7 Relief Systems and Charity

> All the activities of our charitable institutions should be called death in installments, the dividing up of death into installments. We should finally realize that we cannot save anybody from death, for we don't have the means. We can only push death away, postpone it; we cannot prevent it.
>
> – Rachel Auerbach, Warsaw ghetto

Each of the three ghettos provided assistance in some form or another for the poorest of its residents.[1] Many families and individuals relied on various means of relief including soup kitchens, special food distributions, and cash payments. The sick, the elderly, refugees, the orphaned young, and others relied on relief payments, or on relief in the form of care and food provided in orphanages, hospitals, and old age homes.

The sources of support in the ghettos varied: All three Judenräte provided support for those in need for at least a portion of the existence of the ghettos. Some of the Judenräte-supported institutions enjoyed patronage from individuals in the ghetto, who supplemented the support they received from the community as a whole. Various charitable organizations that operated in the ghetto received funds from individual or foreign donations. In addition, ghetto dwellers helped one another both individually and collectively in numerous ways.

Foreign Aid and Its Distribution

One reason that these charitable organizations could maintain their activities in this early period in the General Government was that they received support through the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC). Many prewar Polish charitable organizations had their bank accounts and resources seized. Until the United States entered the war, American organizations were able to maintain resources in Poland as representatives of a neutral country, so the AJDC acted as an umbrella organization for other charitable efforts, including the Coordination Commission of Welfare and Social Organizations (Komisja Koordynacyjna Organizacji

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Opiekuńczych i Społecznych) in Warsaw. The AJDC was headquartered in Warsaw but also established offices in Kraków. Eventually, under German pressure, its Kraków operations became its headquarters in the General Government. The AJDC distributed foreign funds and foreign aid throughout the General Government until, in January 1940, Germans established the Jewish Self-Help Coordinating Commission Organization (ŻSS) as the conduit through which foreign aid was to flow. Unfortunately, since the majority of the relief funds came from the United States and were subject to the official German exchange rate, the German government was able to expropriate 80 percent of the foreign funds intended to support the Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland.[2] The ŻSS was headquartered in Kraków in 1940, initially under the control of Marek Bieberstein, the Kraków Judenrat leader, who was thus responsible for distributing foreign aid throughout the General Government.[3] This gave this community a distinct advantage in being able to support those in need in Kraków. After Bieberstein was arrested in September 1940, the ŻSS came under the directorship of Michal Weichert, with a branch office operating in the Warsaw ghetto that remained in operation until fall 1942. After the closure of ŻSS, Weichert established Jüdische Unterstützungstelle (JUS), which was responsible for distributing foreign aid to Jews in the ghettos and labor camps. It was able to exist due to the insistence of the Red Cross, which threatened to discontinue aid to German POWs if there was not an organization to guarantee receipt of aid to Jews in the General Government.[4] The JUS came into conflict with Jewish underground organizations, particularly in Warsaw, as it was believed that the acceptance of foreign aid projected a false sense of normalcy to the outside world.[5]

Official Community Care for Those in Need

Charitable organizations played a more significant role in feeding the poor in Warsaw and Kraków than they did in Łódź. In Warsaw, for example, various political groups and communities provided public kitchens and other resources to combat hunger early in the ghetto period. The private charitable sector played a larger role in these efforts than did the Judenrat at this time, although the Judenrat, too, pooled a great deal of communal funds, supplemented by donations, to support vulnerable populations in the early period.[6] Unfortunately, the Germans soon put a stop to this sort of support from the Judenrat.

In Łódź, the official Jewish Council provided food relief for the poorest of the ghetto residents. With the outbreak of war, many Łódź citizens who were already living on the brink of starvation were put in a perilous

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situation. The Judenrat, prior to the sealing of the ghetto, provided some help in the form of a small-scale relief system. When the ghetto was sealed, those on relief were supplied with food stamps that entitled them to purchase food items at a below-retail price. The food stamps, along with a nominal fee, could be used to acquire food at a community-owned and community-operated food distribution point or at a number of private shops.[7] This relief system, however, proved inadequate to support the needs of the large population suffering from lack of income, especially those without possessions to sell off in order to purchase food. These individuals were at the greatest risk of starvation and were the first to suffer, but soon even those who had been employed before the war began to suffer from lack of possessions and lack of income. Josef Zelkowicz recorded the story of Lemel and Pessia, who, before the war, were a happy couple with a decent living from taking in laundry. When their customers went away and their money ran out, they began selling off their belongings, until all that was left was the bed on which the sick wife and the three children lay, all starving and wasting away from lack of food.[8] Their story was merely one of many such accounts.

