in danger of liquidation. I think that point has come. If we give in to the Germans...if we give up our commander...

JOSEPH: You're right. We mustn't let the thought enter our minds. It means liquidating ourselves.

VITTEN: Why? The commander has a replacement. The headquarters can continue its work.

KOVNER: What? Are you testing us, ~~comrade~~ commander?

VITTEN: I'm not interested in testing anyone. We swore to forget personal affiliations, did we not?

DINA: <sup>y</sup> Do you think they will be satisfied with the commander? If we give him up, we give up the ghetto. Listen to me. They want to ~~liquidate~~ us first, so as to make the total liquidation easier.

JOSEPH: <sup>y</sup> Then we must fight. We can't wait any longer. There are only twenty thousand Jews left in the ghetto.

DINA: If we begin our resistance tonight, then the entire ghetto will be wiped out immediately. How can we explain it to them in one night? How do we win them over? Over ninety percent of them don't even know about our existence. How do we open their eyes?

(They freeze.)

FIRST WOMAN: All right. Tell me, how many human beings do we have in the ghetto? Maybe one in a thousand.

FIRST MAN: God said: I create the world out of nothing. Comes man and turns the world into nothing. So what's the logic behind it?

SECOND MAN: I envy them, my wife and children. They're sleeping in Ponar. It's been seventy days already; they're on summer vacations, you understand. Birds chirp for them; a mild, refreshing wind blows...there are no working papers, no certificates. There is no fear. Everything, praise God, is over for them. Now there's only peace and quiet.

FIRST MAN: Honor. I prefer a Jew without a beard to a beard without a Jew. Life is the important thing. You don't go crawling under the murderer's fingertips.

FIRST WOMAN: As long as we live there is an alternative.

(They come to life again.)

KOVNER: There's nothing we can do about it. Even if we had more time, we still couldn't accomplish very much. We'll order them to hide in their bunkers.

DINA: What do you mean we'll order them? They will all perish without even knowing why. On the contrary, they'll blame us, and not the Germans.

KOVNER: The ghetto is condemned anyway. It refuses to see the truth and it never will. That's our justification.

JOSEPH: I don't know whether we have the right.

KOVNER: And did the entire ghetto of Warsaw participate in the resistance? Wasn't it almost completely liquidated first? Who carried through the uprising? A tiny group of Jews. Thanks to them Warsaw perished with an uplifted head. We must attempt the same thing here in Vilna.

JOSEPH: And what about our own partisans? Our fighters are also ghetto Jews. Are they prepared for what is to come?

VITTEN: We musn't think in those terms, Joseph. Our idea seems foreign to the masses because it is perhaps foreign to all of human nature. No one wants to give up his individual fight for life and accept his fate. It takes a long time for a man to act against his nature. Sometimes, though, it will take only an instant. I suggest that we order a total mobilization of all fighter units. We actually haven't decided anything yet, but these are exceptional circumstances. Now is the time to decide. If today we eliminate the commander, tomorrow headquarters will go, the day after tomorrow the fighters and finally the entire ghetto. Demanding the commander is but the first step toward total annihilation. If we give in to the Germans // \* them one and one half years of suffering, sacrifices, ~~of~~ and collecting arms / have become meaningless. We are the only ones who have conquered our fear of the Germans. The Germans want to annihilate us so that the masses will be \* alone in ~~the~~ <sup>their</sup> final moment. What will they be able to accomplish then? That's why we must act on their behalf. It's hard to say whether we can do it against their will. \* Do we have the right to endanger the days or perhaps months, that remain for them to live? There is no answer to that. I can only express my own feelings...I feel, that we can.

(They remain standing in the dark. Exit Dina.)

NARRATOR: ~~February~~ 1943.

Two weeks before, another five thousand Jews were shot in Ponar. The stability of the ghetto turned out to be illusory. Reports about the other ghettos had not been received for quite some time. Everyone in the ghetto knew: The days of the final liquidation were approaching.

And in the same, because... the last order of liquidation

And in the ghetto, Passover seders were being prepared everywhere, as if nothing were in the air. Thousands felt it but did not utter the words: the last seder of their lives.

The windows were covered with black drapes. The men brought their children, but some children came without their parents. The women were seated on benches around the room. Each person had a few matsos that the ghetto cooperative had distributed, and a few boiled potatoes.

Several candles, smuggled in from outside the ghetto, were stuck into bottles.

(NARRATOR lights two candles.)

Woman after woman said the blessing over them. A torn Haggada, found in a ghetto ruin, lay on the table. One man recited and the others repeated after him. The smallest child in the room asked the Four Questions and many eyes followed his every movement. One man got up and said.

