M E M O H I E S
O F T W O
G E N E R A T I O N S

Reverend Alexander Jurowitz

VOLUME TWO

translated from the Yiddish
by Rabbi Amram Prero

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2024

Book Two:

I.	Conscription compels my Departure from Home	1.
II.	Liberated from the Army, I approach my Marriage	7.
III.	The Wedding	9.
IV.	What transpired after Pesach	12.
V.	The Town of Svislah	17.
VI.	I receive Shechitah Certification	24.
VII.	On the Estate of my Patron	30.
VIII.	I am tested in the Village	32.
IX.	I become a Svislaver Ba'alebos	37.
X.	My wife gives birth to a Son; she grows ill	40.
XI.	Our Sojourn in Minsk	42.
XII.	I depart, leaving All behind	51.
XIII.	I spend Rosh Hashanah in Loyev; a kindly Rebbe takes me in	54.
XIV.	My Sabbath at the Rebbe's	58.
XV.	Saturday Night; Payments and Petitions	63.
XVI.	Rosh Hashanah and Tashlich	65.
XVII.	Tashlich	68.
XVIII.	In Kiev	75.
XIX.	My Adventures in Krementchug	81.
XX.	My Cantor arrives; we are in Business	86.
XXI.	The German Colonies and the Peasant Villages	90.
XXII.	The Yekaterinaslaver Jewish Colonies 50 Years Ago	93.
XXIII.	The Second Colony; the Rav tends the Oven	98.
XXIV.	The Brith in the Synagogue	101.
XXV.	The City of Pavlograd	103.
XXVI.	The Shochtim of Pavlograd	108.

XXVII.	The Same Routine but another Name	113.
XXVIII.	I begin to study Russian	116.
XXIX.	My Family joins me; I become a Melamed again	118.
XXX.	A Disaster overtakes us after Sukkoth	121.
XXXI.	My Nephew becomes my Partner	125.
XXXII.	I take Leave of my Nephew	128.
XXXIII.	After my Nephew's Departure	130.
XXXIV.	The 1905 Revolution and the Pogroms	133.
XXXV.	Our City during the Revolution	136.
XXXVI.	The Polish Soldiers in Russia	140.
XXXVII.	OurDaughter marries in Sedlitz	144.
XXXVIII.	I take my Leave of Pavlograd	146.
XXXIX.	We settle in the Townlet Yenaveh	149.
XL.	How I fared until my Wife arrived	154.
XLI.	Our Life in Yenaveh until our Departure for America	156.
XLII.	Why We had to leave Yenaveh, and Russia too	158.
XLIII.	We travel to Yekaterinaslav, to take leave of our Children	168.
XLIV.	We begin our Journey to America	171.
XLV.	On the Road: the Yelloveh Station	174.
XLVI.	The First in the seven Steps of Hell for the Immigrants	178.
XLVII.	Second Phase: Onward to Bremen	182.
XLVIII.	We arrivein Bremen; we board the Ship	187.
XLIX.	We receive our Ship Cards	191.
L.	We board the ship "Kellin"	194.
LI.	Our voyage on the Sea	197.
LII.	We sail from Philadelphia to Galveston	203.
LIII.	We arrive in Galveston	204.
LIV.	City of San Antonio 22 Years Ago	211.

LV.	The Rabbi, the Cantor, the Shochet, the Mohel -- All in One!	215.
LVI.	San Antonio Today, 20 Years Later	220.
LVII.	We settle in San Antonio: my Business Disaster	223.
LVIII.	The Pattern of my Life resumes	230.
LIX.	An historic Change in Agudas Achim; accidentally, a new Cantor!	233
LX.	Rabbi Gerstein dies campaigning; a new Rabbi is engaged	240.
LXI.	We bring our Children to America	245.
LXII.	The Times change. . .	249.
LXIII.	The Balfour Declaration	253.
LXIV.	Rev. Lubel discharges me; I open my Butcher Shop	256.
LXV.	The American Rabbi's Lot ~~is the~~ Lot of European Women	260.
LXVI.	And a new King arose who did not know Education!	265.
LXVII.	Our Triumvirate is torn asunder	268.
LXVIII.	My 71st Year -5691	270.
LXIX.	Synagogue Jews, Jews without a Synagogue, German Jews, Half-Jews, Country Jews	275.
LXX.	The "Country Jews"	279.
LXXI.	The year 1932	281.
LXXII.	We are What We are, but Jews We are!	283.

CHAPTER ONE

Conscription Compels My Departure From Home.

I could not yet marry, because I had not yet been counted in the Naruzhnem Vid.** (Note: Young men older than twenty one were excused from military conscription. They registered for the Naruzhnem Vid, to be accorded this exemption.) I was too young, and did not look twenty one. It was decided that my older brother would register in my place, and that I should leave town until after the conscription season.

I went to a small town called Krasne, remote from my home town. I settled into a yeshivah bochur's little hotel. Then I went to the synagogue, took a gemorrah, and began to study. At Mincha time, people drifted into the synagogue, and they saw "a new face," sitting over the Talmud. They came over, welcomed me warmly, and asked all about me. I ~~merely~~ only told them that I was from Berezhin, had studied in Volozhin, and had come here to study.

After Ma'ariv, the most prominent Jew of the town called me over and invited me to his house. I stayed there until after Sukkoth. He accepted me unreservedly, even though he was a confirmed chassid and I was a mithnagged.

The town was small. But a giant of a Torah scholar, the Gaon Reb Aryeh Humener, came from there. He became the Head of the Minsk Beth Din. There were both fine scholars and affluent Jews in that town. But, curiously, even the wealthy lived in a most modest manner.

During the weekdays their diet consisted of coarse thick bread and the leanest of porridges. Even the poor bread they did not eat until it was several days old. (I suppose that was because one is tempted to eat more of fresh bread.) They burned no lamp, no candles, except on the Sabbath. Instead, they had a large bottle of water, with some gas on top, and a cotton wick. This gave all the illumination they had. The typical house furniture consisted of a large white table and several long benches.

Despite all of this self-deprivation, they lived happily, without worries. They would go to the synagogue twice daily. The schul was chassidic, according to the Lubavitch tradition.* (* The Lubavitcher are a chassidic movement.) In a separate, inner room, the mithnagdim prayed. They had no quarrel with each other. They lived together in peace.

The chassidic Jew with whom I was residing lived in much finer style. He was, after all, the notable of the town, Gabbai of the synagogue and leader of the community. Even chassidim love a yeshivah bochur, whenever they detect a chassidic joy

in him. In me they detected a truly chassidic soul. They were completely correct in this, as it turned out.

I remained with that fine Jew through the Festival, and on Simchat Torah my chassidic soul impelled me into a measure of drinking no less than his. In truth, I did not drink excessively--no more than the three angels ate of Father Abraham's food. But it was sufficient to propel me to the joyful chassidic heights of the real drinkers. I joined in the chassidic niguním (tunes), and in their dances. In a word, I fit in so harmoniously that I was quickly accepted as one of their own.

I should have remained there happily until the end of the military conscription period, but at the end of Sukkot I had to depart, under interesting circumstances.

At the conclusion of the Festival, my landlord made detailed inquiry of me concerning my father, what trade he pursued, and all about my family. While I replied politely, I wondered all the while as to his interest. (Just as Joseph's brothers were puzzled by his curiosity concerning their family, especially their old father.)

Several days later my puzzlement was removed. As the saying goes, the cat came out of the bag. As I was sitting at my gemorrah, a shadchan came over to me and proposed a shiddach with my landlord's daughter! He extolled that girl

extravagantly, and promised a most generous nadan, with an unusual number of years of kest. She was an only child, and her father was ~~an~~ affluent, and prominent leader of the community. This and much more he described to me, ~~and~~ he wanted my reply at once. A quandary, no? I could scarcely be engaged to two brides-to-be. And yet, how could I stay on, there, and decline the proposal? But if I did decline, where could I go, since the conscription prospect was very real?

I delayed my response several days. Those days were most awkward for me. I felt very guilty and could not bear to look at my "bride" ~~feeling very guilty~~. It was obvious she had taken a liking to me, and was anticipating our marriage happily. Every time she smiled at me, ~~whenever she exhibited friendly feelings,~~ my conscience stabbed me. I realized that I could remain there no longer. I told a white lie to her father. (One is permitted to tell such a lie, in the cause of peace in family life.) I said that I had received a letter from home, summoning me back. I had to return at once. I bade them all a friendly farewell, took my meager possessions, and goodbye!

Unable to go home, for the conscription threat was yet alive, I went instead to another small town near Minsk. I followed my normal pattern. That is, I found my way into a synagogue, took up a gemorra, and began to study. The truth

is that my mind was not at all on the text. I was pre-occupied with thoughts of what I had just experienced.

