

TISHEBOV IN MICHALESHIK
(this manuscript is untitled and undated)

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Esteemed friend Dovid, I have received your letter. That what you ask about *Tishebov*,² Jews used to fast and to sit in the *Beis ha Medresh* on the floor and sprinkle their heads with ash and recite the *Eykho* (the Book of Lamentations) that wrote the Prophet Jeremiah, and *klogn* (wail) about the destruction of our people, about which the prophet says there. That we are an exiled people, and that we will never get back our land. And it is ended with *Ata bekhartanu* (*You have chosen us*) observance.

About twelve at night the *shames* Fayvl Katselnik used to ascend to the *bimah* (podium for reading Torah) and to give a clap on the table: *Jews, enough wailing! Go home, lie down to take a little rest.* The next Saturday is *Shabbos Nakhmu* (Shabbat of Consolation), when there comes a prince from the Prophets, Yeshaya ben Amos,³ and says *Console, Jews, my people! We will be back, my people, we will get back our land! And they will sit in the streets of our land, old men and old women, and grooms and brides will be dancing on the streets of Israel. I do not agree with Jeremiah that we are finished.* As a people we see that the prophesy that Yeshaya has foreseen is fulfilled - *Am Yisroel khai* (the people/community of Israel lives)! And in such way was *Tishebov* observed in Michaleshik.

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About the fish *vontsakes* (barbel fish),⁴ it is a fish that has whiskers, weighs about 2 kilos apiece. The taste of the fish is *der tam fun Ganeydn* (taste of the Garden of Eden/Paradise) as the women used to say. The waters of the Viliya then were very clear and now my wife told me that the Viliya is very small and that people have diverted its waters. Communism brought *khurbn* (destruction - the same word as used for the Holocaust) and ruination to our little *shtetelekh* and even to the beautiful Viliya. I played 10 times the film that you have sent to me. My wife took photos, and the only house is the one which a Podverontser *goy*⁵ had built on my house's

¹ Although the letter from Urke to Dovid Katz is undated, its contents (newspaper clipping from 19 Apr 1993 and Rosh Hashana greetings for 15-17 Sep 1993) indicate that it was probably written in early September 1993. It contains references to Urke's essay on *My Work for the Stalin's State* postmarked 26 Aug 1993 and *A Tale of Two Weddings* dated 15 Aug 1993.

² *Tishebov/Tisha b'av* (the 9th day of Av on the Jewish calendar) is a fast day in remembrance of the destruction (*khurbn*) of both the first and second temples in Jerusalem and is regarded as the saddest day on the Jewish calendar. For many Jews (especially those who survived the Holocaust and their descendants), it is also a day to remember the third *khurbn*, the destruction of Jews in Europe also known as the Holocaust or Shoah, although there also exist other dates on which the Holocaust/Shoah is officially remembered.

³ Yeshava ben Amōts (Yeshava son of Amōts) is the prophet Isaiah.

⁴ From Wikipedia: Barbels are a group of small carp-like freshwater fish, almost all of the genus *Barbus*, usually found in slow-moving waters with little oxygen content; a *barbel* is a slender, whiskerlike sensory organ located near the mouth in a variety of fish including catfish, carp, *et al.*

⁵ Probably from Podvarantsy 54°48'N, 26°08'E, 1.7 miles SW of Micháleshik

foundation. I don't know why Avreml did not tell you where my house was. He named to you in the film the places not correctly.

When I was leaving Rusland (Russia), a Christian at whom I was staying had to come to the station at Lyntupy from where we were going to go to Poland. In the meantime there came an order that the train had to depart earlier. And so my savior was not able to come and I have left for him 2,500 rubles [with the person at whom I stayed], and he had to give it to him. And so, my savior came in the morning, but we were already

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gone. And he knew him and asked him what happened, because the train had to stay till the morning. And he said there was an order that the train has to move, but he did not hand him the money.⁶

Here in New Haven lives his⁷ wife's *zayn itstiker vaybs a landslayt, a Dunilovitcher* (former fellow villager, from Dunilovichy).⁸ And he [former fellow villager] came to me saying they ask for a little money. And I gave 50 dollars. His⁹ father was a horse thief together with your grandfather's son Bendele. Your grandfather sent Bendele to America, and *goim* caught him and broke both his legs. He had to limp around on two crutches.¹⁰

The word *tsnote* (chastity) is not a Jewish/Yiddish one. The *goim* used to apply this word to a girl that did not have sex before getting married, they called such girl *tsnotne* (chaste),¹¹ in English, *a virgin*.

