

Sutzkever, Abraham

(b. 1913), Yiddish poet and Partisan fighter from Belorussia. Sutzkever moved to Vilna in 1922. He authored poetry from the age of 14; his first poem was published in a literary magazine in 1934. From 1934--1941, Sutzkever contributed much to Yiddish literature.

The Nazis invaded Vilna in June 1941 and established the Vilna ghetto soon thereafter. Sutzkever lived in the ghetto until September 1943, during which time he wrote more than 80 poems. Many of these poems focus on the events that Sutzkever himself experienced in the ghetto, and its communal and cultural life. Sutzkever was very involved in choosing the material to be performed in the ghetto theater and ran a literary circle there for young people. While doing forced labor, he was made to sort through the collections of books and manuscripts in the library of the Yiddish Institute (YIVO), which was located outside the ghetto. Along with Shmaryahu Kaczerginski and others, Sutzkever took the opportunity of being outside the ghetto to obtain weapons and smuggle them in. He also composed many of his wartime poems while working at the YIVO building. He won the Writers' Association literary prize in July 1942 for his dramatic poem, "Child of the Tomb." In February 1943 he penned the famous "*Kol Nidre*," a poem that described the liquidation of Vilna's "small ghetto" on the High Holy Day of *Yom Kippur*, 1941.

On September 12 he and his wife, along with Shmaryahu Kaczerginski, fled the ghetto for the forest, where they joined the partisans. Sutzkever served with the Voroshilov Brigade in the Naroch Forest; at that time he kept a record of testimonies about the crimes committed by Nazis. He also chronicled the partisan movement's history in the area.

On March 12, 1944 Sutzkever was flown from the Naroch Forest to Moscow, where he stayed until he testified on behalf of the Soviet prosecution at the Nuremberg trial of 1946. The next year, Sutzkever immigrated to Israel. He continued to write both poetry and prose, with the Holocaust and Israel as his major themes.