At Mincha time, the town Rav approached me. He was an older man, with a warm and pleasant demeanor. We conversed on both worldly--that is, secular--matters, and then in Torah terms. We tested each other, although to a casual observer it would have appeared an innocent chat. I soon realized that he was not a great scholar. (I knew this, because he obviously judged me to be one--and I knew that I was not!) I hasten to ~~interpolate~~ add, however, that I speak in relative terms. In those days, every Rav was well versed in Torah, Talmud, commentaries. Compared only to the really overwhelming scholars of our day, he was somewhat less.

There was a maxim, in those days, to the effect that an ignorant Rav, a poor prince, and a peasant who was clever, are alike. The "ignorant" Rav was still well learned; the "poor" prince still had more than most non-princes; the "clever" peasant still had the low intelligence of peasantry. Now, of course, this maxim does not hold water. Royalty in our day, today, is often genuinely poor; the peasants have come a long way up in the world, and--lamentable but true--there are now rabbis who are woefully ignorant.* ~~Note~~ *The author uses the Yiddish word 'ra-byes', denoting Reform-ordinated men. In the 1930's, Hebrew language, Talmud, Commentaries, were absent

from the HUC curriculum. Today, of course, the situation is vastly improved.)

Recently, a Jew from a small Texas town complained to me that his community had taken a rabbi, who was an ignoramous. I observed that they had not taken a rabbi, who was an ignoramous; they had taken an ignoramous and made him a Rav! The fact is that any small town Rav of the days of my youth would be reckoned an important Torah scholar now.

I found favor in the eyes of the Rav. Through his intercession, I was brought food to the synagogue daily, with great respect. I remained there, patiently studying, for several weeks, until I received word from home that my priziv had ended. I--that is, of course, my brother who was standing in for me--was judged to be twenty four years old, thus no longer eligible for military service. (Since my brother was twelve years older than me, my family divided the ~~number~~ difference, setting his age at six years younger than he was and six years older than I ~~was~~.)

Thus I managed to cheat the Czar. But of course he cheated us much worse, so no pangs of conscience disturbed me. I reckoned that it was far preferable to serve as the son-in-law to the shochet than as a soldier to the antiSemitic Czar.

For this noble sacrifice which conceivably saved my life --or at least readiness to sacrifice(he could have been in-

duoted)--I have been grateful to my brother Abraham, of blessed memory, all of my life. Beloved brother, it is many years since you were called to the Eternal World. You do not need my thanks, and my thanks cannot reach you. But I deem it my sacred obligation to recall your great kindness with gratitude. You were, for me, a true brother, especially in the day of my need. May your memory be for a blessing. When my children, or their children, will read this, they will know how good and pure a man you were.

CHAPTER TWO

Liberated From the Army, I Approach My Marriage

The news that I no longer had to fear conscription gave me a sense of relief on two counts. First, I was free from the fear of having to be a Russian soldier. Second, my approaching marriage would end my days of wandering in various yeshivahs, eating at strangers' tables, living an itinerant and rootless life. I felt that it was high time I settled down.

Upon returning to my parents' home, I learned of yet another cause for joy. My older sister's wedding plans were complete. She would be married within several weeks. And so

my own wedding would be clear of any obstacles. I was ready!

As far as my parents were concerned, there was no problem at all. They had no preparations to undertake. All preparations and arrangements, by honored custom, were the responsibility of the bride's father. Indeed, only he and I had anything to prepare for the wedding: I had to equip myself with a Torah lecture for the Wedding Seudah (Feast), and he with the dowry and the wedding finery (trousseau, other dresses, veil, etc.).

My challenge was easier for me to meet than was his for him. As modest as was my store of Torah learning, his store of worldly goods was far more modest. Even though he had two sources of livelihood--he was both a shochet and a chazzan, as you will recall-/ he managed quite easily to remain a very poor man or, as the saying went then, "poverty stricken in both pockets".

Then, in the small Russian towns, a man in his profession had ample tzores (hardships) and miseries. In his case, with two professions, he naturally had a double portion of both. ~~But the abundance did not extend to his material lot; there he was woefully lacking~~. And yet, he was keenly eager to have a learned young man as his son-in-law, although this meant an extra heavy obligation of dowry and kest, as well as the taxing expenses of a wedding. But if he had little of

financial resources, he had plenty of resources--especially experience!--in the worry department. That is to say, he was a seasoned, capable worrier. In this area he was an expert. For he served as <u>chazzan</u> and <u>shochet</u> some fifty years and never stopped worrying!

Immediately after Purim, a letter from him arrived, inviting us all to come there for an Adar 20 wedding. He had completed all arrangements.

CHAPTER THREE

<u>The Wedding</u>

At the designated time, we drove up for the wedding, my father, my mother, my brother Aaron. (I also was along.) Toward evening, as we approached the town, although it was muddy and the snow was still falling, we were greeted by a group of musicians. As they played joful tunes, my in-laws, together with dozens of boys and girls, went forward to ward us, singing their welcome.

Outside my in-laws' house stood many men and women and children, all dressed in festive garb. They were ready for a wedding. It took about an hour for the procession, the formal welcome to the groom, and the veiling of the bride. When all of this required ritual was ended, the

little band began to play again. The escorts were already holding the candles in their hands, preparatory to leading the groom to the chuppah.

My brother Aaron demurred! He demanded that my father-in-law transfer to me the two hundred rubel dowry, before the wedding could proceed. This is what was written in the T'naim document: that the father of the bride must produce the dowry before the marriage could take place.

My father-in-law was duly asked, "Do you have the money?"

He shrugged his shoulders, as though to say, "How foolish can you get? From where can a poor shochet get such a large sum?"

Normally he was a quiet, reticent man. When something had to be said, his wife spoke for him. She was the spokeswoman, the Eshet Chayil. In this instance too she took the lead, disputing with my brother. Her friends, the women present, assisted her, to the point where my brother's voice was lost in the turmoil. The Rav of their town, and the bride's brother, the Lapitch Rav, also intervened.

Finally a compromise was worked out. My father-in-law would convey a sale document on his house. That is, the document would state that if within two years time my father-in-law had not delivered the full dowry to me, his house would belong to me. We all agreed. He wrote out the

conditional Bill of Sale. My dowry was assured. We went off to the wedding...

At the post-wedding feast, I delivered a Torah lesson, as was expected. Permit me to confess that this lecture was far from a masterpiece. Indeed, it was quite poor. My tongue would not say what my brain commanded. I rambled, and I was confused. But, now that I think of it, if one considers that lecture's worth in terms of the gifts my new relatives gave us, the lecture was splendid, worth far more!

Ah, it was another world, then, with a completely different attitude. Then, lectures were delivered without consideration for the fees to be paid; today, many alleged scholars receive lecture fees without delivering a worthwhile lecture! Then a Rav had much Torah but small remuneration; today it is frequently the reverse. Then, the school had a rich curriculum without proper organization; now there is fine organization without a curriculum. You can find many such distinctions. When was it better? Which is preferable, as it was then, or as it is today? Let whoever will, give his opinion. I have mine!

CHAPTER FOUR

What Transpired After Pesach

The first week after the wedding, the traditional seven days of feasting, it was a happy scene, in that house. There was eating, drinking--most of it left over from the wedding. Many people dropped in with "mazal tovs", "l'chayims", and the simchah continued unabated.

Several weeks later, as Pesach approached, the prospects for my father-in-law brightened. After all, which Jewish ba'ale-bosteh (housewife) did not nurture several geese and a fat hen or two, for the Festival of Freedom? And not a few fattened up a turkey. One needs schmaltz for the kneidlach (dumplings), and a luscious piece of meat for the Seder! Since it was unthinkable that anyone would eat non-kosher meat, the shochet naturally was indispensable. And so he had a sudden spurt upward in his livelihood. In addition, my father-in-law was a partner of the baker in the podrad--the matzah-baking facility. Thus it was a very good season for him. Since Pesach is, additionally, a holiday when food of festive nature is prepared for the entire week--in contrast to the poor man's menu throughout the year--, we anticipated the holiday with pleasure.

I used to go to the synagogue daily with my little sack (tallith and tefillin), quite content. Following the Service, I studied a page of the Talmud with relish. Then I would return home, have my kest breakfast leisurely. (Finally I was dining at no stranger's table.) The son-in-law, you see, does not eat his kest as the yeshivah bochur eats his teg. In his case, it is his, for it his due, as contracted in the marriage terms. And, at least at first, the in-laws are quite pleased. They have married off a daughter--a heavy burden thus removed from them--, and to a learned young man. Indeed, so satisfatory was the match that all the neighbors envied them.

And so each of us in his/her own way, found pleasure in the pattern of life, until after Pesach.

The Festival ended, and the days of summer began. There are many for whom the summer season is a welcome time. This is not true for small town shochtim. For in those years, who needed meat during week days? Almost everyone made do with dairy krupnick. Who needed to have a bird slaughtered in mid-week? Perhaps the tax collector. (Note: There was a tax levied on kosher meat. The post of tax collector was accorded as patronage.) Maybe for a pregnant woman. Or for one seriously ill. Or if a chicken was not too well. In all other households, the citizenry contented themselves with the "slaughter" of a Lithuanian herring. And for the Sabbath

one cow and some dozen chickens sufficed for the entire population. So go make a living from such minimal work--and maintain a son-in-law with kest in addition!

