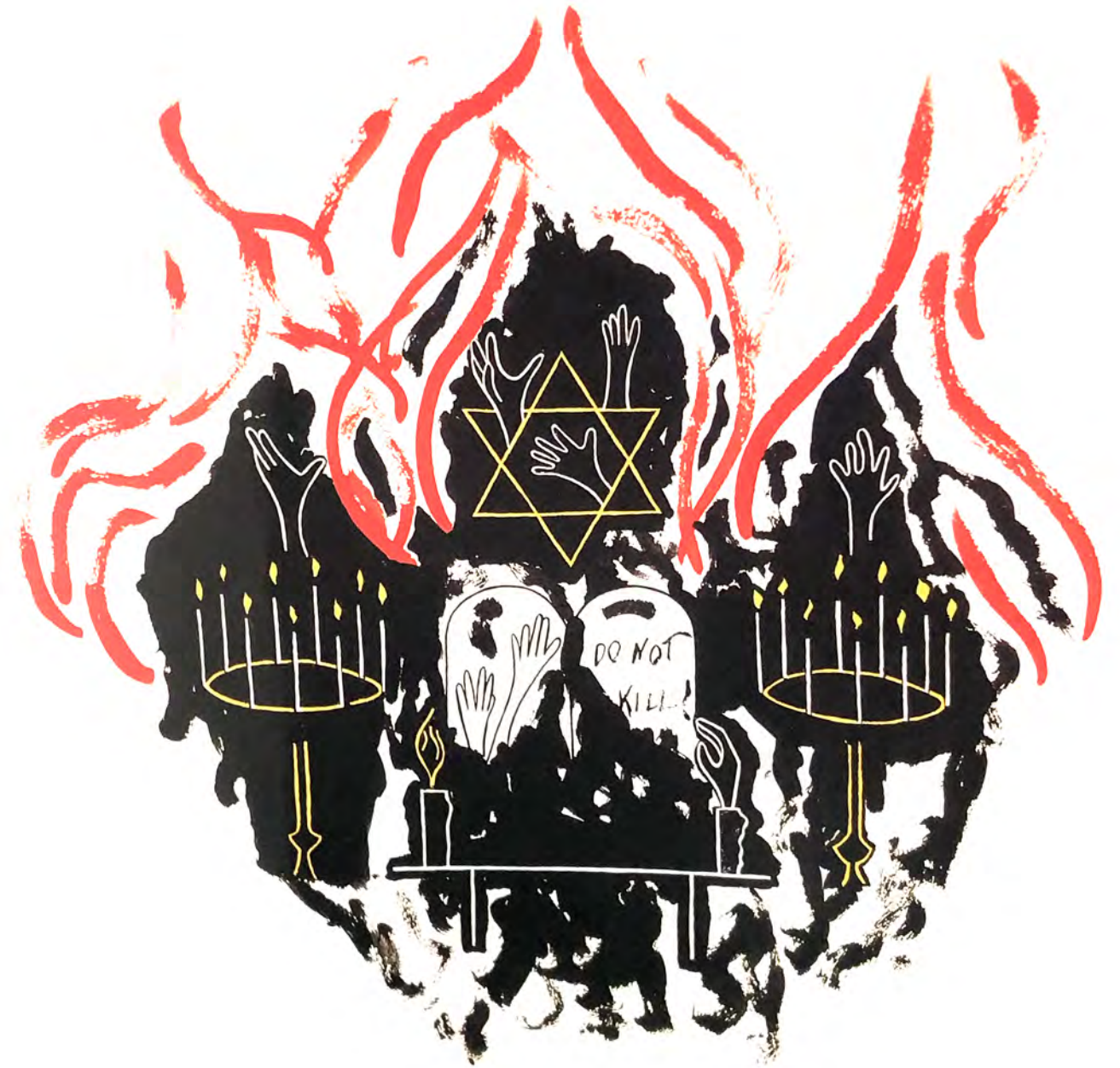


“The songs of the sanctuaries turned into screams.”

In the dead of winter, we marched from dawn to sunset at the foot of the Alps. Sometimes we marched for days without food or water. If someone sat down, he was shot. We carried nothing. Blankets were acquired by picking one up off the ground where it lay after someone had dropped from fatigue and no longer needed it. As we climbed toward the mountain pass, the number of bodies increased. We were ordered to stop and form lines of five. At the pass, two were randomly shot from each line. As some fell, the rest kept marching.



“Oh, God, in my sorrow, I turn to Thee.”

We reached a small village by late afternoon. We numbered thousands, hungry and exhausted. An Austrian peasant brought a bag of apples to the edge of the fence and started to throw them toward us. The reaction of the prisoners was wild. But the peasant paid a dear price: she was shot on sight.

Yet the SS members sometimes surprised us with their actions. Together they performed their duties without hesitation, whatever the cruel or vile act. However, alone, when not seen by their comrades, some of them behaved quite differently indeed. For instance, once during a march, an SS soldier rudely broke the line, then secretly handed out sandwiches. On another occasion, the soldiers “mistakenly” gave out more food than the ration permitted. Humanity can be seen even in such a place as this! It was as if rare vegetation had appeared miraculously on a rock.



“How the heroes were falling!”

We arrived at Mauthausen, an old concentration camp where the gas chambers were out of service. A big sign hanging above the entrance read, “Work Makes You Free.” Dead bodies and skeletons were sprawled all over. Food ration for a day was a cup of black coffee and a quarter slice of dark bread covered with green fungus. The toll was evident in our physical appearance—gaunt faces and skeletal frames. One dying boy turned to me and asked me to tell him about restaurants. “Is it really true that you can eat as much bean soup as you wish?” He never found out.

We slept in huge circus-sized tents. How marvelous to be in a tent after weeks of marching, with nowhere to lay our heads but on the frozen ground under the sky. The entire camp was surrounded by electrical barbed wire and towers with reflector searchlights shining penetrating beams across the grounds all night. In Germany it was forbidden even to light a cigarette at night because of air defense. On our second night there, a bomb was dropped and exploded in my tent. The airplane noise was deafening; all around were injured people, fire, bloodshed, and death. I was in a deep sleep and drooling. I awoke and thought, “Aw, who cares? What a way to go!” I turned over and went back to sleep.



“Behold my misery and save me.”

We started out on yet another march because the Russians were nearing the camp. Five days of marching, and we were less and less able to walk because of our diminished strength. Some were given help and put on couches rigged to horses. Our destination: Concentration Camp Gunskirchen—a “gem” in the Austrian forest. The exhausted victims from the couches were thrown directly into open graves, then killed.

The barracks were packed full of people squatting—one on each side of you, one in front of you, knee to knee, one in back of you—crammed together. We were confined to the barracks 12 hours at night. During the night, some of the weaker prisoners toppled over, burying others underneath, so that many suffocated. During the day, we were lined up and counted three times, for two hours. Food was given to us from a barrel the SS stood in. Our breakfast was a cup of coffee; our dinner, a cup of soup and a slice of bread. The toilet facilities consisted of a room for 12 men and 16 women for a prison population of 30,000. You had to use the “facilities” when you could find time to go—when you were not standing in line or confined to your barracks. Diarrhea or constipation afflicted everyone. Those who could not wait to use the toilet were executed on the spot.

One day an unusual alarm sounded, and everyone was ordered out of the barracks. The SS announced that someone had eaten meat. Who did it? Meat? Here? Ahh, they had eaten part of a corpse. Declaring what an “inhumane act” this was, the SS shot the perpetrators in front of us to “teach us respect for the dead ones.” Oh, what a lesson in humanity.