SECOND MAN: We invite to the seder the souls of all those who are missing, the souls of those who have been deported and have disappeared forever. Come to our seder! Kol dikhfin yeysey veyeykhul--let all who hunger come and eat.

NARRATOR: The moon sparkled over the ghetto. The ghetto streets were dreaming a magic dream. Window after window in every house and every room--the entire ghetto was conducting a seder.

SECOND MAN: Khayov odom liros es atsmoy--keilu hu yotso mimitsrayim. It is a man's duty to think of himself-- As one of those who came out of Egypt.

NARRATOR: Zelig Kalmanovitch, dressed in a white kittel, got up from the table to make a speech.

KALMAN: A year ago some circles of the intelligentsia in the ghetto sought an answer to the question: what is a Jew and who is a Jew? Everybody was tremendously preoccupied with this question. Formerly the majority of these people had never given much thought to this question. They felt they were Jews. Some more so, others less. Some, perhaps, did not feel so at all. And if someone suffered because of his Jewishness he somehow found a remedy for it and, in general, occupied himself with other more practical affairs, rather than speculate about such an "abstract" matter. Now these various people were driven together and locked up in the narrow confines of the ghetto. People of different languages, different cultures, different interests and beliefs were gathered and placed under one label: Jews. Confined as punishment: that is, they committed a crime and the crime consisted in being a Jew. Many of them actually did not know what to say about the "crime." They did not

know what it means "to be a Jew." To be truthful, practically nothing resulted from all these speculations and reflections.

But even in this case I obtained an answer to the question, "who is a Jew?" from a child in the ghetto. A teacher of religion in the ghetto school told me the following story of his experiences. In the school are children who were total strangers to Jews, who had never heard either in their homes, or in school, or in the street anything of the Jewish past, of Jewishness. Now in the ghetto many of these children listen eagerly to the stories of the old sacred history, of the Bible. One such child, who had previously attended a Polish school and had spoken Polish at home, studied with great interest the stories of the Bible. When, in the weekly portion of Toldot, they studied the story of Jacob and Esau, this child suddenly called out: "Teacher, we are the descendants of Jacob and they the descendants of Esau." I reflected on this story and discovered that I could deduce from it a method for determining who is a Jew. It is as follows: The fantasy of the individual is free, no walls can confine it. A person in the ghetto can therefore on occasion imagine that he is given a choice: he can divest himself of his Jewish inferior and beaten "I" and assume the "I" of the master of the ghetto. Now I ask: What would he do? Would he want to change? Would he desire to take on the image of the master? If he does we may assume that he is not a Jew. But if by his free choice he wishes to remain a Jew, then he is a Jew. Continuing to reflect: the Jewish child instinctively chose to be a Jew. ~~He~~ feels naturally at home among Jews. In the case of the adult, whom I imagine choosing freely to be a Jew, is instinct a sufficient ground in his case? Or can there be rational motives also?

I believe there can. To be a Jew means in every instance to be in an exalted position. The temporary suffering and blows that descend upon the Jew have a meaning, are not merely oppressions, and do not degrade the Jew. For a Jew is a part of the sacred triad: Israel, the Torah and the Holy One, Blessed be He. This sacred triad runs through the whole course of history. It is a reality that has been proved countless times. Our grandfathers clung to the triad, lived by its strength. And now too: the Jew who does not cling to this triad is to be pitied. He wanders in a world of chaos, he suffers and finds no rationale for his suffering. But the Jew who clings to the sacred triad need not be pitied. He is in a secure association. To be sure, this is a stormy period in history. A war is being waged against the Jew. But this war is not merely directed against one link in the triad but against the entire one:

against the Torah and God, against the moral law and the creator of the universe. Can anyone still doubt which side is the stronger? In a war it happens that one regiment is beaten, taken captive. Let the Jews in the ghetto consider themselves as such prisoners of war. But let them also remember that the army as a whole is not and cannot be beaten. The Passover of Egypt is a symbol of an ancient victory of the sacred triad. My wish is that all of us should live to see the Passover of the future.

(Enter CLERK, GENS, TEO.)

CLERK: Zelig Kalmanovitch, the Prophet of the Ghetto, never reached the Promised Land. During the deportations to Estonia, Kalmanovitch left his house, went over to the distracted Yakov Gens, Chief of the Jewish Police, and asked him:

KALM: Herr Commandant, shall I go?

CLERK: And he walked off voluntarily to the gates.

(KALMANOVITCH lights a candle, then exits.)

(Exit CLERK.)

NARRATOR: Gens himself (was a sturdily built man of thirty-eight. He) always carried a revolver in his belt.