I noticed that my in-laws were sad. No longer was there the cheerful mood of previous days. At the same time, it did not escape my attention that numerous people came to the house and spoke harshly with them. I understood that these were creditors, to whom money was owed, probably from the wedding. My young bride, too, walked around with downcast face, but she tried to keep her worry from me.

I refrained from comment. But I felt that I was not acting in just fashion. It was not fair that I, a young and able man, should be a burden on the old couple; that I should go along having them support me and my wife, when they were so poor. I must help them somehow. But how? Money with which to do some business I did not have. Other young men in my situation could do this, with their dowry. But mine was not yet given to me, only promised. With the Bill of Sale my father-in-law had given me, conditionally, I could secure no inventory. A skilled workman I was not, and I had no profession.

What a bargain the chazzan-te (chazzan's wife) had found! For her own precious child, her only daughter, she had found a young man who could not earn enough for even one

meal!

This was the first time in my life that I was compelled to think in practical terms of my future. I realized at last that before one marries he should have a source of livelihood, and not depend upon others. Well, it was too late to bemoan my former impracticality. What should I do now? I consulted with my wife. Even together we could find no answer. I put it to my in-laws. I told them that I wanted to help out, but I did not know how. They were well taken with my attitude; pleased that I was sensitive to the need, and that although I was not legally obligated I nevertheless felt a moral duty. They presented a plan.

They counselled that I should learn <u>shechitah</u> (ritual slaughtering), so that I could secure a post as a <u>shochet</u>. And meanwhile, during the time of my preparation, I could take in several boys and teach them. Heaven forbid that I should become a <u>melamed</u>! This would be but a temporary measure, to bridge over the current need. (The very idea of my becoming a <u>melamed</u> was anathema for them; far too low on the social scale.)

This counsel of my in-laws appealed to me. (Did I have any alternatives?) Even though my fantasies, my youthful golden visions, would thus be destroyed, and my mother's cherished dream, to see her son a Rav, would thus evaporate,

yet I knew this was what I had to do.

I had studied until I was eighteen, wandered from yeshivah to yeshivah, labored, suffered privation, bent my back over the gemorra for three long years in the Volozhin Yeshivah, and I finally attained the great height--after making a splendid shiddach--of preparing to become a shochet (which I could have done in total ignorance), and in the meantime half a melamed! What glorious heights I had scaled! But I knew that I must not grow bitter. I had to be realistic, face life as a mature man with responsibility. There was no better road, so I must travel this one, with proper resolve, and in good spirit.

And so I undertook my dutiful destiny, my woeful lot.

No sooner had I determined upon this course, then I received an invitation from the most affluent pillar of our community to teach his young son. This was the illustrious Rabbi Sholom Chayim Levin, the father of the world renowned Zionist leader, Dr. Shmaryahu Levin. He paid me as much as a melamed received for an entire semester for an entire roomful of children. People once again envied the chazzante her wondrously fortuitous match for her daughter.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Town of Svislah

The small city called Svislah, where I lived with my in-laws, became a melamed, and eventually worked as a shochet, was located between Minsk and Bobruisk. Two rivers touched the place, the Svislah and the Berazha. There were some one hundred and fifty Jewish families residing there.

This town was not much different from all such towns of its size in those years. There were more Jews than Christians, and they occupied the center of town, with their shops. There was an imposing synagogue, with a Rav, a youngish man, who was very well learned, both in Torah and in secular studies. His name was Rabbi Avraham Moshe, of blessed memory. The shochet-chazzan, as you know well by now, was my father-in-law, Rabbi Zusha Ber Shatz, of blessed memory. He was then a man of seventy, a pious, righteous Jew and a fine lamdan (Torah scholar). He used to spend almost all of his time studying Torah. He had committed the entire "Ein Ya'akov" (classic text of law) to memory. My mother-in-law, her memory for a blessing, was his second wife. She was a true Eshet Chayil (ideal Jewish woman), much younger than he, and she managed the entire household. Everything was done

according to her will.

My in-laws had four children, a daughter (my wife Sarah Rachel, of blessed memory) and three sons. One of them was a Rav of extremely dubious merit. He was tall, skinny,, with shifty eyes, a scraggly little beard once yellowish and now grey. He was innocent of any learning. It was with difficulty that he managed to recite a chapter of Mishnayoth (basic Talmudic text). He was able to write an address in Russian with seven errors. (In all fairness, few in the town could do better.) Since from his Rabbinate he could obviously earn no livelihood, he became a "melmed dardeke", a teacher of little children. He kept his books in Yiddish. (Note: It was the mark of the learned that they kept personal records in Hebrew.) Frequently he would do things upside down. Example: instead of inscribing someone as having been born, he would inscribe as having died. One of his sources of income was the preparation of documents certifying eligibility for marriage, or a Get (Jewish divorce). His standard fee for all such documents was half a rubel. But when he committed an error, that is, inscribing it not precisely as the laws required, then the "victim" had to have his wife--a bright, able young Eshet Chayil--re-do it. In that event half a rubel would not do. She charged three rubel. But then you knew that it was done correctly.

There were three categories of people in the town: the learned, the half-learned, and the common folk. There were also divisions of other kinds. There were the affluent, the well to do, and the poor. Actually, there were only two wealthy families, the Levins, Dr. Shmaryahu's parents, and the Broides. These two families lived in perpetual strife with each other. The Broide family's fortunes had already begun to decline, while the Levin's star was on the rise. This was especially noteworth in the case of Dr. Shmaryahu's father, Shmuel Chayim. He was a lumber merchant, and a man of acknowledged integrity. His father, the patriarch of the Levin family, Rabbi Zalkind, was a renowned philanthropist and a very pious man.

Within the Jewish population there was a group of some thirty families who were closely bound to each other. They were known as "Polyshukes", having all come from Palesia. They all secured their livelihood from one occupation; actually two occupations, one in the winter and the other in summer time.

During the winters, when the rivers were frozen over, they would drive wagons on sleds--that is, no wheels but blades for travel on ice--selling or trading their goods in the surrounding villages. Summers, they transferred their work to dry land. That is to say, they still worked in the water, gathering logs and large pieces of wood freed

from the melted ice, bind them up, and sell them to the builders and lumber dealers in such major cities as Kiev. They were hard working, strong, diligent people. Their appetites were prodigious. Of them it could well be said not "three who ate as one", but "one who ate as three". They were strong as giants, very physical. But they were also completely trustworthy, honest. During the week they pursued their occupation unswervingly. On Sabbaths, however, they observed all the Jewish laws and customs scrupulously, just like all the other Jews.

Unhappily, among the learned there were men of low character. The worst among these were two brothers. One of them was the kosher meat tax collector. From him we received terrible trouble, as did the families of <u>shochtim</u> in all the smaller Russian towns in those days.

One good thing could be said for him: his brother Zisha was even worse. They had a third brother, a <u>shochet</u> in some other small town, and they sought to have him designated as the <u>shochet</u> for our town. I was therefore as "a bone in their throat". For they understood that I would step into that post. And so they looked feverishly for some fault, some weakness in me, that would preclude my appointment. Zisha considered himself the most pious and the most learned Jew in town. It was his custom to teach a page of

Talmud every day after the Morning Service. This arena I selected as the field of battle. I taunted him with a bombardment of questions he could not answer. Finally, in defeat, he stopped lecturing altogether. But of course that scarcely earned me his love. His animosity against me deepened, but he was helpless, because the townspeople understood, and sided with me.

My father-in-law, sad to say, fell ill. I had not yet qualified for the license to do <u>shechita</u> by myself, that is, without supervision. They did permit me to do the ritual slaughtering, but only with someone qualified standing by. Thursday was the day set aside for <u>shechitah.</u> My father-in-law was unable to arise from his bed. The Rav instructed me to do the slaughtering, and if a questionable growth should be found, I was to bring the meat to my father-in-law at home, and remove it in his sight. I did as the Rav said.

The following morning, Zisha's son brought some slaughtered meat to us at home. He showed it to my father-in-law and said, "My father has sent this meat back to you, because it is <u>treif</u> (not kosher). Your son-in-law slaughtered it, and he is not a qualified <u>shochet</u>."

I went over to the synagogue, to see how far this evil report on me had gotten. As soon as I entered, all faces turned toward me, as on Sabbath Eve when the worshippers turn

toward the synagogue entrance at "Boee B'shalom"("Come in peace", chanted to the Sabbath Bride). One man ran up to me with a shout (the Rav, also ill, was not present), and the others followed him with loud cries and complaints. How could I have done such a terrible thing? I told them that I had done precisely as the Rav had instructed me. But my words were"a voice in the wilderness". They continued to harrangue me.