During the summer of 1940, the ghetto population as a whole began starving.[9] In August of that year, only 52.2 percent of the Łódź ghetto population purchased food rations. In response to this widespread hunger, food riots took place between August 12 and August 25, which ultimately resulted in a welfare system to allow the poor to purchase food. I have termed this riot the "Bakers' Riot" because Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, the Łódź ghetto leader, laid the blame for the rioting at the feet of the bakers (historically, bakers often have led food protests, and the bakers and butchers in Łódź had a long history of organization).[10] Rioting broke out, and the Jewish police were ordered to break up the disturbance but were unable to control the crowds. Rumkowski claimed that the rioting was caused by the long lines at the bakeries, which he blamed on the food sellers. A ghetto song lyric reflects the riots: "Everything is up in the air, Onions, carrots, beets, salami, horseradish. Get the Jewish police to come, to combat the crowd, Just like on the First of May. We shall fight, in life and death, until you give us a bowl of soup and bread. Until you give us beets and salad to keep us alive, and to be full."[11] On August 25, the riot got so out of control that the German police had to come in to suppress it. In response to the riots, the relief system in the ghetto was expanded. By October of that same year, 96.7 percent of the ghetto population purchased food rations.[12] A ration system is meant "to ensure the fair and equal distribution of food."[13] When part of the population cannot afford to purchase food, the ration system has failed.

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In the Warsaw ghetto, official support for those in need was offered in various ways, including through free breakfasts and hot coffee for the poor, as well as support for orphanages and homes for the elderly, refugees, and others. In addition to these services, the community provided special relief packages for the poor during holidays. For Rosh Hashanah 1941, 3,000 food parcels containing "a kilogram of bread, a packet of honey, a bag of coffee, a bag of sweets and a bag of saccharine" were distributed to the poorest of the ghetto.[14] From time to time, Adam Czerniaków, the head of the Warsaw ghetto, ordered the seizure of foods from the black market or from shops in town and distributed them to the poor. For example, in April 1942, Czerniaków ordered the Jewish police to seize delicacies in the windows of upscale food shops in the ghetto. The food was given to street children and orphans.[15] Rumkowski did much the same in Łódź. Unfortunately, throughout the ghetto period, most of the funds collected to support the poor in the Warsaw ghetto came from taxes on basic necessities, which just made life more expensive for those who were already struggling. By mid-1941, prices for food in the Warsaw ghetto had risen considerably. Many people were running out of things to sell off and were becoming impoverished. In April of that year, nearly 29 percent of the population was exempt from paying for their rations.

While in the Łódź ghetto, Rumkowski tried to distribute food equally to all individuals, in Warsaw, Czerniaków faced tremendous pressure to distribute more food to the poor and to allow the wealthier residents of the ghetto to buy their own provisions through private markets and the black market. For example, in May 1941, Czerniaków received a request from social activists that 30 percent of the bread ration cards of the wealthy of the ghetto be given to the poor.[16] This was not done. By October 1941, 35 percent of those receiving ration cards were exempt from payment, meaning that 35 percent of the ghetto population was impoverished.[17] In December 1941, Czerniaków estimated that approximately 150,000 ghetto residents were receiving public assistance.[18] In January 1942, Czerniaków noted that he exempted 150,000 people from paying the new bread tax imposed by the German authorities.[19] The next month, he noted in his diary, "I was visited today by a delegation from the welfare shelters stating that over 20 percent of their charges died of starvation."[20] The support for the poor in the Warsaw ghetto was simply insufficient to keep the poorest of the ghetto dwellers from starving to death.

In 1941, the year after the Bakers' Riot, the Łódź ghetto was also still supporting the poor. In January of that year, in response to the high death toll, the bread ration for the general population was increased from 300

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to 400 grams per day. The increase for the general population came at the expense of laborers, who saw a 33 percent decrease in their ration.[21] Additionally, monthly relief allowances were increased. Children up to the age of 14 received seven ghetto marks; adults (ages 15–60) received ten ghetto marks; the elderly (up to age 70) received twelve ghetto marks; those from age 71 to 79 received fourteen ghetto marks; and those over the age of 80 received sixteen ghetto marks.[22] According to Rumkowski, 46 percent of the ghetto was on welfare in February 1941.[23] At that time, 0.7 L of soup cost 15 pfennigs in a soup kitchen. A meal that consisted of two dishes cost between 25 and 65 pfennigs.[24] A simple calculation of one meal per day in a thirty-day month reveals that adults were able to buy only the cheapest meals and would have likely needed to use any extra money to pay for their children's meals. Thus even with the increase in the allowance, families on relief were not receiving enough income to ensure survival. Consequently, some family members were reluctant to take on the burden of an additional family member, even with the funds from relief.

