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Vilnius, Lithuania

### Lottery for the “Winter Assistance” initiative (Poster 34)

Study the poster. In your opinion, what motivated people to participate in this lottery?

How is this lottery paradoxical?

Study the following testimonies and try to answer this question.

*“The ghetto has no ‘tomorrow,’ rather, it lives from moment to moment. Each morning, man awakes from a restless slumber: his first thought is – the night has passed, who knows what this day will bring?”*

*Ruska Korczak, Flames in the Dust (Heb.), (Merhavia: Moreshet V'Sifrat Hapoalim, 1965), pp. 344-345*

**Ruska Korczak (1921-1988):** an underground fighter and partisan and a native of Poland. Until the outbreak of World War II, she lived in Plotzek. Afterwards, she arrived in Vilna, where she joined the leadership of the Hashomer Hatzair youth group. After the underground left for the forests, Korczak became a partisan. In December 1944, she made *aliya*, where she reported to leaders of the *Yishuv* (Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel) about the Holocaust and the Jewish underground movement. Korczak was a member of Kibbutz Ein Hahoresht and a leader of Hakibbutz Ha'artzi and other educational programs to commemorate the Holocaust.

- What difficulty does Ruska Korczak depict in her testimony? What was the effect of this difficulty?

*“Perhaps because of the great uncertainty surrounding the future, people lived fully in the moment, enjoying fleeting instants of emotional satisfaction, and forgetting the entire world to enjoy the few bright moments. Romances blossomed, couples looked for places to be alone for a few hours, and rabbis officiated at marriages of young couples....”*

*“On January 15, 1943, a group of young adults gathered... to celebrate the birthday of... Lyova... Lyova had turned 28. She was accustomed to celebrating her birthday every year with a nice party. This evening she sensed that this would be her last birthday. She burst out in tears and we, her friends and family, cried with her.*

*“... Lyova told us that she had a fiancé in Eretz Israel... and said again that she was certain she would never again see her beloved and this would be her last birthday; perhaps some will survive, and those people will celebrate their birthdays and be happy, but she would not. Those who remain might take the opportunity to remember her and other beloved ones who had been murdered, and remember this day of January 15, 1943, and the birthday celebration in the ghetto, in a small, dark room. Her will and her wish was for this evening to be engraved in the memories of all, as a sort of dissonance to the bitter and horrible reality in which we were mired. In the end, the evening took on a more upbeat tone, and we began to form dreams for the future: how the world might look once Nazi Germany was defeated, how people might then relate to life, and how great might be the joy of those who remained....”*

*Alexander (Xenia) Rindzionsky, The Destruction of Vilna (Heb.), (Tel Aviv: Beit Lohamei Hagetaot Vehakibbutz Hameuchad, 1987), p. 110.*

Upon the liquidation of the ghetto, Lyova and her family were murdered in Ponary, mere days before Vilna’s liberation.

Alexander (Xenia) Rindzionsky: fought with the partisans in the forests outside Vilna. After he was wounded, he contributed actively to an underground newspaper, and in the spring of 1944, the leader of the partisan brigade asked him to document Jewish life in Vilna during the Holocaust. After the war, he worked at the Jewish Museum in Vilna; in 1959, he made *aliya*.

- What, in your opinion, do the ghetto birthday party and the ghetto lottery have in common?

Note: a birthday party has two aspects: One – to mark the end of a period in one’s life; and two – especially among youth – to mark getting older, while opening possibilities for the future.

Funds from the ghetto lottery were donated to “Winter Assistance” – one of the three ghetto aid societies. This organization’s goal was to collect winter clothes for the needy. In the ghetto were those who could not work and did not receive food rations. Social aid programs included free meals at public kitchens, financial assistance, free medical care, full or partial rent exemptions, and more. Unlike in some other ghettos, in the Vilna ghetto people did not die from hunger or cold – partly thanks to these aid institutions.



*“Worth noting: The students from the school at Siauliai Street 1 raised from among themselves 209 rubles for their fellow students who came to school hungry. They asked their teachers to take the money and arrange breakfast for their hungry friends.”*

*“Diary of Moshe Olicki,” in Leah Langelben (ed.), Live and Learn (Heb.), (Jerusalem: The Institute for Holocaust Studies, 2014), p. 334.*

- Why does Olicki think that the event is “worth noting”?
- What is the significance of the fact that Jews engaged in mutual aid efforts in the ghetto?
- Does this poster gain added significance after reading the testimonies?