

## Nechama Shneerson, Jewish Survivor

### Survival and Loss

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*The following glossary has been created to assist students and teachers with potentially unfamiliar words, phrases, or concepts in Nechama's testimony.*

**Challah**<sup>4</sup> Egg-rich yeast-leavened bread that is usually braided or twisted before baking and is traditionally eaten by Jews on the Sabbath and holidays.

**Great Aktion**<sup>2</sup> (Ger. *Action*) On October 28, 1941, the Germans staged what became known as the "Great Action." In a single day, they shot 9,200 Jews at the Ninth Fort.

**Judaism**<sup>1</sup> The tenets of Judaism are outlined by the Torah. A Jew is one who is either born into the people of Israel, thus inheriting his/her status, or voluntarily converts to it. As a culture, as well as a society of laws, beliefs and faith, Judaism is based on the events recorded in the Torah, which was given to Moses and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. Judaism follows a set of principles as outlined in the Torah. There are several movements in the Jewish religion, for example: Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism, Reform Judaism, Reconstructionist Judaism, Hasidic Judaism, Ultra-Orthodox Judaism and Traditional Judaism.

**Kaunas, Lithuania**<sup>2</sup> (German name, Kovno) Between 1920 and 1939, Kaunas, located in central Lithuania, was the country's capital and largest city. It had a Jewish population of 35,000-40,000, about one-fourth of the city's total population. Jews were concentrated in the city's commercial, artisan, and professional sectors. Kaunas was also a center of Jewish learning and had a rich and varied Jewish culture. The city had almost 100 Jewish organizations, 40 synagogues, many Yiddish schools, 4 Hebrew high schools, a Jewish hospital, and scores of Jewish-owned businesses. It was also an important Zionist center.

**Kiddush**<sup>4</sup> A ceremonial blessing pronounced over wine or bread in a Jewish home or synagogue on a holy day (as the Sabbath).

**Kovno Ghetto**<sup>1</sup> (Kaunas, Lithuania) The ghetto in Kovno (the German name given to Kaunas) was established in August 1941. It was situated in the Slobodka suburb of the city. The ghetto had two parts, the small ghetto and the large ghetto, separated by Paneriu Street. The two ghettos were guarded by German police and Lithuanian auxiliaries. Jews were compelled to do forced labor at various sites outside the ghetto. On October 4, 1941, German authorities liquidated the small ghetto. They transferred those Jews fit for work to the large ghetto and shot the remaining Jews at Fort IX. On October 28, 1941, Germans murdered approximately 10,000 Jews living in the large ghetto. German authorities liquidated the large ghetto in the fall of 1943 and, in the aftermath of the liquidation, deported thousands of Jews to forced labor camps in Estonia. At that time they established a concentration camp known as KL Kauen on the site of the Kovno ghetto. In July 1944, the Germans evacuated the camp, deporting the remaining Jews to the Dachau and the Stutthof concentration camps.

**Ninth Fort (Fort IX)**<sup>1</sup> (Kaunas, Lithuania) Fort IX was part of the military installation built in Kaunas during the time of the Russian Empire (late 19th century). In the wake of the German occupation of Kaunas (named Kovno by the Germans) in 1941, Fort IX was used as an extermination center for the Jews confined to the Kovno ghetto, and later for those in the Kaunas (Kauen) concentration camp. The Jews, victims of many *Aktions*, were taken to Fort IX and murdered. A special Jewish unit was assigned to dispose of the corpses after the mass executions.

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**Shabbat**<sup>1</sup> The Sabbath; the seventh day of the week, which is designated as a day of rest. It is observed by attending synagogue, hearing the weekly Torah portion, and having festive meals. During Shabbat meals, it is traditional to say Kiddush (sanctification over wine), break the bread, say blessings after meals, and sing songs. The holiday concludes with a Havdalah service, which separates Shabbat from the rest of the week. Restrictions during the observance of Shabbat include prohibitions on travel, handling of money, kindling flame, cooking, and carrying objects outside a designated area.

**Shoah**<sup>5</sup> A Hebrew word meaning “catastrophe,” referring to the Holocaust.

**Shul**<sup>3</sup> Yiddish word for synagogue, or Jewish house of prayer.

**Stutthof**<sup>2</sup> In September 1939, the Germans established the Stutthof camp in a wooded area west of Stutthof, a town about twenty-two miles east of Danzig (Gdansk). The area was secluded: to the north was the Bay of Danzig, to the east the Vistula Bay, and to the west the Vistula River. The land was very wet, almost at sea level. Stutthof was originally a civilian internment camp under the Danzig police chief. In November 1941, it became a “labor education” camp, administered by the German Security Police. Finally, in January 1942, Stutthof became a regular concentration camp. The original camp (known as the old camp) was surrounded by barbed-wire fences. In 1943, the camp was enlarged, and a new camp was constructed alongside the earlier one. It was surrounded by electrified barbed-wire fences. The camp staff consisted of SS guards and, after 1943, Ukrainian auxiliaries. Tens of thousands of people, perhaps as many as 100,000, were deported to the Stutthof camp. The prisoners were mainly non-Jewish Poles. There were also Polish Jews from Warsaw and Bialystok, and Jews from forced-labor camps in the occupied Baltic states, which the Germans evacuated in 1944 as Soviet forces approached. Conditions in the camp were brutal. Many prisoners died in typhus epidemics that swept the camp in the winter of 1942 and again in 1944. Those whom the SS guards judged too weak or sick to work were gassed in the camp’s small gas chamber. Gassing with Zyklon B gas began in June 1944. Camp doctors also killed sick or injured prisoners in the infirmary with lethal injections. More than 60,000 people died in the camp.

**Thorn**<sup>1</sup> A women’s subsidiary camp of Stutthof. It was opened in July 1944 and closed in January 1945. Its inmates were compelled to dig ditches and work on various construction projects.

### Source of Definitions

<sup>1</sup> Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archives Search Terms and Definitions

<sup>2</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, online glossary and/or *Holocaust Encyclopedia*

<sup>3</sup> Florida Center for Instructional Technology’s Glossary

<sup>4</sup> Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary 2009

<sup>5</sup> *Echoes and Reflections: a Multimedia Curriculum on the Holocaust*