

Katzenelson, Itzhak

(1886--1944), Jewish poet, playwright, and educator. Born in the Minsk district of Russia, Katzenelson moved to Lodz with his family in 1886. He began writing poetry at a young age, and throughout his life he wrote in both Hebrew and Yiddish.

In November 1939 Katzenelson escaped Lodz for Warsaw. He lived and wrote in Warsaw until the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. For the first year and a half of the Nazi occupation of Warsaw, Katzenelson tried to encourage the ghetto's Jews by saying that just like other bleak times in Jewish history, "this too shall pass." However, when Katzenelson realized that the Nazis intended to destroy every last Jew in Europe, he lost his optimism. His writings began to focus on confronting the mass death of Polish Jewry. His poems dealt with Jewish heroism, and mourned the Jews who had been sent to their deaths, including his wife and two of his sons.

After the outbreak of the ghetto revolt in April 1943, Katzenelson hid for weeks on the Polish side of Warsaw. He was discovered by the Germans in May. Because he possessed a Honduran passport, he was sent to the Vittel camp in France. There he wrote a diary which is an important document about the Holocaust. A year later, he and his surviving son were deported to Auschwitz, where they were executed.