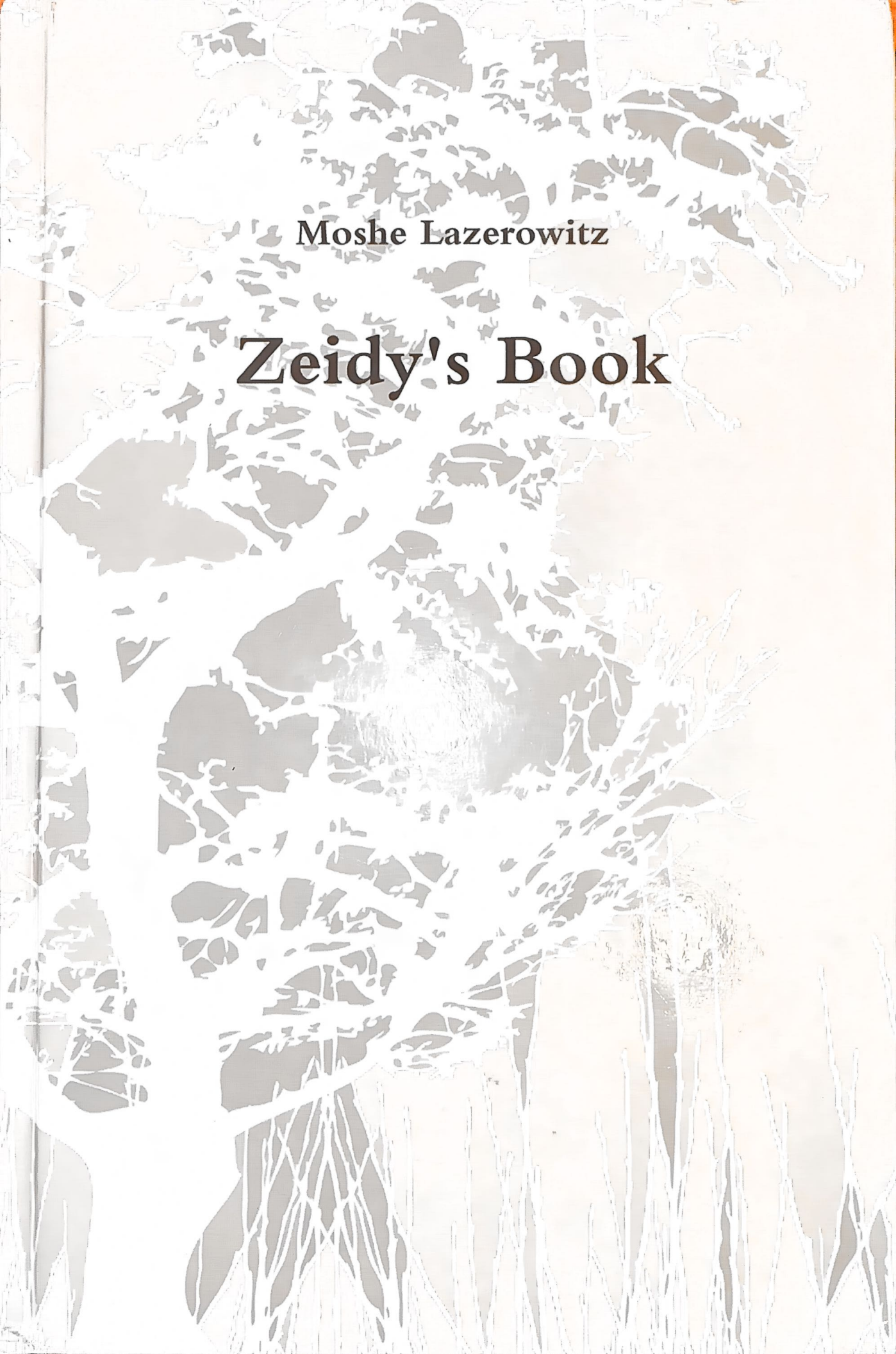




Moshe Lazerowitz

Zeidy's Book

Foreword

I was often asked why I constantly talk about the terrible destruction of our people during the bloody years of Hitler's regime, and regularly mention the indescribably painful experiences of those who miraculously survived the Nazi inferno. "Reliving those times is not good for your health," people tell me. However, I feel that I have an awesome responsibility towards my martyred family, as well as towards the countless kedoshim in general. I, too, could have been among their ashes, which were spewed forth from the monstrous gas chambers, and are scattered across Poland.

No, we may not forget, and we must not allow others to forget what the Nazis did to the Jewish people, amidst the apathy of the general world. We, the generation that witnessed the tragic destruction of our people, must constantly remind, talk and write about it, so that it should never be forgotten. I, too, have undertaken to fulfill this responsibility.