(Lights up on TEO.)

M GENS: Stay a little longer.

TEO: Why, is there a celebration tonight?

GENS: There will be one, I hope. They informed me that they were coming. They'll arrive in a few minutes. He will sit here...right opposite me.

TEO: You'll be able to look each other straight in the eyes.

GENS: Do you think I'm afraid to look him straight in the eye? You're mistaken, my sparrow.

f TEO: The lion of the ghetto. He'll <sup>rip</sup> ~~tear~~ out little <sup>Police</sup> ~~Ghetto~~ Commandant to pieces with his sharp teeth.

GENS: How do you know? Maybe I'm the lion.

TEO: Then why haven't you escaped from the ghetto?

GENS: You know as well as I do that I could have had a pleasant life on the Aryan side. You know that I gave up a wife, broke up a home and came here. Because I am a military man and the battlefield is here. I haven't come here to fight for my own life, but rather to fight for my people, my brothers. It is a filthy, <sup>h</sup>degrading kind of battle that I wage here in the ghetto. M; conscience has brought me



GENS (CONT.) here and forced me to remain.

TEO: The conscience of a German.

GENS: I am not a German. I am tormented by the evil that I do.

TEO: You came here to do evil and to suffer by the evil that you do?

GENS: Yes. That's the price for the good that I accomplish. For the higher goal.

TEO: How high is your goal?

GENS: My goal is the people.

TEO: You are their hangman. Didn't you know that? You--are--a--hangman.

GENS: Shut up!

TEO: Please forgive me. I mean the Angel of Lithuanian Jerusalem. The white Messiah of the Jewish people. (There is a knock at the door.)

GENS: Have they arrived? Let them in.

(Enter Vittenburg, accompanied by Joseph, Dina, and Kovner. Viteenbung sits down opposite Gens.)

GENS: I wanted to speak to you as one military man to another.

VITT: I am not a military man. I am a fighter.

GENS: That's very touching. (Turns to others.) The Germans want him. (pointing to Vitt.) Before the evening is out he must be given up alive to the Gestapo.

JOSEPH: And if not?

GENS: If not, the ghetto will be liquidated. Twenty thousand lives on your conscience, Will you be able to stomach that?

KOVNER: We'll come to you for lessons on how to stomach it.

GENS: Let's discuss this. I want to lay my cards on the table, do you understand? You've decided not to give him up? You decided to fight, no? (Silence.) Why don't you answer? I'm not your enemy. ~~I swear it. I'm one of your flesh and blood.~~ (Thinking.) Battle...how many times have I considered it? In the frightening nights before an "action," when I pace the room like a condemned man, with the German order in my hand, a voice inside me pleads: Tear it up. Tear up the order. Prepare for armed resistance. The mind begins calculating strategic

GENS (cont.)

plans, preparing defenses, organizing the battle. I see myself as the head of the ghetto masses. But then my prudence interferes and says: No, you cannot allow yourself the luxury of fighting a lost battle... You think you know me. You see in me a blood-thirsty devil. I don't care. You can think what you like. In spite of you I will carry out my duty to history. I am here to save lives. To protect anything I can, so that at least a remnant will remain of our Jewish Vilna.

VITT: Who knows if Yakov Gens will be able to save his own courageous head?

GENS: Do you dare speak that way to me? What have you done for the ghetto in all these years? Maybe you're the one who built it and supplied it? Maybe you're the one who risked his neck to get kitchens and workshops set up? Do you realize where we would be today without them? And who built the schools for the children? Who brought them a little happiness? And is that all? Who built the theaters--yes, theatres? And who encouraged the writers, and even went as far as to pay them honorariums? Who accomplished all this? Was it you?

VITT: No, not I. Nor did I stand at the gate and count heads. I did not carry out the selections. I did not beat any children, nor did I reveal any underground bunkers or shoot any bread smugglers. I did not drug the people with the empty hope that perhaps something would be saved in the end. I did not become a servant to the Germans. I did not help them in any part of their work of extermination. I did not destroy the Jewish pride. (colder)

GENS: And I will carry the responsibility for that. I am not afraid. If there is a God, he will perceive my true feelings and will judge me right, and if the men of the coming generations will condemn me, let them. (Pause)

~~I don't care.~~ History will absolve me sooner or later. ...It's true that I lead Jews to their death, but I also save them from death. I order that bunkers be demolished and children beaten at the gates, and at the same time I protect tens of other bunkers, and I pretend not to see when hundreds are smuggling through the gates. The Germans come to me and demand a thousand Jews. I obey, because if I were to disobey they would seize them by force. Not one thousand, but ten thousand. Anarchy would reign in the ghetto. Thus with a hundred, I save a thousand, with one thousand, ten thousand. I save lives and that's why I'm hated by those whom I save... Don't you think I would be happy to be one of you?