At that point Rabbi Shmuel Chayim Levin (Shmaryahu's illustrious father) came into the synagogue. He quieted them with these words."The young man tells us that he did what our esteemed Rav told him to do. Let us go to our Rav and inquire of him. If the young man is not telling us the truth, there will be time enough to shout at him."

Zisha, of course, was not happy with this counsel, but he was overruled by the congregation. Many of them went with us to the Rav. Shmuel Chayim accompanied us. And, as our Tradition has it, "The Satan also was in their midst". That is, Zisha and his brother came along. I went to the Rav, or more correctly, I was led to the Rav as a prisoner is led to trial.

The Rav, seeing a crowd of his parishioners, with the young shochet in their midst, at first thought that I must have committed some heinous crime. Immediately he asked,

"What crime has been committed here?" Zisha replied at once,

"What crime, indeed! This young man is causing good Jews to eat <u>treif</u> meat! He slaughtered a cow with no one standing by, and he has the chutzpah to declare that you told him he could!"

"Do not shout so", said the Rav. "He is a fully competent shochet. I did indeed permit him to slaughter the cow. In fact, I am eating of that very meat now, at my lunch. All of you, good Jews, go home and eat with a good appetite. It is kosher without any doubt."

The crowd dispersed, satisfied. Only the two brothers stayed behind, and Shmuel Chayim with them. The brothers began to argue their case.

"How can you permit that young man to be our <u>shochet</u>?" they demanded. "He is irreligious. He converses during the <u>dovvenen</u> (prayers). And look at his earlocks, how short they are! And his white collar, like the assimilated aristocrats! No, he is not fit to be a shochet here!"

The Rav responded that no authority even alludes to the length of earlocks necessary to qualify for a <u>shochet</u>. And if the young man interrupts his prayers with irrlevant conversation, he should be told not to do so."But a fine <u>shochet</u> he is; Torah scholarship he has. I bear witness to that. I shall give him <u>kabbalah</u> (certification as shochet).

He is qualified to be a shochet in any community of Jews, and here in our town as well. And if he wishes to wear a white collar, that will do him no harm in his profession."

They wanted to argue further, but here Rabbi Shmuel Chayim injected himself,

"Listen, my friends, it will not avail you. No matter how much you argue, this young man will remain our shochet, together with his father-in-law."

The brothers departed, humiliated, and gave us no more trouble. This Shmuel Chayim remained my best friend and protector. I taught his children in his house for a long while. This was my first exposure to the professional teaching career, a burden I have not shed in all the years until now.

CHAPTER SIX

I Receive Shechitah Certification

In several months--the year was 5637--I travelled to Boibrisk and qualified for my kabbalah upon examination by the rabbis and shochtim there, and subsequently upon my testing by our Rav and my father-in-law. I was duly designated the shochet, together with my father-in-law of course,

for the town of Svislah.

I satisfied the brothers, at least in part, by letting my earlocks grow even longer than they had demanded. But my white collar I refused to give up. In all other respects I complied fully with the portrait of a small town shochet of the period, even to the wearing of a sash around the waist of my kapoteh, and my trouser legs inside my boots.

In a word, I became a partner with my father-in-law. We were really equal partners, for he added his Cantorate to the shechitah, and I added my teaching. And both of us, together, remained abjectly poor!

I would have been satisfied with the arrangement, but my mother-in-law was unhappy, and she gave me no peace. What displeased her was that they had to give me one half of the cantorial income, and from me they received only one half of my half-time teaching. To mollify her, I began to teach full time, in addition to my shechitah. I did this for an entire year, but it tired me terribly. And she still complained that I was taking half of their livelihood. This irked me constantly. Where was justice? Not only was my dowry not given to me, and not only was my <u>kest</u> not given, either (for I was paying much of my own income), but working double time was not even appreciated.

My unhappiness stemmed from all sides. In the cheder the little children taxed my patience; in the town, the citizenry bothered me as customers; in the house my mother-in-law nagged me. I brooded on this, and sought a way to extricate myself from these entrapping nets.

The proposition I put to my in-laws was this: if they would give me three hundred rubel for my shechitah appointment (which could be transferred to another, as a concession) and for my nadan, and for my kest, I would consider all obligations met in full, and they would be free of any debts to me.

My father-in-law had a son by a previous marriage who was a shochet in another small town. When he was informed of this opportunity, he liked it. He agreed at once, came to us, paid me the three hundred rubel, became a partner with my in-laws--and I was free! Indeed, for the first time in my life I was not only unconcerned as to where I would find my next meal; I had the grand sum of three hundred rubel! I was an affluent citizen! I could now become a businessman! My fate would be in my own hands; no more being beholden to others; no more public servant; my own boss!

Well, the prospect of going into business was intoxicating, but what kind of business? What did I know of

the commercial world? I was advised that I should go to my brother-in-law, the lumber dealer in Yekaterinaslav. With his extensive experience as a merchant, he would be able to suggest a suitable business for me. I acted upon this counsel, left my wife and one year old daughter in a rented house (with enough money for their needs), and went off to seek my destiny in the world of commerce.

My brother-in-law welcomed me warmly, and assured me that he would help. Indeed, he did. Within several weeks we purchased a <u>barlikeh</u>, a wood-hauling boat, to carry logs from one camp to another on the Dnieper. We engaged a boatman to run the boat, and our business venture was launched. It went well from the start.

I was filled with joy. I was liberated from the shechitah, and from the classroom. I was a merchant! I sent money home, with each of my frequent letters.

The river, however, is navigable only in the warm months. Soon the frost and snow and ice came over the water. With autumn, the edges of the river began to freeze over, and business there ceased. Every boatowner sought a mooringplace for his boat, over the winter. We also docked ours.

What could I do to earn a livelihood during the winter? Suddenly I realized that I was more fortunate than all of the other boat merchants. For I had an income source that

was impervious to weather! I could open my "store" during the cold months, and I knew that I could always secure "customers", for my "inventory" was constantly in demand. And so it was! Within one week I found an affluent Jew, a lumber dealer with two children, and he engaged me to teach his children over the winter, at a handsome salary! He gave me kest as well. Another advantage was that my patron lived near the river, so that in my free time I could go down and check on our boat. That boat was nesting peacefully at the water's edge, waiting patiently for us to set her in motion once more; when I would be free from my teaching, and she free from the ice.

That winter was extremely harsh and long. Purim came and went; I was finished with my teaching agreement. And still the waters were frozen. I realized that before the ice melted entirely, and the boat was ready, it would be Pesach time. This would be a good time to visit my family at home--especially as I had been informed that I had a new daughter. And so I spent the Festival at home with my wife and children. But I had the clear understanding that immediately after Pesach I should return to my business.

We had a very pleasant holiday. I invited my former providers of my livelihood--the pillars of the community--to have Kiddush at our home, and played the gracious host.

Everyone envied the Chazzan and Chazzente once again, for see how fortunate they were. They had snagged a son-in-law who was gifted in so many directions. He was a shochet, a melamed, a boat owner. Even mybrother-in-law, who had purchased my shechitah concession, envied me, for he was already in deep trouble in that town. Neither my father-in-law nor my mother-in-law could stand him--they always quarreled--and the people of the communtty liked him no more. He was at the point of giving up his shechitah and going into some other line of work.

Numerous prominent people urged me to take back my shechitah "franchise" from my brother-in-law. But I declined. Once was enough! To returned to one's "divorced" was unwise. Immediately after yom tov I prepared to depart for my boat business. But my wife, and also my in-laws, pleaded with me to remain. They assured me that my partner in the boat would surely return my investment to me. And if I did not want, or secure, the local shechitah, I could easily get a post as shochet in any one of a number of nearby towns.

In fact, several days later a letter arrived. It was from a respected man in a town some thirty viorsts from us, inviting me to come there as both a shochet and teacher for his son, for a fine salary and kest. I permitted myself to be persuaded, and I returned to shechitah and teaching. It is more difficult to become a merchant from a teacherthan the reverse...

CHAPTER SEVEN

On The Estate Of My Patron

Mr. Levin had bought a large tract from one of the wealthy landowners. It had some fifteen wooded fields, and a large fifteen-room furnished house stood near the river. Mr. Levin was a man of means, a Lubavitch chassid, who presided over a scrupulously observant Jewish home. He himself was a highly learned man, both in Torah and secular studies. In addition, he was most hospitable.

He was naturally concerned that his children should not only be nurtured in a warmly religious home, but that they should receive the best possible Jewish education. He had two sons, twelve and eight years old, two daughters--one married, the other eighteen years old. His family filled that spacious house. There were several cottages on his holding, for the peasants who worked the land.