Zelkowicz recorded the plight of an old woman and her orphaned grandson who, despite living with two of the grandmother's children, did not receive food or support from their family. The responsibility of caring for another person on the meager welfare allotment was too much for the family to bear.[25] In early March 1941, a 700-person-strong demonstration was organized to protest against the administration. Among the demands was an increase in relief payments, as well as decreases in the price of products, free laundries for the poor, and the establishment of bathing and disinfection facilities.[26] There were several responses to this demonstration. One was an article in the March 21, 1941, issue of the ghetto newspaper *Geto-Tsaytung*, entitled, "You Will Not Starve!," which told about the relief for April.[27] A month after the protest, in April 1941, Rumkowski allocated 30,000 marks for relief payments and holiday allotments. That summer, however, catering to the poor ended. In July 1941, there was a mass registration of welfare recipients for work in the ghetto and labor details.[28]

Charitable Organizations and Initiatives

In the Warsaw ghetto, in addition to the Judenrat and private organizations, the Office to Combat Profiteering and Speculation (also known as "Thirteen"), which fell under the direct authority of the German police, offered parallel services, including initiatives aimed at feeding the poor. This effort was part of a larger struggle for power between civil authorities and police in the General Government, a struggle ultimately between

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Hans Frank and Heinrich Himmler. In an attempt to take control of the Warsaw ghetto, Abraham Gancwajch, the head of the Thirteen, promoted himself and his agency by engaging in highly publicized acts of charity, some of which included distribution of food to the poor. For example, one organization he headed offered free bread to the poor that had been seized from illegal bread-baking operations.[29] Similarly, the head of the Thirteen distributed coffee and bread to the poor in honor of his son's bar mitzvah. He also distributed special baskets to the poor in honor of Jewish holidays, just as the Judenrat did. For the Purim holiday, for example, he gave food baskets with "bread rolls, gingerbread, and sweets" to poor children, in honor of the anniversary of his father's death.[30] This type of charitable giving echoed charitable giving in the prewar period, when elites demonstrated their power and wealth through charitable distribution.

In addition, numerous private organizations, house committees, and individual donors supported the poor in the Kraków and Warsaw ghettos. One organization operating in the ghetto was the Catholic charity Caritas, which provided benefits to Christians of Jewish origin in the ghetto. Some Jews even converted to Christianity to benefit from the support of Caritas, which maintained a generously supplied soup kitchen in the ghetto. Other organizations, started after the outbreak of war, provided assistance as long as the founders were in a position to give charity. Mary Berg, along with a group of other former Łódź residents in the Warsaw ghetto, organized a club, the Łódź Artistic Group, that put on performances and then donated half its receipts to relief efforts for refugees from Łódź who were in Warsaw. Over time, many of the original troupe members became impoverished, and eventually the group disbanded. In the Warsaw and Kraków ghettos, numerous concerts, events, and even street collections were undertaken on behalf of orphans and other vulnerable ghetto populations. For example, regular collections were made for charitable organizations such as the Central Association for the Care of Orphans in Poland (CENTOS), a prewar Polish organization for children and particularly orphan aid that continued operations during the war, including inside some ghettos. Some women in the Kraków ghetto collected donations for CENTOS by standing on street corners on Sundays, and the older orphans in the Kraków ghetto made brushes to support the orphanage.[31] In both Warsaw and Kraków, ticket sales for concerts supported orphans. In Warsaw, Niunia Czerniaków, wife of ghetto head Adam Czerniaków, was a patron of organizations raising funds, including through concerts. CENTOS successfully supplemented food resources for children by supporting food kitchens of orphanages and schools.[32]

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Outside of official food distribution mechanisms, the house committees in the Warsaw ghetto provided extra assistance to those in need. Certain residents in the Warsaw ghetto were more affluent than others, and they used their financial resources to provide charity for others in their immediate vicinity. For example, the residents at 24 Leszno Street provided monthly soup portions to refugees living at 19 and 23 Leszno Street.[33] In her diary, Berg noted that the house committee of her building supported Dr. Janusz Korczak's Children's Home, an orphanage located on their street. The house committee at 24 Leszno Street distributed supplemental food portions for holidays such as Passover 1941 and Rosh Hashanah 1941. In addition, the house had a Spoon Committee that, according to Berg, collected food for the benefit of children: "a spoonful of sugar or two spoonfuls of flour and gruel twice a week from each tenant in a given house. Potatoes, carrots, beets, cabbage and other foodstuffs are also collected."[34] In Kraków, numerous individuals recalled bringing food to orphanages.[35] In Łódź, in addition to the relief payments, other efforts were made to feed the poor. Kitchen no. 2 of the ghetto, a special social kitchen cofounded by Rumkowski's sister-in-law, served fifty free meals daily made up of "leftovers."[36] In 1943, after the majority of nonworking Jews had been deported out of Łódź, the workers created Sickness Committees, whereby they pooled funds to assist sick or exhausted workers.[37]

