

From the Testimony of Salek Orenstein about being Liberated at Theresienstadt

...Q: When you reached Theresienstadt?

A: Must have been about two days after the war ended.

Q: It was already ended. Whom do you see? The people, in what condition did you see the people?

A:...I didn't see anyone. I was still on the train. The personnel came - doctors, nurses.

Q: They were the only people? I would like to ask you...in the train.

A: I didn't see anybody at all. No, no. We were outside on the "*gliesen*". We were not yet in Theresienstadt itself.

Q: But you don't see other people. From your own train...(not clear).

A: No, no. We didn't see any "*heftlinger*". We did not see any prisoners...

We did as we were told. Some people actually did not quite, of course, you know, adhere to the instructions. And I remember what we have seen - the people actually, the underground people, brought a couple a lorries, open lorries with bread, particularly bread, bread and...I don't know what they had because I was too sick, too ill and too emotional to know what they had and they tried to distribute actually pieces of bread to the people on the way in. But as we have not seen bread for so many weeks, and we haven't seen any food at all, some of the stronger of us prisoners jumped off the thing, came out and tried to run towards the place where the bread actually was situated and that really created havoc. And they themselves, actually, the partisans themselves, or the liberators were literally afraid themselves. We did not behave like human beings. We behaved like wild animals. A, They were afraid of being hurt, number two they were afraid actually of catching our diseases. It took a couple of hours again. I didn't get anything at all because I could not run. The bread actually, they distributed by throwing on the train, were wrongly, of course, you know, distributed. The bread should have been cut, but they threw complete loaves of bread. And very difficult actually - lips were dry and gums were sore and we couldn't bite into it. The only bit of bread I remember I saw on the floor of the wagon was somebody who got hold of it, has already had some of it and he dropped it by accident. I could not consume it. I

couldn't...I couldn't even pick it up with my hand to bring it to my mouth. I was too weak to deal with a piece of bread in order to consume it. ...And we were taken off the train according to the conditions we were. I could not move. I could not descend from the train. Quite frankly, the only thought came to me most probably they would leave me here as dead. The only thing it appeared to my mind which I repeated so often is "*Shma Yisrael, hashem elokeinu, hashem echad*". Do I say it now or do I have to wait when I won't be able to say it? The only thing I remember - four of the young ladies came on the train, sort of pushed me towards the door on a blanket, they put me on a blanket and pulled the blanket across that, and the four of them carried me. I think one could have lifted me up - I had no weight left behind - but four of them, those were the instructions. I don't know how many of us, actually, arrived in Theresienstadt. I was told later on that out of the whole transport, several thousand, there were only about six hundred or seven hundred survivors. How many of these survivors eventually remained alive I don't know.

I was brought into a hall and there were "preacher" actually, you know, beds, camp beds, up to four or five up to there. They put me down on the floor and another two ladies came along. They looked older, they like, to me, nurses. They also spoke German. I think they were prisoners actually, Jewish prisoners. Two of them took me into a room where there were sort of bunkbeds and they put me on, on the thing, and they brought actually a hose which had lukewarm water to wash me down and they washed me down there. They pulled off the thing and I was lying there and I could not, of course, lie on my back because it was hurting me, I was all bones. After they washed me down it was sort of - I shall never forget. I can smell it still today - the water or the liquid was a sort of a smell of chloroform, you know, very strong. Naturally must have been sort of a disinfectant. And I was brought in, actually, into a different place entirely where what they called this "*elazeit*" - sort of a hospital place. And the first - I remember they were also ready - still night - in the morning they brought in sort of a mixture of soup and some liquid. I could not pick it up, could not do it. Could not eat with food or..no muscle movement. And one of the women there picked up my hand, the other one poured into me, of course, some sort of liquid for about three or four

minutes and they left me. They came back again about three or four hours later and they repeated the same action again and again and again. And the doctor came twice to have a look at me, patted me on the shoulder and said: "You'll be alright, you'll be alright."

First thing I encountered actually being there was human kindness for the first time. I was absolutely dazed. I didn't know what to make out of it. Is this after the war? Is this during the war? Have we been partially liberated? Wholly liberated? What's going to happen? My mind started to work about three, four days later. Where am I going to go now? Back to Buchenwald? Back to Skarjisko, back to Transelhou? Back to Opatow where I was born, lived with my parents? What's going to happen? I was not in a position actually to converse with anyone, but all that came through my mind, not being able to read, not being able to talk, not do anything at all. It was a question of just lying and imagining and thinking out things. Worst part of it was next room to mine there were people, prisoners like myself, but some of them much older - in the 20's or maybe in their early 30's or late 20's - shouting, crying, screaming. And I remember the women, nurses said: "Well, some of them are mad, out of their minds." Some of them calling names of their dear ones, wives, sons...calling out names and asking "Where are you?" This was the most horrifying thing which I've never even experienced actually on the wagons, not even Buchenwald, anywhere. People used to die quietly, without a murmur, without a sigh, nothing. Just closing their eyes and maybe sometimes you could hear a sigh, a deep sigh, or a snore and then we knew already this was the end, the last gasp of air...

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