KOVENER: Who's stopping you?

GENS: I cannot abandon the sinking ship. I can only envy you. We have chosen two different ways to serve our people, and each way is mutually exclusive. You will be able to tell the world: our hands are clean, because Yakov Gens bathed his hands in blood.

VITT: That's right. Because you are the executor of the German goals.

GENS: Don't speak to me that way, Vittenberg. I want to save--

VITT: You know better than anyone, that it's impossible.

GENS: I can, I know I can. Haven't you heard the latest news? The war can't last much longer. If I can only maintain order in the ghetto.

VITT: Will they really allow the Jews to remain until...

GENS: Yes, it can happen!

VITT: What can happen?

GENS: A miracle!

(Vittenburg, Joseph, Kovner break out laughing.

Narrator nods to First Man and Second Man, both of whom now wear Nazi armbands. They enter.)

Narr

2nd MAN: Who is Vittenberg?

GENS: (long pause...then pointing) This is Vittenberg.

Narr

2nd MAN: Come with us.

(Vittenberg is taken out by First Man and Second Man. After a few moments, the comrades rush after him.)

TEO: Lekhayim! Lekhayim! Yakov Gens the First, King of Lithuanian Jerusalem is celebrating his victory over the Lion of the Ghetto. People, rejoice. The Lion has been captured. He will no longer roar at night. You will be able to sleep peacefully, and sleep away your life, oh great nation, now that Yakov Gens is your leader. ~~(Oh, excuse me, I mean misleader.)~~

GENS: You don't give up, do you? But you don't realize that I want to help those over whom I rule.

TEO: Fool. Don't you realize that the Germans are leading you on? You have no power of your own. You're the lowest dirtiest slave in the world.

GENS: With the illusion of power many things can be accomplished.

TEO: You think you're doing it for them, for your people. No, it's not them that you love, but the Germans. You yourself want to be a German. You hate them only because they treat you like dirt.

GENS: No, That's not true. It just isn't true...

(Enter Second Man.)

*Narr*  
2nd MAN: (Saluting) Herr Commandant, I report that... that... Vittenberg has escaped. The partisans attacked us at the gates and made off with him... with Vittenberg... He's free... (he runs out.)

GENS: He is free...

(Blackout. Exit Teo.)

GENS: (voice in darkness) I want to save you brothers! Help me! Look for Vittenberg. He is hiding in the ghetto. Unless Vittenberg is surrendered to the Gestapo, the ghetto will be wiped out in one blow with bombs, tanks, and artillery. Vittenberg must be surrendered by 10 in the morning. Remember Warsaw! Our only hope is life in order and work. Help me maintain the order. Spread out over all the streets and courtyards. Search in all the holes and bunkers! Bring him to me alive!

(Lights up on Vittenberg, panting heavily.)

LITT: I don't want it to end this way. Maybe it will be decided that we fight after all. No, they will say that I must sacrifice myself, that the worst of all is warfare among brothers. They won't allow that to happen. And I? Can I allow it to happen? I hoped to become a spark that would explode the choking sorrow of the ghetto. And here? What am I? A dog pursued by a pack of hungry wolves. I'm afraid of the torture. Kozlovsky was a brave fellow, and he broke under the strain. I don't want to go to them. I want to fight.

I am no longer commander. If there is no battle, there is no commander. I shouldn't say that. My friends look to me. The ghetto looks to me... I'm tired... ~~How they chased me. I came here across roofs and attics.~~

I love them... those who are shouting outside: Death to Vittenberg! I am theirs. Theirs? And whose was I until now? Why do they want me broken and not proud? Why should I let myself be bound? Why shouldn't I be allowed to tear at least one German throat apart with these hands? ~~They want me as a sacrifice and not as a hero.~~ And my duty is to obey.

One day the world will awake to a day without me, and the day will be full of light. It will be the day of

VITT: (Cont)

liberation...How is that possible? How can there be a day of liberation without me...I won't allow it. Somewhere or other I will have to be present... sounds stupid, doesn't it? And yet...I see them all. How beautiful you are, my brothers, in the day of liberation. And now I am alone...completely alone.

(First Man's voice--from offstage)

1st MAN:

Your strength will become the strength of the ghetto. Your courage--the courage of the nation. You are Vilna--the dying and the living Vilna. You are not going alone. You are only going forward. Such is fate. And people who will see you go will say: Itsik passed through here proudly; now it is easier for me to go.. (Enter 1st Man.) Come, I will accompany you. My name is Akiva.