Many individuals also offered charity on either a large- or small-scale basis. Some, such as Gancwajch, made grand gestures of distributing large quantities to a large number of people. After mass deportations and starvation left many children in the ghetto orphaned, Rumkowski sought guardians for minors. He enlisted prominent members of the ghetto to "adopt" orphaned children. Czerniaków also sought support from individuals to help those in need. He regularly summoned individuals to him to request funds to be distributed or utilized by entities in the ghetto.

Refugees

One specialized group that received support were the newly arrived in the ghetto. Jews from villages in the countryside and from Western Europe arrived into the ghettos. In each city, various methods were undertaken of housing and feeding the newly arrived, with the goal of ultimately integrating them into the ghetto. The issue of receiving and feeding refugees preceded the ghetto period. Due to the mass migration during the early war period, refugees were ever present and in constant need of assistance. Once the ghettos were created, Jewish arrivals from various areas continued, with the responsibility for their care being

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placed on the official Jewish Council. In some cases, when the population was arriving from Western Europe, funds were forwarded from the city of origin for the refugees' care. In other cases, the ghetto had to find a way to support the newly arrived. Those arriving from surrounding areas as opposed to Western Europe tended to be in poor condition and without resources.

Jews arriving in all three ghettos were put in refugee or quarantine centers, usually in old school buildings. For those Jews arriving into the Kraków ghetto from outside, for some portion of the ghetto period, the prison fulfilled the role of quarantine center.[38] The fortunate were put in overcrowded ghetto housing instead of the dormitory-like settings of the refugee centers or the poor conditions of a prison. However, the conditions for refugees were usually in line with what was provided for the poorest of the ghetto, which was not enough to survive. The refugee population, like the very poor, suffered from high mortality rates connected with hunger.

Oskar Rosenfeld describes the food officially provided to the refugees:

> [They] received a loaf of bread to last for one week. In the morning, black coffee like tepid brown water. For lunch a thousand people lined up with their bowls. Young women brought buckets of soup from the kitchen: warm water swimming with some green stuff, carrots and turnips. People fell over this meal, their lunch. The only meal of the day. Toward evening, again a small bowl of coffee, that is tepid brown water.[39]

While the refugees from Western Europe generally brought some food supplies with them, these would eventually run out, and they were left trying to subsist on the officially provided food. In Warsaw, a worker in the quarantine center at 109 Leszno Street recorded that the quarantine centers did not always have bread, and the newcomers could not purchase food on the black market while quarantined.[40] Not everyone who arrived in a refugee center came with funds. Mordechaj Wasser, a caretaker in a refugee center in the Warsaw ghetto, noted that a group of "460 refugees, mostly the elderly and children" arrived from various villages around Warsaw, and further recorded that "70 percent of our wards used to be beggars."[41] Unfortunately, due to the newness of the refugee center, it was not yet equipped to provide food for the new arrivals. Three days after the arrival of the newcomers, the refugee center was finally able to start feeding them. A few days later, Wasser reported, a Care Section delegation arrived at the refugee center: "our wards were asking the delegation to take mercy on them and not make them pay 10 groszy for bread. During that conversation the lady from the Care Section said that she could not understand how they could not spare 10 groszy."[42] The next day, no bread was provided, as the center could

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not gather enough funds from the refugees. The workers at the refugee center ended up asking the next delegation that came to visit to provide the money for bread.[43] Of a different refugee center, an anonymous writer who worked there noted, "The amount of food we can give them does not satisfy their hunger…. A line of people follows us, asking for a little more soup. Unfortunately, we have to distribute it evenly among all. We do not have enough to satiate them."[44]

All the testimonies about refugee centers record horrific stories of death by hunger. One woman reported on her experience as a caregiver to children in a refugee shelter daycare center in the Warsaw ghetto: "I took over the feeding of twenty-four children, as a substitute, for the time being. Already in the first days three of them died, two of them in my arms."[45] During August 1942, an orphanage in the Kraków ghetto took in many children from the surrounding villages who arrived in poor condition.[46] A group of mentally disabled individuals with limited communication and personal care skills tragically died in the refugee center in Warsaw after not being fed. Wasser recorded their fate: "We do not bring any food to the cripples. We give their portions to the healthy children instead of sustaining the life of the incurably ill at this difficult time."[47] Throughout the ghetto period, individuals engaged in decision-making and choices about how to distribute inadequate resources. Institutional staff were among those who made these difficult decisions.