Before I begin to write about the tragic Hitler era and the Second World War, which took place between 1939-1945, I feel that I must first mention the terrible devastation that was brought upon the Jewish people. Over 6 million Jews, from Poland, Lithuania and other European countries, were murdered with unimaginable brutality that is unequaled even by churban Yerushalayim, the crusades, the bloodshed during 1648-49, the Spanish inquisition, the pogroms of Petluren and his gang, and other tragedies that befell our people.

I wish to mention the names of my brothers and sisters, their wives, husbands and children; my uncles, aunts, their children and grandchildren, and some of my friends, who were murdered by the German beasts in various concentration camps, including Auschwitz and Treblinka, may Hashem avenge their blood.

Lots of memoirs were written about the holocaust that ravaged Europe between 1939-1945. Throughout their long and

bitter exile, the Jewish people have written a lot about their trials and tribulations, whether in the *punkosim* of the *kehillas*, in their *siddurim*, or in their *kinnos* and *peyutim*. Yet, never before was there so much to write as during the horrific Hitler era. The martyrs wrote diaries, chronicles, notes and wills, while they traveled on their last journeys. They inscribed their own epitaphs on the walls of their synagogues and prison cells, and their pain and suffering was included in our nation's poetry. Even more was written, and is still being written, by the survivors of the ghettos and crematoriums, as well as those who heroically fought the enemy, either by hiding out on the Arian side or by joining the partisans. They tried to take revenge on the German murderers and their eager assistants – the Polish anti-Semites and other depraved nations in occupied Europe.

I was born in Sosnowitz, near Katowitz, Poland. My father, R' Aaron Shmuel Lazerowitz, was born in Wodislav near Keltz. My mother, Sarah, was born in Klimentchitz near Wodislav and Djaleshitz, to her father Kalman Potak.

My father had two brothers. One was Lemil, who lived in Pintchev with his wife Leah and their three daughters and sons-in-law, who were all murdered by the Germans in 1942. His second brother was named Moshe, his wife was Zelda Feigel and they had three sons and two daughters. The two oldest, Shlomo and Feivel, were killed with their wives and children during the summer of 1942 in Miechov. The third son, Aaron Chemia, was killed with his wife, children, parents, and his unmarried sister Chava Aidel, during the summer of 1942 in Wodislav. Another sister, Rachel, was killed with her husband Yidel Pik and their children, in Sosnowitz or Auschwitz, during the summer of 1942.

My mother had four brothers and four sisters. Yaakov, his wife Shprintza, and their three children, Mottel, Aidel and Tolba with their children, were killed in the summer of 1942 in Wodislav. Her second brother was Zelig, who lived in Gluz by Djaleshitz near Keltz. His wife Keila and their eight children – seven daughters and a son, named Esther, Faigel, Gittel, Rivkah,

Sarah, Yentil, Chava, and Kalman – with their spouses and children were killed in the summer of 1942.

Two of my mother's brothers, Volf and Avraham Potak, lived in Lodz. They were killed in Lodz, along with their children, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, and their grandchildren.

My mother's oldest sister, Yentil, was killed with her sons and daughters, their spouses and children. I will mention Shmuel Weisberg, his wife and children, of whom I remember Shaindel and Zalman; and Moshe Weisberg with his wife Chava and their children. Sima and Shaindel immigrated to Israel before the war. Four more of her children were murdered in Sendishev by Keltz in the summer of 1942. Another daughter, Nacheleh, with her husband Asher Friedberg, her sons and daughters with their spouses and children, were killed in Sendishev, 1942.

Another one of my mother's sisters, Udel with her husband Yosef Midlik, lived in Klimentchitz by Wodislav. They were killed, along with their children and grandchildren in Wodislav, 1942.

My mother's other sister, Gittel and her husband Zanvil Leiderman, with their children Nacha, Zalman and Yentil, were killed in Wodislav, 1942.

My cousin Yentil, from the Silberstein family, and her husband Yisroel Schipeg, were killed in Sosnowitz, 1942.

This is part of my close family that perished in the holocaust. My extended family, including cousins and their in-laws, their children and grandchildren, who were killed in various death camps in Poland, number in the hundreds.

I want to mention my friend Avraham Ber Krawitz, who was murdered with his wife and child in Zlotchuv, Galicia. His mother, two sisters with their husbands and children were killed in Sosnowitz, 1942. Another friend of mine, Avraham Shlomo Silberstein, with his mother and her sisters Rachel and Reizel Zonerstein, as well as his brothers, perished on a transport before the liberation in 1945.