It was to this generous affluent Jew that I came, to teach his children and his son-in-law, and to serve as the shochet. Occasionally I would be expected to drive out to slaughter in the neighboring villages. Although I bore both titles, melamed and shochet, I confess that this was no heavy load. I taught only three or four hours daily. The

schechita was also not overly time consuming, and there were ~~nieter~~ neither the difficult customers nor the tax collector. Evenings we would go foe a stroll, or I would take the children in the fields. Every morning and evening I would bathe in the river. My kest was better than at my in-laws.

Each Friday morning, whenever I wished it, a horse and wagon was arranged for me to spend Shabbos at home, which was about thirty viorsts away. In general, I lived qutte well there. Often I would engage my patron in disputations regarding chassidism, and he never took umbrage, even though my views were contrary to his. Once I loaned him a book by Peretz Smolianski. He began to read it with pleasure, but soon I observed him throwing the book to the floor and cry out, "The devil take him!" After awhile, he could not resist picking it up again, and continuing reading. He was a remarkably tolerant man. Although himself a confirmed chassid, he raised no objection when I read with his son-in-law the writings of the most progressive secular Jewish authors.

One Friday morning, as I was preparing for my journey home, a letter arrived from the Rav of our town, addressed to my patron Levin, summoning me to an examination by him, so that he could determine if I was qualified as a shochet, since I was slaughtering within his domain. The implication was clear, that if I did not subject myself to his examin-

ation, he would instruct all of his families not to eat from my shechitah. My patron did not take well to this ultimatum, and urged me to decline. But I told him that a shochet was obliged to heed a rabbi, who was charged with the religious responsibility for all of his families, and I did not want to have such a stain--my refusal--on my record. Besides, I assured him, I was completely confident in my knowledge and in my skill, and so I was unafraid.

As a matter of fact, I rather looked forward to the prospect of having it known that at the Levin estate there was a kosher, certified, qualified shochet. And so the horse and wagon were made ready, and the shamas and I rode off to the Rav.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I Am Tested in the Village

It was not so much a town as a village, with but twenty five to thirty Jewish families. But it did not lack anything that a much larger place had: a synagogue, a mikveh, a Rav, a shochet, a shamas, and all the usual community committees. Everything, to be sure, was on a small scale, but it was there. This village originated in Napoleon's time. On his retreat from Moscow, Napoleon made a stop there, it was recorded.

But the little town had not grown since then. My father-in-law had told me all about this place. About fifty years past, when he was a very young man, he had been the shochet there. It was a largely mithnag-dig (opposed to chassidic) townlet. Even the official style of prayers--nusach--was Ashkenazi. The most prominent man in town took a chassidic young man for his son-in-law. Since this young man could not bear the mithnag-dig style of worship, he refused to go to the synagogue. He worked on his father-in-law, and finally persuaded him to establish a minyan--chassidic, of course--in his house on the Sabbath.

The first Saturday there was a scant minyan (ten men). But the affluent householder served an elaborate kiddush (Sabbath repast) after the Service. And so the next Saturday there was an appreciably larger number. And so it grew. Eventually, this chassidic minyan rivalled the regular public synagogue Service. Indeed, there came a time when just about half of the Jews in the town paid allegiance to the chassidic mode.

The nineteenth of the month Kislev is, among chassidim, an important minor festival. They eat, drink, dance, and in general celebrate as only chassidim can. Well, on one such day, as the chassidim were singing and dancing--but especially drinking--, this son-in-law hopped up on a table,

and cried out to the chassidim--all quite inebriated by now--, "How long shall we permit the mithnagdim to rule over us? How long will they determine what nusach is to used in our synagogue? How long must we be exiled to a minyan in this house, rather than in a proper synagogue?"

And so,with fervor and joy, all that horde of chassidim marched over to the synagogue, and had a completely chassidic Ma'ariv!

Naturally, as soon as the others in town became aware of this travesty, they stormed the synagogue. A battle royal ensued. But the chassidim outfought the mithnagdim, and from that day on the nusach in that synagogue was chassidic.

The civil war did not end with that. The newly "converted" chassidim were unfamiliar with the chassidic prayers. And there was an insufficient number of chassidic siddurim (prayer books) in the town. Therefore, one or two of the major chassidic prayers which were not to be found in the ashkenazi siddur were printed on large cardboards, which were then put up on the walls. Whenever the congregation reached that point, all would look up from the siddur at the wall, and pray from there. It happened, once in awhile, that the lectern of a mithnaged was overturned by a chassid. Then the victim would tear the chassidic prayer from the wall. The war would thereupon resume. This went on for a long

time, and there was no peace.

The village was owned by a princely landowner named Shvintarchke, a local Russian nobleman. The townspeople, unable to resolve the issue, finally went to him, to settle it once and for all. He was eager to hear both sides. The chassidim presented theirs: their prayer text, called "K'gavneh", was torn from the wall. (They, of course, referred only to K'gavne, not defining it, since all knew it was the name of a prayer.) The mithnagdim, for their part, argued that their "shtender"(lectern) had been abused by the chassidim. The nobleman, not knowing that they were talking about inanimate objects, thinking "K'gavne" and Shtender were the leaders of the two factions, pronounced his decision. He did not like quarreling among his people. Let there be peace. Let K'gavna and Shtender both have a drink together, shake hands, and let there be peace!

The crowd heeded his words, drank the whiskey, and made peace as the paritz (nobleman) had decreed. And from then on, it was a chassidic village, but at peace.

My patron Levin had come to the village, to the Rav, every High Holy Days, until now, when his shochet--I--was challenged. What transpired during my examination would have historic effect, that was a certainty.

I entered the modest house of the Rav. It was a very small, unpretentious, sparsely furnished house. But there was a ~~big~~ tall book case wall. The Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmuds were there, as well as numerous commentaries, both of the early and the late masters. On the large table in front of the Rav many volumes were scattered. His own brows were knit over an especially difficult text.

As I came into this scene, I marvelled, "How remarkable that the Torah is to be found in such a remote corner!" For here, obviously, was a great scholar.

He took me in with great warmth and respect. We chatted a bit, at first, on general subjects, and then on matters of Torah. I showed him my kabbalah for shechitah from the great rabbis and shochtim. He interrogated me in the laws of shechita and the examination of animals (to see if they were kosher). He also examined my shechitah knives (which must be razor sharp, devoid of nicks). I also showed him my letters of recommendation--as to Torah scholarship--from the NETZIV of the Volozhin Yeshivah.

He was very pleased, and said, "It is a source of real pleasure for me that you are a shochet in my territory."

As it was close to the Sabbath, we went together to the bathhouse. Upon return, the rebbitzen gave me all of the delicious Sabbath delicacies. The Rav, after Shabbos, sent

me off with his own letter of highest recommendation. In brief, I left him not only physically cleansed--from the bathhouse--, but with my soul refreshed. My patron was immensely pleased that I had made the journey.

I remained there for a year, a summer and a winter. I would have been satisfied to stay on there, for many more years. But when I came home for Pesach, the Gvir (rich man) Kabakov, who was an uncle of my patron Levin, asked me to stay and teach his children in his house. He offered a considerably higher stipend than his nephew, and since taking his offer would mean that I could be at home, I accepted his invitation.

CHAPTER NINE

I Become A Svislaver Ba'alebos

This was in the first year of the reign of Alexander the Third. My wife gave birth to our third daughter at Shavuoth. I was very pleased with her. When she was born, my entire life took a happy turn. There I was, living at home and earning my livelihood without hardship--a respectable citizen. I taught the two Kabakov young men--one his son of eighteen and the other a grandson of ten--only

two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. All the melamdim in the little town envied me. Even my brother Ab, of blessed memory, said to me, "My brother, you are a fortunate fellow. You labor one third of the time I do, and you earn three times as much."

My brother, who had divorced his wife, had remarried. His second wife was beautiful, and they had two fine children, both boys. He would take them to the synagogue every day, and he had great satisfaction in their piety. He himself was very religious, but also very poor. Me he regarded as affluent. Think of it, I was getting one hundred and twenty rubel a semester for teaching two children, while he had ten pupils and received but fifty rubel for the semester. And in addition, he had to teach from early morning into evening, compared with my four hours daily. All of the melamdim naturally felt the same way.

Ah, well, as the saying goes, "Everything depends on <u>mazal</u>, even the Torah in the Ark". That is to say, even if you are a Torah teacher, you need mazal!

The princely Kabakov was among the most prosperous wood merchants in Russia. He was worth half a million rubel. (I did not count his money, but that is what they said.) He and his family were the leaders of the <u>Chabad</u> (Lubavitch) Chassidim. The patriarch and his two sons-in-law travelled

twice each year to visit the Lubavitcher Rebbe (head of th Movement). He had a minyan in his own home, and since I taught and lived there, it was inevitable that I should also become a chassid. (What does one not do for parnoseh, livelihood)?