The refugee housing and quarantine centers were deadly, and finding a way out of the refugee housing situation was essential in obtaining sufficient food. In some cases, individuals with connections were able to find their own way and blend into the ghetto. Others who arrived were formally quarantined or at least placed into housing barracks until better accommodations could be found. And if disease was actually found among a transport, a group might be doomed to a longer period in quarantine. As one writer recorded, the food situation for those who fell ill with disease was terrible:

> Hunger is a constant element of the isolation ward. People faint so often that we have stopped paying attention to them. The patients rebel every couple of days. Some women came to us escorted by a policeman. They said that people were fainting in their room and that they needed bread. We sliced all the bread we had and we took 100 slices with marmalade to 218 isolated patients. It was all we had.[48]

The horrific food situation did little to ensure the recovery of those who were ill or suspected of being ill. With their stays prolonged each time they or someone else became ill, quarantine was a potentially deadly prospect.

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In the Warsaw ghetto, a person might be released from quarantine due to overcrowding or bribery. One anonymous author recorded that their group of arrivals were asked to pay bribes to receive their luggage, to get out of the quarantine area, or even to buy someone else's luggage. This drain on resources upon arrival did not set up new arrivals for success in their fight against hunger.[49] As one anonymous writer in Warsaw recorded, "The ones sent to quarantine … are the most unfortunate … even if these refugees are not beggars now, they will be in a week."[50]

Rosalie, a Kraków ghetto survivor who was forced into the ghetto from the surrounding countryside, was in a one-room apartment with "no windows and no heat. Mother, Lucy, Henry and I had one corner and eight other people divided the rest. Nobody had a job and it was too dangerous to go outside so everybody sat on the floor all day long crying from hunger."[51] Attempts were made to help the refugees once they were let out of quarantine. Some of these were private initiatives, such as at the home of Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapira, the Piasecznер Rebbe, which served as a kosher soup kitchen for refugees in the Warsaw ghetto.[52]

Soup Kitchens[53]

Soup kitchens had a long history before the period of ghettoization. They served hot meals to those in need as a bulwark against starvation. With the arrival of the war, the need for soup kitchens expanded, and within the ghetto borders, the soup kitchen's importance increased. In the ghettos, soup kitchens usually served a soup or stew and, depending on availability, bread. One Kraków ghetto survivor described the allotments in the soup kitchen as bread and a free soup usually made from cabbage.[54] The community kitchens in Warsaw served what one survivor described as "a dish of soup, consisting of hot water with a potato swimming in it."[55]

The Social Welfare Department of the Łódź ghetto opened a soup kitchen at 26 Zgierska early in the ghetto's existence.[56] In Warsaw, in the early ghetto period, the price of dinner at a soup kitchen was free. It slowly rose, first to 10 groszy and then, by spring 1941, to between 40 and 50 groszy for adults (children and those with special coupons paid less). By June 1941, the cost of soup had risen to 70 groszy, and most reductions in price had been abolished.[57] Eventually, bread became hard to provide in some soup kitchens and only soup was offered.

Various types of soup kitchens existed in the ghettos. Organizations, religious groups, ghetto administrations, and individual professions all had their own soup kitchens. Many groups had soup kitchens that

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served their members or that targeted certain groups that had become impoverished and reliant on soup kitchens for their meals. Some soup kitchens, including those from CENTOS and Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia (the Society for the Preservation of Health, TOZ), served children or students. Jewish and Christian groups supported their members with soup kitchens: The Warsaw ghetto had a soup kitchen for Torah scholars, for example, and Caritas provided assistance for Catholics in the ghetto.[58]

Soup kitchens were not solely places to obtain food. They were also important gathering spaces for underground political and religious organizations that continued to be active in the ghetto. In such cases, soup kitchens might allow secret schools to function or political meetings to take place, or serve other functions. For example, high holidays were held in Kitchen no. 2 in the Łódź ghetto.[59] The kitchens also provided work for members of the organizations that ran them, a place for members to gather, and a captive audience to influence. The Left Poalei Tsiyon, which ran multiple kitchens, used its main soup kitchen at Elektoralna 14 in the Warsaw ghetto not only to serve meals but also to hold party meetings.[60] Warsaw ghetto diarist Chaim Kaplan recorded his first Hanukkah celebration in the Warsaw ghetto, noting:

> I returned from a celebration at the Zionist soup kitchen. On every holiday the guests here arrange themselves at small tables, sip tea, and nibble on some sort of baked goods. But that is not important. That is only on the outside, for the sake of appearances before strange eyes. The important thing is the presidium, which is headed by Kirszenbaum and Kaminar, to the right and left of whom sit all the leaders of Warsaw's Zionists, who speak and debate with words that go straight to your heart. This year's Hanukkah celebration was very well attended. We almost forgot that we are only allowed to go as far as the corner of Nalewki and Swietojerska streets.[61]