We were four children of my late mother. The oldest, Esther, lived with her husband Avraham Chaba in Sosnowitz. Kalman Shlomo, the second brother, his wife Tzurtel from the Pasmantir family, and their two children – Volf, age 11, and Avram'la, age 9 – were killed during the last auszidlung (liquidation) of the Shratzila Ghetto, in Sosnowitz 1943. My oldest brother was Yerachmiel. When war broke out in 1939, he left Sosnowitz with his wife Rivkah (from the Potak family), and their two children - Sarah'la who was born in 1933 and Eliezer Yosef who was born in 1934. They lived with Rivka's father in the village Gluz, near Djalewitz by Keltz. After the Djalewitz and Miechov Jews were killed, he and his family hid among the fields in Gluz. They later went to Navi-Radamsk and there they were either killed or deported to Treblinka.

My father's second wife, Leah (nee Greenblatt), and four of their children - Hendil, 15; Rivkah, 13; Chana, 11; and Gitteleh, 9 – perished either in the Shratzila Ghetto in Sosnowitz, 1943, or in Auschwitz.

28 years have already passed since the end of the war. The young generation is not very familiar with our tragic past, and is unaware of the conditions under which our loved ones were killed by the German beasts and their helpers – the Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and others. In our home we constantly spoke about the holocaust. My wife and I, as well as other relatives who survived the war, mentioned it pretty often. Our children listened; however, their school friends whose parents were American Jews that didn't suffer as we did, were ignorant of and indifferent towards our tragic past and the suffering of our dearest family members.

I decided to recount my experiences during the terrible war years, but I was looking for other survivors who were together with me, in order to be able to recall the events with greater accuracy. I was searching for books that were written by survivors of the same camps, but I didn't come across such memoirs. I was also urged by a fellow townsman from my birthplace, Sosnowitz, to involve American Jews in an attempt to

save the local Jewish cemetery. The German bandits already destroyed some of the tombs, and the rest of the cemetery was in jeopardy of being obliterated.

Additionally, we survivors were urged by journalists to list the names of our martyred family members and publicize them in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, to serve as a monument for those who were killed, as there are no *matzevos* to mark their *kevarim*.

I therefore decided to list, not only my sisters and brothers (we were 10 siblings), my sisters-in-law and brother-in-law and their children, but to mention all of my relatives who perished. May this be a monument for them.

Dear children and family members, if you see an error in these pages, please forgive me. Some memories have faded with time, and I am not a writer. I am simply recounting my own experiences, which might be useful in Yad Vashem, so that Jewish visitors who are unfamiliar with the holocaust should gain a better understanding of what the gentile nations did to us. Non-Jewish visitors, too, will realize the terrible wrong that was committed against us, and will resolve to never let this happen again. The nations will help us fulfill our dream and firmly establish our government in Israel so that the remaining survivors of our harried nation should be able to settle in their homeland after 2,000 years of terrible suffering.

I pray that I should accurately remember at least part of my experiences during the terrible Nazi years, when I suffered together with my fellow Jews – both in my hometown Sosnowitz, as well as when I was later exiled together with many other Jews to the labor camps. I was in Atmut, Ober Ladjisk Schlesian, Auschwitz, Warsaw Ghetto, the death transport from Warsaw to Dachau, in a part of the Dachau camp, Lager 4 in Kaupring Beirin, Lager 7 Landsburge Beirin, and Lager 11 Beirin. In April 1945 we were transported in the direction of Tirol in Austria. We were liberated en route, in Buchberg, by the American army, on May 1, 1945.

Chapter 1

Thursday, August 31, 1939

Sosnowitz, Poland

After the Ribentrop-Molotov pact in the summer of 1939, there was speculation that war is imminent. Some Jews, however, felt that the situation is not so serious. Hitler is merely threatening, they reasoned, so that America and England should pressure Poland into a compromise over Danzig, similar to what has been worked out with Czechoslovakia the year before. Germany was defeated in the Great War, and they are totally unprepared militarily and economically. Rumor even had it that the Germans are being fed with margarine and other cheap products.

Despite these attempts at self-complacency, we were ordered that a bunker must be made on every street, in the cellar of one of the apartment houses. The windows of the cellars were obstructed with bags full of sand to protect them in case of shelling. However, these preparations were done in an apathetic manner, because most people doubted that Germany would start a war. Life went on as usual, with everyone going about their business.

Army reserves were called up to be on the ready, in order to show the Germans that Poland is ready for war and doesn't fear them.

On Thursday evening, the 31st of August, we all retired for the night as usual. I was peacefully in bed, when I was suddenly jolted out of my sleep by the distant sound of explosions and machine-gun fire. I went into my brother's room and told him that there is shooting going on.

My brother groggily walked to the window and peered out. "It's thunder," he declared simply, "it is about to rain."

I went back to bed and tried to fall asleep. Suddenly, an alarm sounded. My brother and I ran down to the bunker, which was already full of frightened people. Entire families, with small