VITT:

The name is familiar.

1st MAN:

And your name is Itskhak.

VITT:

Jews have so many Itskhaks and Akivas.

1st MAN:

I am not I and you are not you.

VITT:

We are they...

1st MAN:

Yes.

VITT:

I went to the sacrificial altar.

1st MAN:

My skin was scourged by iron combs and I said to my pupils--

VITT:

You had pupils...

1st MAN:

And you have friends.

VITT:

True. I leave friends behind. In that case, I must leave them a legacy of hope.

(Enter the comrades, with heads bowed.)

VITT:

Comrades...

JOSEPH"

Commander.

VITT:

I know.

KOVNER:

The Party has decided.

VITT:

I know.

JOSEPH:

Headquarters decided...we cannot--

VITT:

I know.

VOICES (Offstage): We want to live! We want to live! Give us Vittenberg!

KOVNER: Commander.

VITT: Yes, comrade. I'm coming. I'm coming. (To Kovner.) Take my revolver; it's loaded. Don't waste a single bullet, not one.  
× The ghetto is lost...but the battle is not ~~lost~~. Escape to the forests. Break through to freedom.

(Exit Joseph, Kovner.)

VOICES: × Death ~~the~~ to Vittenberg!

VITT: I'm coming. ~~I'm coming~~.

(Exit 1st MAN. Exit Vittenberg, first lighting a candle.)

(Enter Clerk.)

CLERK: Vittenberg took leave of his comrades, appointed Aba Kovner as his successor, and started off for the gate. The Gestapo was waiting for him. Vittenberg was driven off to the Gestapo cellars.  
Here he was at once turned over to Max Gross, a specialist.

The next morning Vittenberg's body lay in the corridor of the Gestapo building. His hair was burned, his eyes pierced, and his arms--bound behind him--broken.

(Exit Yakov Gens, lighting a candle.)

And, on September 14, 1943, Yakov Gens was shot in the Gestapo courtyard for his connection with the partisans.

1st WOMAN: (SONG)

*Under dayle  
Vayse shtern*

Shtiler, shtiler, lomir shvaygn,  
Kvorim vaksn do.  
S'hobn zey farflantst di sonim:  
Grinen zey tsu blo.  
S'firm vegn tsu Ponar tsu,  
S'firt keyn veg tsurik,  
Iz der tate vu farshvund.  
Un mit im dos glik.  
Shtiler, kind mayns, veyn nit oyster,  
S'helft nit keyn geveyn,  
Undzer umglik veln sonim  
Say vi nit farshteyn.  
S'hobn breges oykh di yamen,  
S'hobn tfises oykhet tsamen,  
Nor tsu undzer payn  
Keyn bisl shayn,  
Keyn bisl shayn .

Friling oyfn land gekumen--  
Un undz harbst gebrakht.  
Iz der tog haynt ful mit blumen--  
Undz zet nor di nakht.

(cont.)

1st WOMAN(Cont.)

Goldikt shoy<sup>n</sup> der harbst oyf shtamen--  
Bitt in undz der tsar;  
Blybt faryosemt vu a mame;  
S'kind geyt oyf Ponar.  
Vi di Vilye a geshmite--  
T'oykh geyokht in payn--  
Tsi-en kri-es ayz durkh Lite  
Itst in yam arayn.  
S'vert der khoyshekh vu tserunen,  
Fun der fintster laykhtn zunen--  
Rayter, kum geshvind--  
Dikh ruft dayn kind,  
Dikh ruft dayn kind.

Shtiler, shtiler, s'kvain kvain  
Undz in harts arum,  
Biz der toyer vet nit faln  
Zayn mir muzn shtum.  
Frey nit, kind zikh, s'iz dayn shmeykhl  
Itst far undz farat,  
Zen der friling zol der soyne  
Vi in harbst a blat.  
Zol der kval zikh ruik flisn,  
Shtiler zay un hof...  
Mit der frayhayt kumt der tate,  
Shlof zhe, kind mayn, shlof.  
Vi did Vilye a bafrayte,  
Vi di beymer grin-banayte  
Laykht bald frayhayts-likht  
Oyf dayn gezikht,  
Oyf dayn gezikht.

(Exit Clerk and First Woman)

NARR:

Now it occurs to me at night that I see them, the shadows of  
Itsik Vittenberg from Vilna, Moderdechai Anielewitch from  
Warsaw, and Mordechai Tannenbaum from Bialystok, and I hear  
x them ~~talk~~ to me ~~aloud~~: "We have perished--and you are here."

Tell me, conscience, what can I answer them?