The saying of our sages is correct. "The wealthy man has many friends." And so it was with Kabakov. Some hoped to gain something from him, in the way of business. Others were seeking a gift or a loan. Since in our small town there were many, unfortunately, who were in need of such kindnesses, the minyan in Kabakov's home was large. It became, in fact, the chassidic shtibel (little synagogue). I was designated the chazzan and the ba'al koreh. On Sabbaths, following lunch, I recited portions of TANIA, the classic book of Chabad Chassidism. They considered me a fine Reader. I suspect this was so because in chassidism it is necessary only to hear, but not understand, wh the teacher is saying. In truth, I, the Reader, also did not understand. So we were all in harmony.

After Minchah we conducted our Shalosh Seudas (the third Sabbath Meal), with singing and with a bit of stron spirits. This was an especially enthusiastic gathering when Kabakov's son-in-law, the father of one of my charges, was present. He was a most enthusiastic chassid, and

he was very pleased with me. First, the fact that I had become a chassid meant much to him. Second, his son was progressing quite well under my tutelage, and that, of course, pleased him greatly. He gave me anything I desired. With his help, I bought a house. He sent over lumber from his fields, and his workmen built the house as it should be. Thus I became a ba'alebos (a householding citizen) in our town! I continued to serve as shochet for the Kabakov family, and for his chassidim.

The second year I was there, 5643, my sainted mother died. It happened that I was in the town, not in the village, so I was able to keep the daily kaddish and to learn a chapter of MISHNAOTH in her memory each day. I was privileged to do this, since it was her lifelong wish. May her soul be bound up in the bonds of eternal life...

CHAPTER TEN

My Wife Gives Birth To a Son; She Grows Ill.

During the third year of my tenure at Kabakov's, our son Eliyahu was born. The Brith (Circumcision Service) was a grand affair. Two rabbis attended, the local Rav and my brother-in-law. The entire affair was arranged and

paid for by Kabakov, so he was the Sandek(holder of the baby during Circumcision). He asked all who would participate in the Brith to go to the Mikvah first. (This is why, to this day, my son Eliyahu loves to bathe every day.)

After the Morning Service, we gathered for the Brith, then had a sumptuous feast with a minyan, learned both Torah and chasidus (chassidic wisdom), and spent the balance of that entire day in religious rejoicing.

The times went well for me, in every direction. I had a fine livelihood, respect, children, and good health. I lived without a worry. But, as our sages put it, "It is not merit but mazal that brings well being to people". The good luck was suddenly transformed. In the middle of a bright, sunny day, a brutal black cloud overshadowed my horizon, and darkened the skies above me.

Several months after the Brith my wife became ill. The local doctors could not help her, so I took her to Bobrisk. There they also could do nothing for her. I was advised to take her to Minsk, and remain with her there until her recovery. I left my post at Kabakov's, and my three little daughters were taken by my in-laws. With my wife and little son, I took off for Minsk. My "inventory", that is, my Torah knowledge, I always had with me, to use when we needed sustenance.(Only a melamed has this option.)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Our Sojourn In Minsk

We ride. The train takes us onward. It flies. It whistles. And the whistles would seem to be the same for all.

But that is not so. For the passengers differ radically from each other, in the purpose of their journey. One grows happier with each turn of the wheels, with each whistle sound. For this brings him closer to his longed for destination. Another passenger rides sadly, for he has been glad to be away from whatever it is at home that gives him sorrow, and with each whistle he knows that his journey of escape, only temporary, is coming closer to its end.

We sit, pensive, sorrowful. We left our home, with our little children. Where are we going? What will be our fate there? I shall arrive, a stranger, seeking my livelihood and my wife's cure. Every whistle blow of the train tells me that we are closer to that dread unknown. the entire world grows steadily sadder.

When we heard the conductor yelling out, "Minsk!", an overwhelming melancholy siezed me. Where shall we go? The

pockets are empty. I stood at the station doors and thought, "I have no other choice. I must go to my sister. She has numerous houses. She will surely find some corner for us."

I was both humiliated and deeply disappointed when my sister declined. She had no vacancies, and her own home was too small. And besides, to take in sick people...

So I went to my brother Moshe Hirsh. He lived in a modest little suburb of Minsk. He took us in gladly, and with open heart. It was not that he had a larger residence; indeed, it was much smaller than my sister's. But he had a better, a greater heart. In his poor quarters, he made place for us, and we were with him half a year, until we were able to return home.

The following morning I went with my brother to my sister. My father in law and my brother saw to it that I get set up in my "trade". The next day I ascended the throne of the melamed.

Every day I went to the cheder, and every day I took my wife to the doctors. I followed their instructions scrupulously. I went from one doctor to the next. And still her illness did not release its hold on her. This way month followed month, until just before Pesach. I was advised to return home with her. I arranged my work

for the summer, and we made our way back home with no more joy than we had on the way to Minsk.

While I was home, I decided to try to find an answer to our problem in Bobrisk. A specialist there finally revealed the truth to me, that there was no known cure for my wife. There was no hope that she could recover. With broken heart I returned home, hiding the truth from her. But her heart told her.

You can imagine what kind of yom tov we had. But what followed the holiday was even worse. I was compelled to leave my home, the little children, my sick wife whose life was in mortal danger. I could not remain at home, for how would we live?. I had to go. With tear-filled eyes, with a bitter heart, I left my wife and children. I was torn apart as I looked at them before departure. I kissed the children, and my tears fell upon their faces. I said goodbye to my ailing wife, and kissed her pale and drawn cheeks. I did not permit myself to think that this might well be the last time I would ever see her.

Her leavetaking, her pathetic tears, the look in her darkened eyes through which she gazed compassionately at me--understanding that I must go--, her pressing of my hand with both of her hands, her kissing of my hand with her cold and pale lips--all of this affected me so deeply that

I could barely keep my balance. I sat down for a moment, so that she should not see my condition and feel even worse. I comforted her with words of hope, looked upon her once more, and left the house. I feared that I would break down completely. I stood behind the door for a moment more, looked inside through a crack in the wall, and then, on most reluctant feet, took up my journey to the depot.

Upon return to Minsk, and to my teaching duties, I had to pretend that life was normal, present a cheerful countenance, so that the people should not think that my problems were interfering with the children's studies. But when I was alone, then my troubles would surface, and I would cry.

I sent money frequently, with cheerful letters. Her replies arrived regularly, although they were brief. But they lifted my heart and gave me hope.

This did not last long. About a month after Pesach, no reply from her to my latest letter. I sent a telegram--no answer from her. I wanted to speed home at once, but my brother-in-law would not permit it. He counselled that I return home for Shavuoth. I could find no peace during the intervening weeks.

Several days before the holiday I travelled home. Each

hour seemed a year. Terrible and terrifying thoughts crossed my mind, until I arrived at our house. With trembling hands I turned the knob of our door. I glanced in all directions. I saw my in-laws sitting with bowed heads, weeping, near the baby's carriage. The children ran to me crying, "Papa! Mama is no longer here!"

I am certain I need not describe what happened with us at that point. Everyone can envision it and understand. You can understand, too, what kind of Shavuoth we had...

To remain at home with the children and the old folks was impossible. I had to earn a living for them, if not for me. And so I wanted to take the children with me back to Minsk, but the grandparents could not bear to part with them. Finally, there was no other way but for me to leave the children with them, and go to Minsk alone.

I was alone at my work in Minsk until Rosh Chodesh Elul, and then came home to be with my children. I was at home until after Sukkoth, and back to Minsk again. The entire time I sent money--as much as they needed--to them. But my in-laws would give me no peace. They insisted that I should re-marry, and thus be able to provide a normal home for the children. They were too old to raise little children. They urged me to marry their niece, as their daughter--my wife--had pleaded on her death bed.

In the year 5645 I married my second wife, Feigeh Reitah. I found in her a splendid helpmeet on my life's journey, and a wonderful mother for the children. In the span of forty four years, we shared good times and bad, sunny and cloudy, as is the normal route of a human being's life. I describe everything from the day of our marriage until today.

I took the children to us, sold our house, and settled in Boibrisk, where I rented a nice house. After Pesach I opened my "store", that is, a cheder. Children of the finest families were brought to me, and I had a very good livelihood. Everything went well, and we began to live a decent, good life, in peace and with much satisfaction, that entire summer.

I thought, as all people think, that the future would bring even greater good fortune. But for me there was vindicated the blessing with which a good friend blessed me on a happy occasion: "God willing you should no longer, ever again, be a melamed". Naturally he meant this for my good. He meant that I should be able to leave that low level profession and go upward, to some more desireable way of earning my livelihood.

Alas, I did leave the melamed state, but improve my lot I did not. I became so ill that I could no longer teach!

Nu, how do you like that? And do you want to know what brought about this catastrophe? It was the pre-Yom Kippur mikveh!

Most of the citizenry in the town, as I have said previously, were chassidim. And chassidim, as is well known, must immerse themselves in a mikveh before every Sabbath. For this purpose they had a separate bathhouse with a mikveh especially designed for immersion, not for bathing. I confess that although I lived with a confirmed chassid who frequented that mikveh every Friday--and sometimes in mid-week as well--, and always urged me to accompany him, I never went. This, it seemed to me, was going too far. But erev Yom Kippur, the Day of Judgment, I did accompany him.