I have sent you a couple of weeks ago a number of things, and I don't

⁶ In the last four sentences, it is unclear to whom the pronoun *he* refers. Perhaps: And so my savior [Dąbrowski] was not able to come and I have left for him [Dąbrowski] 2,500 rubles, and he [person with whom I left money] had to give it to him [Dąbrowski]. And so my savior [Dąbrowski] came in the morning but we were already gone. And he [Dąbrowski] knew him [person with whom Urke had left money] and asked him [person whom whom Urke left money] what happened, because the train had to stay [was to stay] till the morning. And he [person with whom Urke had left money] said there was an order that the train has to move, but he [person with whom Urke left money] did not hand him [Dąbrowski] the money. [That is: Urke and Konstantyn Dąbrowski planned to say their final good-byes at the train station in Lyntupy. Dąbrowski would come from Hadzilun to Lyntupy where Urke planned to hand him a sum of money before boarding the train to the newly-formed Third Republic of Poland scheduled to leave at a set time. However, the train was ordered to depart from Lyntupy before it was scheduled to depart and before Dąbrowski arrived. Urke handed the money to a mutual acquaintance and instructed him to explain to Dąbrowski why Urke had to depart early and give Dąbrowski the money. When Dąbrowski arrived, the mutual acquaintance did explain the early departure but did not give Dąbrowski the money Urke had left for him.]

⁷ It is unclear to whom the possessive *his* refers but perhaps the Christian with whom Urke had been staying before leaving for Poland; thought to be the same man with whom Urke had left the money for Dąbrowski.

⁸ Perhaps Dunilavichy, 55°04'N, 27°14'E (Belarus) in the Pastavy area.

⁹ It is unclear to whom the possessive *his* refers to in this sentence, possibly to the former fellow villager of the wife of the man with whom Urke had left money for Dąbrowski.

¹⁰ Urke appears to be referring to Bendele Gubersky, son of Aharon Vulf Gurbersky (maternal grandfather of Menke Katz).

¹¹ *tsnota* from Polish noun *cnota* meaning *chastity*; *tsnotne* from Polish feminine adjective *cnotna* [masculine adjective is *cnotny*] meaning *chaste*, Chastity is the quality of being morally pure, virtuous, righteous, virginal; a chaste girl or woman (a virgin) may be described as *tsnotna*.

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remember if I have given to you before: 1. My work for Comrade Stalin when I supplied meat to the Red Army. [2] When I was getting asleep at night it came to my mind two famous weddings in the *shtetl* [Michaleshik] that everybody got crazy about and it made such an impression on people.

But if you do not like it, you can throw it away. I remember the things which happened 60 years ago, but that what happened not so long ago is to me hard to remember. As we are nearing the new year, *Le-shone toyve* (shortened version of traditional Rosh Hashana formal greeting)¹² must be written for all *Klal-Yisroel* (all the people of Israel should be written for the coming year into the book of life), and foremost health. It should be peace to all Israel. My wife sends her regards and best wishes to you.

U. Blakher

I sent you a picture from a New Haven paper that they took of me, I did not know they were photographing me. After the end the correspondent of the paper came to me and asked my name, and the next day I was in the newspaper.

[Page 5—clipping with a photo]¹³

¹² *L'shana tova kitateivu* – (may you) be inscribed for the next year (in the Book of Life)

¹³ The clipping is of an article by correspondent Jim Shelton entitled *Survivors of purges speak for the slain* published by the New Haven Register on Monday, 19 Apr 1993, the day following the *Yom Hashoah* (Holocaust Remembrance Day) celebration at the New Haven Holocaust Memorial on the fiftieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (Sunday, 18 Apr 1993).