



## From the Testimony of Zvi Katz on How I Joined the Bericha Organization

Zvi Katz was born in 1924, in Kovno, Lithuania. He lived in the Kovno ghetto, and was deported to the Landsberg labor camp. After being liberated by the Americans, Katz traveled to Poland on his way back to Lithuania; he joined the Bericha in Lodz and from there made his way to the DP camps in Germany. In this extract from his testimony, he describes his experiences in Lodz in liberated Poland in 1945.

“I met a Lithuanian family and they directed me to the Dror kibbutz - that was my salvation. The entire house at 18 Polodniova Street was at the kibbutz’s disposal. Children and young people gathered here. They organized them into the Dror movement. There was a kitchen, we went out to work. We studied Hebrew - the language, songs, the social experience - like a youth movement. The leaders were people who had been on training courses [*hakhsharot*], had survived, and had returned from the Soviet Union... I met people who came from Vilna and they took away any notion I had had of going to Lithuania... I grasped the concept of Eretz Israel and I was eager to immigrate. I dropped all other plans. It turned out that I was in one of the major centers for the Bericha...”.

“...In the winter of 1946 we all went off on the train, about 50 young men and women, including some parents who had reached Dror with their children and my mother. They equipped us with Greek travel documents and taught us a few words in Greek, such as ‘Good evening’, and so on, and advised us to speak Hebrew and sing Hebrew songs that we knew. We reached the Czech border. There was a passport check on the train. The Poles looked at us in amazement. There was a Czech who was an expert on languages sitting next to us, and he latched on to us. He wanted to know which language we were



speaking. We said, 'Greek'... We were in Prague, then we traveled on to the German border, the American zone. We stole across the border at night, guided by Bericha activists, through a flat, wooded area covered with snow. In the morning we were on the German side.”

Katz reached the Leipheim DP camp in Germany with the help of the Bericha. He spent about a year in various DP camps in the American zone in southern Germany, working as a youth group leader. After a year he went on his way with the Bericha to Palestine via Austria and Italy:

“The day of immigration arrived... We crossed the border in a forest so dark that we couldn't see a thing - absolute darkness in a dense forest. You had to hold on to the belt of the person walking in front of you or you could have got lost. A lorry was waiting for us. It was so tightly covered with canvas that we couldn't breathe... we reached Austria...”

[On the way from Austria to Italy] “The crossing went smoothly. Somebody appeared and we went off at night after him, in a lorry. We reached the foot of the mountains and came to a steep ravine. Here two Austrian policemen counted us, we got the impression that they had been bribed in advance... We marched from morning till night - the women and children too. We climbed winding paths. We managed to keep going, resting every now and then. Towards the end of the journey some young men collapsed, and we had to carry them on our backs... When we reached the mountain hostel, young men came down to meet us and helped the weak and the children. It was all organized...”

**Source: Testimony of Zvi Katz, Yad Vashem Archive, 03-4433 (Hebrew).**