

From the Testimony of Dov Levin about Returning Home and Encountering the Destruction

Dov Levin was born in Lithuania in 1925. He escaped from the Kaunas ghetto and fought with the partisans until the liberation of Lithuania by the Red Army in the summer of 1944. He immigrated to Palestine in 1945.

[Passage from a diary that was lost and later reconstructed in Israel]

Kaunas, August 1944

After the destruction and devastation, I am back in Kaunas for the first time. However, I don't expect to find anyone, because the reports I received from friends say that no one from our family is among the living.

...There was nothing left for me to do but to see with my own eyes the ruin and the horrors, the charred bodies, and the smoking embers of the ghetto... It was not easy to find the place where the house of our collective had stood. There used to be a whole neighborhood here, now there are heaps of rubbish and burnt bricks.

I look at the ruins. Perhaps I will find something from the past. The body of a wretched friend, a diary, memories, pictures... The fire has consumed it all. There is nothing. Suddenly I remembered that Chaim G., who was here this morning, told me that he had found a notebook and a sign with the number 7 on it. He had hidden both items beneath a large brick. In fact, after poking around in the smoking heap I found a piece of paper in Hebrew with all kinds of calculations on it. I recognized the handwriting of Yerachmiel and I sank into deep thought. Suddenly I also saw the sign, with a shiny white 7 on it, as though attesting to the essence of the house at "7 Mildos".

I stood there, on the mound of ruins, for a long time. The house and all its events flashed before me. It was in this house that the scales were turned.

Here my best friends had remained. Here they had perished. Here we spent nights and evenings in the bunker...

I snapped out of my fantasies. A group of German prisoners led by Russians was forced to bury the sick [the dead] -- something they could be proud of... Without thinking I took the two items with me to Vilna and they remained with me until I left the city.

Source: Kleinman, Yehudit and Springer-Aharoni, Nina (eds.), *The Anguish of Liberation*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1995, p. 64.