

From the Yad Vashem Archives: Letter from Vienna testifies to the events of *Kristallnacht*

by Lital Beer

■ “The Blessed House [synagogue] was attacked; all of its windows were shattered, its benches broken, the *parochet* ripped to shreds, and the Torah scrolls hurled outside. The entire contents of the synagogue were destroyed; the Torahs were thrown to the ground and ripped, and three scrolls were taken, along with the Holy Ark. The black memorial plaques on the walls were also broken.”

So wrote Arnold (Aharon) Rosenfeld to his son Haim (Robert) in Haifa, a few days after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in his hometown of Vienna: “All night long, until 1 am, we could hear the screams of the victims. Tonight we visited Eugen Hess, and the alley looked like it had suffered a snowfall. It was entirely covered with feathers tossed from the apartments.” Later in his letter, Rosenfeld adds: “Is there any chance that Wilson will intervene when he hears about what is happening? How can we expect help if this does not become known?”

Had Arnold Rosenfeld been referring to the US Ambassador in Germany? Was he trying to transmit an encrypted request to his family to publicize the information? The letter arrived at its destination safely, due to Rosenfeld’s resourcefulness in disguising it as a newspaper wrapper, thus escaping the notice of the censors. This is a testimony written in real time by a person who did not live to tell his story. Arnold Rosenfeld finishes his letter

with the words: “May it be His Will that the blessed Lord will help us so that we can relate better tidings. Bless the Lord we are healthy. Regards and kisses, your father.”

Some two years later, Rosenfeld was exiled to Theresienstadt, where he died, apparently

in 1943. His son Haim gave the letter to the Yad Vashem Archives in 1987, shortly before his death.

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