He immersed himself time and time again. It did him no harm. He exited safely. But with me it was another story. The mikveh was very hot, and the day was cool. So I caught a cold. (It would appear that a hot mikveh can chill only a cold mithnaged, but not a hot chassid!) I began to feel sharp pains in my side.

In brief, I was in bed for some six weeks with that cold. But, thanks to the Great Healer, and with the help of my dear wife who did not stir from my side day or

night to carry out all of the doctors' instructions, I came out of that danger.

I had no funds for the recuperation period. My mother-in-law--my new wife's mother--had a nice spacious home. She took us in, and cared for us and fed us. On the twelvth of the month Kislev I finally arose from my sick-bed. Not because I was completely well, but because my wife needed the bed for her pregnancy! She bore us our daughter Eda, may she live and be well.

We stayed with my mother-in-law two months. But one must begin to earn one's livelihood. To open a cheder again seemed imprudent. Besides, I had no strength for such a taxing occupation. Suddenly, in mid-winter, my wife decided to open a little food store, right in her mother's house. She simply opened one of the doors and stocked that room, and her shop was open! I secured two private students, for several hours daily, and I earned twenty five rubel a month. Again good! No longer a me-lamed! (Whoever taught students privately called himself a teacher, not a melamed. I had exchanged my robes, but in truth, it was only a superficial change.)

My wife worked in that little store in the house from early morning into the evening. I helped her as soon as I returned home. Customers we had aplenty, but we

earned precious little. The trouble was that most of our clientele were poor, and bought for kopecks rather than rubel. Only on Thursdays and Fridays, when the neighboring women would purchase flour, yeast, kasheh for the Sabbath cholent, sugar, candles--all for Shabbos--, did we earn ~~meaningfully~~ enough to pay off some of the debts incurred in opening the little shop. With the extra, we bought additional supplies to replenish our stock.

This is the way we lived. Obviously no thinking person could be satisfied with such a life, but we did not know how to improve our lot. We both worked beyond our strength, and we lived in straitened circumstance. I did not mind so much for myself, because having been a yeshivah bochur for so long I was accustomed to hardship. But my heart ached for my wife. She was, after all, really a young girl, and she had been nurtured and protected in her mother's home, provided with all that she required. And now, scarcely a year and one half after her wedding, she was compelled to labor so strenuously, and live such a difficult life!

These thoughts gave me no rest. I kept thinking as to how we could crawl out of this pit; how I could arrange matters so that we could live more decently.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I Depart, Leaving All Behind.

It occurs frequently in life that some unexpected event happens that changes one's entire world, either for good or for evil. Man is led through life blindly; that is, he is blind to what may transpire. It had never occurred to me that I might leave my home and my family. But something happened that caused me to do precisely this.

My first wife's brother, a chazzan, came to visit us, and he was accompanied by a friend, also a chazzan. Both had sung, at one time, with the renowned Yerucham the Small, one of the most glorious interpreters of the liturgy in Berditchev.

These two began to persuade me to leave for Malt-Russia, there to find good jobs, they as cantors and I as a shochet. Even if I were to be a melamed there, I would be paid far more than was paid here at home. What in Lithuania a shochet or a melamed received for a half year's work, he received in one month there.. They assured me that I need not be concerned about expenses en route, for they would take care of it, from their chanting in synagogues along the way.

The idea appealed to me. Perhaps I could really improve our lot. To remain where I was made no sense, for it was a dead end with no chance for improvement. I mentioned this to my wife. At first she was unhappy with the prospect, but when she realized that I really wanted to try it, she said, "Do as you think best."

We could not leave immediately, because several weeks earlier my father, of blessed memory, had died. I wanted to be home for the Thirty (Sheloshim) the one month period of mourning), and to say Kaddish, which might be questionable on the road. (Note: A quorum of ten--a minyan--is required for the recitation of the memorial kaddish.) Several weeks later, I bade my wife and children farewell, and I went forth with the two cantors to find my destiny.

My overwhelming desire for this adventure had blinded my eyes and misled my heart, so that I did not see what a terrible thing I was doing. To leave a weary young woman to provide and care for a family all alone was surely ignoble. But I was so taken with the exciting prospect ahead that I went off, unthinking, happily, with the cantors to find the gold at the end of the rainbow.

It was only when we had already travelled several stations on, that the enormity of the injustice I was committing hit me full force. What had I done? What a crime

had I perpetrated? My heart was torn apart. My conscience and my sense of regret assailed me. I told my travel companions that I must return home at once. But they laughed at me. "What is this? Have you lost all reason? Why, you are doing this precisely for your wife and children! Do you want them to go on in poverty and hardship forever? What can you ever hope to have, from your teaching and her pathetic little food shop? Your wife may have a bit of temporary sadness now. But that is a small price indeed for the prospect of a decent life ahead. We are doing the same thing--and so are doing all the forward looking young men."

They talked on, in this vein, until I was both pacified and relieved. And so we went on together. We arrived at Homliah. We stopped there for awhile. On succeeding Sabbaths, they davvened in synagogues, and received a goodly sum of rubel. It became somewhat more cheerful among us. Why, we were getting some money into our treasury--and every week has a Sabbath! All would yet be well!

The next Sabbath, at the Blessing of the New Month, my brother-in-law Ya'akov Shatz pleased the congregation so, that they invited him to be their cantor for the High Holy Days. So he remained there. I was thus left with but one chazzan. Our tri-corded rope was weakened by one third. I

began to speculate, What would happen to me if I lost the second of my chords; if the second chazzan is well liked somewhere, and he remains there? And yet, what alternative did I have but go on?

Precisely what I feared did happen. The following Sabbath another little town took my second cantor from me. I pleaded with the cantor, "Tell me, what shall I do now? I cannot assist you with the singing. Shall I return home now?"

He advised me to go to Krementchug. He would give me a letter to a friend of his there. If I would wait there until after Yom Kippur, the cantor would join me with the money he would by then have earned, and we would go into business together.

I had to agree. I was too embarrassed to return home. He gave me several rubel, and I was alone. No chazzanim.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I Spend Rosh Hashanah In Loyev; A Kindly Rebbe Takes Me In.

I arrived at the station, stood there and wondered, Where to go? I had already determined that I could not go back home, for I would be the laughingstock of the town.

On the other hand, to go straight to Krementchug would mean that I would be imposing on a stranger for a long time. As I was standing there perplexed, a Jew came up to me and asked, "Young man, where are you bound? Perhaps to the Rebbe for the Holy Days? I am also going there, so let us ride together."

The thought appealed to me. I had plenty of time. And I had long wanted to see what it was like to spend a holiday with a chassidic Rebbe. So I accompanied this Jew to Loyev.

Upon arrival there, my new friend went to see a friend of his, and I went to the inn. This was Friday afternoon. I made ready to go to the Rebbe. Although I was unsure as to precisely how one enters and greets a Rebbe, I was loathe to ask the innkeeper. I did not want him to know that I was a mithnaged. (Once I left my chassidic patron's home, I reverted to my natural self, you see, a mithnaged forever.)

As I entered the courtyard of the "Guter Yid" (literally, "Good Jew", a synonym for Chassidic Rebbe), I was astounded. I had thought that a Guter Yid lives just like other Rabbis. Not so! The courtyard was a replica of that of a prince, a wealthy nobleman. There were stables for horses, carriages. There were cellers, attics, storehouses for grain, buildings of various sizes. I was amazed.

Suddenly I saw a young man approaching me. He was dressed in a resplendent silk gown, an expensive fur <u>*shtreimel*</u> *(holiday headgear of the ultra Orthodox), white stockings above glistening black shoes. He was tall, stout, with a clear white face, a trim black little beard, and curly earlocks. He was walking leisurely, as though deep in thought. Naturally, I thought this was the Rebbe himself. He said not a word to me, and I was not impertinent enough to address him. I entered the house.*

I did not understand the huge room into which I had entered. Since it was so large, and there were long tables, I thought at first that this was the yeshivah where the Rebbe studied with his students. But I realized this could not be so, because there were no books on the tables. Instead, large silver candelabra, illuminated by stern lamps, stood in a regular pattern on the tables. Well, I thought, they are preparing for a wedding supper. But then I spied, in one corner, a lectern of the kind a cantor uses when he leads a Service, and an Ark of the Torah with a mantle covering it.

As I stood, looking around, several people, dressed precisely as the young man in the courtyard, with waistbands around their kapotehs, began to walk back and forth in that large room. Then I understood. This was the hall

where they dovvened, ate, carried on every aspect of their chassidism.

I asked one of the chassidim, "Where do I find the Rebbe?" He looked at me as though I had just come from another planet. How could anyone not know where the Rebbe sat and studied most of the day? But he did point to the door of the Rebbe's study.