Numerous ghetto soup kitchens served intellectuals, many of whom had been impoverished by the war and ghetto conditions. Warsaw ghetto survivor Hanna Strawczynski recalled, "We used to go for a while to the Jewish writer's union … because they had a soup kitchen."[62] Some kitchens for the intellectual class, despite serving the same meals as the rest of the ghetto, provided a nicer atmosphere. In the Łódź ghetto, Kitchen no. 2 served the intelligentsia. Its founder and patron was Helena Rumkowska, the sister-in-law of ghetto leader Rumkowski. The *Chronicle* described it as a place where everybody used to be somebody, comparing it to Paris in the early 1920s, where one's taxi driver might be a former Russian grand duke.[63] Although the kitchen used the same ingredients as the other soup kitchens, Kitchen no. 2 seemed to make up for its fare with atmosphere. The *Chronicle* described it as an illusion of what

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formerly famous patrons were accustomed to: "a measure of politeness in people's behavior and the way they are treated … a clean and well set table, dishes that are not nicked, and finally, pleasant surroundings and good company."[64] Kitchen no. 2 also sponsored concerts, poetry readings, and other cultural events to entertain the kitchen's patrons. Despite the fact that Kitchen no. 2 was a community kitchen, it only accommodated a limited number of people and, even with half-hour eating rotations, had a waiting list.

In addition to soup kitchens where people were served soup, communal kitchens for the poor offered ghetto dwellers a place to cook a meal. Łódź ghetto survivor Alfred Dube described the central kitchens that were created in response to a fuel crisis that left people unable to cook their meals. He wrote that lines a block long formed, with people waiting from 9 p.m. to 12 a.m. just to have a space to cook their evening meal. He described times when the public kitchen closed before his sisters managed to get to the front of the line. He also detailed the "common picture" of the line to use the public kitchen: "a mother carrying a small baby under one arm and cold, uncooked soup in the other."[65] Some enterprising individuals rented out their kitchens for a fee.[66] If the meal managed to get cooked, it was served warm, although the *Chronicle* noted that many people in their hunger ate their meals half cooked.[67] The Warsaw ghetto also offered a central cooking kitchen. Warsaw ghetto survivor Edith Millman recalled a house committee initiative in which people without food were given a spoonful from their neighbors. She wrote, "I remember a so-called 'spoon' campaign where you would go from apartment to apartment and ask for a spoon of sugar, a spoon of groats, a spoon of flour."[68] Once gathered, the food was then taken to a central kitchen to be cooked.

Ultimately, however, these measures were unsuccessful in saving most of the food insecure, leaving them vulnerable to starvation and eventually death. Warsaw ghetto survivor Rachel Auerbach, writing about her time heading a soup kitchen there, noted, "I stood at the very center of Jewish suffering, on the front lines of the struggle against hunger."[69] Warsaw ghetto diarist Emmanuel Ringelblum noted:

> The well-established fact is that people who are fed in the public kitchens are all dying out, subsisting as they do only on soup and dry rationed bread. So the question arises whether it might not be more rational to set aside the money that is available for the sole use of certain select individuals, those who are socially productive, the intellectual elite and the like. However, the situation is that, in the first place, the elite themselves constitute a considerable group and there wouldn't be enough to go around even for them and in the second place, why should laborers and artisans, perfectly deserving people who were

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productive in their hometowns, and whom only the war and the ghetto existence have deprived of their productive capacity – why should they be judged worthless, the dregs of society, candidates for mass graves? One is left with the tragic dilemma: being that no one will survive? Or are we to give full measure to a few, with only a handful having enough to survive?[70]

Eventually, the soup kitchens in most ghettos were transformed into kitchens for workers as the poorest of the ghetto inhabitants were shipped to extermination camps. In May 1943, after most of the nonworking and poor had been deported from the Łódź ghetto, Rumkowski utilized the former soup kitchen for the intelligentsia to distribute "reinforcing meals" to workers. These supplemental meals, which were distributed on a rotating basis over fourteen days, had to be eaten on site so they could not be shared as they were meant to strengthen workers. By November 1943, these reinforcement meals ended, and deportations began to be conducted from these former kitchens beginning in February 1944.[71]

Begging

Different types of begging and giving took place in the ghettos. One means of charitable giving that existed prior to the war and was quite common in the Great Depression involved inviting impoverished individuals to one's home and feeding them there. Other common prewar methods of charity involved the gifting of food (this method became less common as people became more impoverished) and variations on the Kraków ghetto spoon method already mentioned, in which someone in need went door to door, begging acquaintances or neighbors for small amounts of food or funds that were used to piece together a meal.

Łódź ghetto chronicler Zelkowicz recorded the story of a rebbe's wife who, in order to feed herself and her husband, "circulates from door to door among former Hasidim and their wives and begs crumbs and grains of food that are literally not worth a cent. From those scraps the size of an olive or half an olive, she prepares those penurious fare that the Sabbath repast has become."[72] The door-to-door requests or requests made of a specific friend or family member were one form of begging.

Those in worse shape took to begging on the streets, which was widespread in all three ghettos. Łódź ghetto diarist Jakub Poznanski recorded in his diary that, "for a morsel of food, for a few spoonfuls of hot soup, people would stoop before anyone, look them in the eye and ask and wait for a handout."[73] Kaplan, writing in his Warsaw ghetto diary, noted: "there is physical panhandling everywhere you turn. Lamed, crippled and blind people; people missing an arm or a leg; all manner of misshapen people who inspire physical repulsion; epileptics and those afflicted with

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skin diseases; naked people and people dressed in filthy rags; and all of them shouting: Give! Give."[74] Warsaw ghetto survivor Stefan Stok recalled, "There were masses and masses of people who were hungry. There were beggars everywhere, particularly in the main streets. There were beggars sitting at the side of the pavement, the beggars sitting next to the gutter."[75] Sometimes, the begging took the form of street performing, but at other times, it involved people feigning a faint in front of a potential almsgiver.

Those who begged were driven to it by extreme hunger. As one woman wrote of her experience with begging in the Warsaw ghetto, "I did not have the wherewithal to live, so I began to beg; the best area—that was Leszno. I was often ashamed, but hunger nagged."[76] Many diaries and oral testimonies specifically discuss child begging.[77] Henry Greenblatt described child beggars in Warsaw. They would call for food, "Can we get a small piece of bread from somebody?" and then "people would throw out of the window a piece of bread, a scrap of a potato." Later, they begged for potato peels or anything at all. Children were not often able to beg enough to survive, as he noted: "And you could pass by maybe two, three days later. And the same children would be laying on the sidewalk already swollen. And a lot of them died."[78] Łódź ghetto diarist Rosenfeld mentioned the child beggars who came to beg among the new arrivals from Western Europe. In the early period after arrival, some Jews in his transport from Prague did not want the soup provided, as they still had provisions they had brought with them. The young beggars would collect the food. Rosenfeld noted, "Once they get something, they come back again and again … impossible to get rid of them. Not a flicker of shame left in them."[79] One Warsaw ghetto diarist, Chaim Hasenfus, recorded at the end of March 1941:

> There's one young beggar in a fragile state who laughs merrily and cries despondently at the same time. Another person, ragged, dirty, and unshaven, keeps calling out the one word *Brojt* – bread – with maniacal repetition. Many are lying in the mud, listless and apathetic, but they still expect passersby to toss them a few groszy.… Any given beggar may have a proletarian background; he may be a former artisan or a merchant or occasionally even a member of the intelligentsia. One bespectacled intellectual keeps repeating in German that he is a refugee, a German Jew, in need of financial assistance. There's one old Jew who sits in front of the courthouse on Leszno Street reading psalms and praying out loud. Whole families stand outside the courthouse for hours with their poor, pitiful children – hungry, scared people trying to move the passing crowd by calling out or showing their swollen legs.[80]

One type of begging that various ghetto writers immortalized was that of the singing beggars. Many street performers lived in the ghettos

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and sought handouts. In Warsaw, for example, one couple with four children sang and pushed the children in strollers until eventually all the children died off one by one, and then the husband remained, pushing his wife.[81] Several street performers found renown in the ghettos. In the Łódź ghetto, a famous street singer was Yankele Hershkovitz. He sang songs that included biting political commentaries in exchange for offerings. By 1942, he could no longer survive off his street performances and got a job in the ghetto. Ultimately, in 1944, Hershkovitz was deported to Auschwitz. He survived the war and died in 1972. Before his death, he recorded many of his ghetto songs.[82] Another well-known performing beggar was Abraham Rubinsztejn in the Warsaw ghetto, who was famous for his saying "Alle Gleich!" (all are equal). Mentioned in numerous diaries and accounts, this fixture of the Warsaw streets told jokes, sang songs, danced, and entertained to the extent that he was able in order to survive on street performances. He was even captured in a Nazi propaganda film and mentioned in the German-occupation-approved Jewish newspaper *Gazeta Żydowska*. Ultimately, although more successful than other beggars, he was in poor condition by 1942 and was reportedly deported along with other street beggars.[83]

The Death of the Poor

Despite public and private attempts to combat hunger, none were sufficient. The vast majority of the poor of the ghetto were killed, largely through starvation and starvation-related diseases.

Most of those in the ghetto, even those working, lived on rations that were insufficient for survival. Warsaw ghetto survivor Stok noted, "official rationing was, I think, just enough to die of hunger. That was, you got some bread and some artificial honey or artificial jam and some other things, but never enough to keep you alive."[84] In Kraków and Warsaw, the rations were supplemented by the black market, but that food was only available to those with sufficient resources to purchase it. For the poor, this additional food was outside their means.

Berg, writing in the Warsaw ghetto, noted:

> A poor man enters to buy a quarter of a pound of bread and walks out. In the street he impatiently wrenches a piece off the gluey mass and puts it in his mouth. An expression of contentment spreads over his entire face, and in a moment the whole lump of bread has disappeared. Now his face expresses disappointment. He rummages in his pocket and draws out his last copper coins … not enough to buy anything. All he can do now is lie down in the snow and wait for death.[85]

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In the Łódź ghetto, the rations were not sufficient to survive, and even being employed in the ghetto did not guarantee earning enough to purchase one's food rations. Łódź ghetto chronicler Zelkowicz reported on how the poor of the ghetto died. For example, he recorded that social worker Ryva Bramson found a woman, Feige, dead in her apartment on September 4, 1941. The furniture in the apartment was gone, and all the other family members had died off during the previous six months. She died alone in an apartment divested of anything of value or use.[86]

Ultimately in Łódź, the poor of the ghetto were subject to deportation. In January 1942, deportees bound for Chelmno began to leave the Łódź ghetto. The poor were among the first to be deported.[87] At that point, Rumkowski began to attack those on welfare. He chastised the newly arrived Western Jews for benefiting from the ghetto relief systems without reciprocating with labor and the forfeiture of their possessions to pay the ghetto food bill.[88] Most of the Western Jews remained unemployed. This was a perilous condition for them, as work in the ghetto was linked with food.[89] In February 1942, Rumkowski announced the dissolution of the collective communal kitchens.[90] In March, he halted meat distribution to the sick and allocated it instead to workers, thus signaling an end of social care and a move toward labor as the means of survival.[91] In the same month, a number of ghetto diarists and writers reported that the poor and those on welfare were largely being deported. By spring 1942, it was clear that the ghetto was largely devoid of welfare recipients.[92]

In the Warsaw ghetto, the poor were also liable for deportation. Not only the Jewish poor were targeted in Warsaw. In April 1942, amid mass deportations of Jews, the Germans arrested a number of Roma and Polish beggars and put them in the Jewish ghetto prison. The Jewish ghetto administration was then told to delouse them and set them free in the ghetto, though Czerniaków successfully petitioned the German authorities to remove them.[93] However, the targeting of even non-Jewish poor was in line with the German desire to remove as many "useless eaters" as possible.[94] Similarly, in Kraków, the nonworking and poor were targeted during the June and October 1942 deportations, with the final liquidation of this group carried out at the end of the ghetto's existence, in March 1943.

Conclusion

A variety of coping methods were employed in the ghettos on the communal level with the aim of supporting the poorest of the ghetto. This tradition of supporting individuals through periods of food insecurity was not new to these communities. Rather, it was a central part of the

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functions of Jewish communal organizations and private charities prior to ghettoization. They had a history of supporting large populations through various means ranging from children's homes (which accepted both orphans and impoverished children whose families could not support them), to soup kitchens, to emergency housing, to direct funds, and beyond. As recently as the Great Depression, the interwar refugee influx, and the early war period, these organizations had been mobilized to support the economically challenged. These types of communal support structures are more typical in large urban environments. If the ghettos under scrutiny were in small villages, we may see a different type of communal support that relied more on individual social networks.

Charitable groups, Jewish communal organizations, and informal networks attempted to employ many of these prewar means to support those who were most economically fragile. This charitable form was already insufficient before the war. However, during the ghetto period, the situation of the community was far more drastic than it had been in the past. Less funds were available due to the siphoning of foreign funds by the Germans and the eroded charitable base of the ghetto population, which was becoming more impoverished. Compounding the issue, the support that was able to be rendered, regardless of method, was insufficient to meet the overwhelming needs of the hungry, particularly the most vulnerable, who over time succumbed to death from starvation and associated diseases. In this situation, choices were made by charitable and communal institutions about where to allocate scant resources. Some vulnerable were sacrificed more than others. The attrition of the most vulnerable is typical of famine situations and is a salient feature of the *atrocity of hunger*. It is the longevity of the ghettos that made these attrition rates so great in number.

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