I opened the door and saw the Rebbe sitting on a stool near a table, a Chumash (Bible) with the Targum (commentary; literally, Aramaic translation). He was chanting the words aloud. I confess that although I am a born mighnaged, when I glimpsed that Rebbe, there was a glow as of an angel, a Heavenly messenger. His bright countenance, his beautiful long beard, with its silver strands, the curled earlocks, and his sable shtrimel, lent him an other-worldly air, a spiritual dimension that evoked my awe. This, I knew at once, was a very special, extraordinary being.

With profound reverence I approached his presence. (I knew that it is proper to initiate the "Shalom aleichem" to a Rebbe.) He inquired of me,

"From where do you come, and where are you going, and what is your occupation?"

I replied as Jonah did, "I am a Jew and I fear God."

The Rebbe realized that he was dealing with a Jew who "knew the small print", and so he invited me to stay with him through Rosh Hashanah. I thanked him effusively. So awed was I that as I was about to leave his room I walked backward, as one does when ending the Silent Devotion prayers, or when one takes leave of a monarch. (This, of course, is the reason for stepping back at the completion of the Silent Devotion--God is the Supreme King.)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

My Sabbath At the Rebbe's

Within several hours a large crowd gathered, all guests of the Rebbe. It was a varied group, rich and poor, young and old. We welcomed the Sabbath with the traditional prayers. The Rebbe himself was not with us in that large hall. He remained, throughout the Service, in his study. After "Aleinu", the concluding prayer, he opened the door to his room and stationed himself there. Everyone converged on that door, pushing each other in their eagerness to be among the first to greet the Rebbe with "Gut Shabbos". The Rebbe responded

to each greeting with a nod of his head.

Soon we all went to the tables, after washing of the hands of course. The Rebbe sat at the head and chanted the "Shalom Aleichem" welcome to the Sabbath Angels. He sang the words so sweetly that it was impossible to conceive the angels ignoring his beckoning. Then he recited the Kiddush (Sanctification over the wine) in a strong, clear voice, holding a large, gold Kiddush cup.

When the Rebbe had concluded his Kiddush, everyone around the long tables reached for the little challahs. Each one had a small challah at his place. The Shamas handed the Rebbe a silver pitcher filled with water, standing on a silver tray. The Rebbe washed his hands, recited the appropriate blessing, raised his hands and said the Hamotzi prayer of thanksgiving for sustenance over a very large challah. Near that large challah were eleven small challahs--twelve in all, like the number of loaves in the Temple. He took a bite of the large challah, and then he sliced that huge loaf into tiny pieces. This mound of Sabbath bread was then pushed forward, toward the chassidim. There was a frantic shoving and pushing and grasping, each chassid yearning for a fraction of the Rebbe's challah. This was done with the fish, and with the meat, as well. The Rebbe would take

a small piece for himself and the rest was siezed by the chassidim. This was the chassidic tradition, the tasting of the Rebbe's shirayim, leftovers. It is considered to this day, among chassidim, a great privilege to eat of a rebbe's shirayim.

Naturally, the hall was filled with noise and movement throughout the meal. This became especially frenzied when the "tzimmes" (fruit stew dessert) shirayim was reached. By this time many citizens of the town had been permitted to enter and partake, and so of course the demands and the clamor soared ever higher. I, too, reached for the shirayim enthusiastically. After all, why should they know that I was not a chassid?

The zmiroth (Sabbath songs) were sung lustily, and with such fervor that the very walls seemed in danger. It was only after several hours of this festive Sabbath Eve dinner that the crowd was satisfied, quieted, and finally left.

Saturday morning, after the dovvenen, the previous evening's pattern was repeated: long tables heavily laden, shirayim, singing, pushing, shoving. The one difference was that in the morning the din, the activity, was more intense--or perhaps I should say uninhibited. For now bottles of wine were on the tables, and those chassidim

drank more wine on a Sabbath morning than most Jews drink at the Pesach Seder table! The zmiroth were sung to chassidic melodies, which have a character all their own, joyful, lusty, enthusiastic, not prosaically muted as among the mithnagdim. Chassidim believe in serving God not with sighs and lamenting and tears, but with happiness, with dancing, with eating and drinking. But none of this is disrespectful or irreverent. It is all permeated by holiness. The Rebbe's table is comparable, among chassidim, to an altar of God; the eating and drinking are regarded as sacred sacrifices brought to God--Who wants us to enjoy and appreciate His world.

I turned to a chassid sitting near me, and I asked him, "Why is it that the Rebbe does not engage in Torah instruction at the dinner table, as the Lubavitch Rebbe does?"

He replied angrily, "Let those who have not discovered the Secret (how to approach God) learn Torah at their tables! At our Rebbe's table there is no such need!"

Well, I thought to myself, I know what that secret is; it is that the chassidim here simply do not know Torah!

The Shalosh Seudoth (Third Sabbath Meal) was distinctive only in that there was no shirayim. Perhaps the reason for that was that the menu was so sparse--dried her-

ring and onions--that the Rebbe did not even wish to taste it, and so naturally there were none of his "left-overs". But this was compensated by much more singing; all manner of song, light hearted, joyful, serious, sentimental. This continued into the night.

That Sabbath made a profound impression on me--a most favorable impression, I must say, although I am not a chassid. When I noted with what fervor, what spirituality those chassidim spent their Shabbos, I was envious of the true chassid. His solid belief, his total dedication, his yearning for God--these seem to elevate him, lift his soul heavenward, near to God. All of this, while he sits at his Rebbe's table; <u>because</u> he is in his Rebbe's presence.

Who knows what lasting effect that Sabbath experience would have left with me, had I departed immediately after Saturday. Perhaps I would have been transformed into a chassidic "believer". But remaining there until after Rosh Hashanah, and seeing all other aspects of what went on there, I changed my view, and I returned to my firm loyalty to the mithnaged's way of Jewish life.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Saturday Night; Payments and Petitions.

After Havdalah, the Rebbe secluded himself in his private study. The Gabbai (Elder, Aide) posttioned himself at the door, like the angel at the entrance to the Garden of Eden with his"terrible swift sword". He permitted no one to enter without approval.

The Rebbe sat in his study for the purpose of receiving the petitions of his chassidim. Some needed his counsel, some his blessing, some his help. With his prayer he healed many a broken heart. With his wise advice he set many on the right path. Each person who entered the Rebbe's room went in with long, sad face, but emerged with happy, relieved countenance, pleased with the saintly one's promise.

Each petitioner gave a contribution, in appreciation--as much or as little as he could afford. This was money well spent. For indeed, in many instances the Rebbe's counsel was truly helpful. Even if it was only the implanting of faith and confidence in the troubled, that, too, was most helpful, and often led to the required change. For the problem was then attacked with

a clear head, and with untroubled vigor.

The petition always had to be written on a piece of paper. This was called a "qvittel". On the note, the name of the petitioner and that of his mother had to be written. (Why his mother, I do not know to this day. It must be one of the chassidic secrets.) The note itself--that is, the specific request--was written by the Gabbai Rishon (Chief Aide). When the qvittel was thus properly executed, it was given over to the Gabbai Sheni (Deputy) who stood at the door. Naturally, both of these men received honoraria for ther efforts--especially for easing the petitioner's way into the Rebbe's room. The "guardian angel" scrutinized each note, and recognized by the accompanying gift how "important" the petitioner was. Of course the more generous or affluent gained earlier admittance. Thus the poor were the last, as always.

As I approached the Gabbai, he asked my name and my mother's name, as well as what I wished to have written on the qvittel. I responded that there was no need for him to trouble himself; I could write my own qvittel. He glared at me because of my chutzpah, but without a word he handed me a pen and paper.

I sat there wondering what, precisely, I should ask. That which I needed--a source of decent livelihood--the

Rebbe could not provide. So I concluded that the best I could do would be to seek his counsel as to whether I should return home or travel on.

I was the last to gain admittance, because I had bribed nobody. The Rebbe welcomed me in friendly fashion. He understood quite well that he was dealing with a poor academic, and a misnagged at that! (A chassid would have known better than to write his own quittel.) He advised that I should travel on. He blessed me with the prayer that God bring my search to a successful end. I left him very pleased, thanked him sincerely for the way he had received me.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Rosh Hashanah and Tashlich

Sunday afternoon, I went to see what was happening at the Rebbe's. I found that it was like a country fair. There was noise, and bustling, and scurrying to and fro. Some chassidim were entering the bathhouse, others were emerging. Some were glistening clean, others were perspired. All were moving rapidly, as against time. I took in this scene, and thought that a bath would do me no harm.

And so I was transformed, for the moment, into a "heated chassid", and jumped into the "schvitz-bod" (communal hot bath). I would have emerged from there a very clean young man. But I made the fatal error of immersing myself, afterward, in the mikveh. What with several hundred chassidim immersing themselves in that same mikveh, you can well imagine how clean it left me!

The Ma'ariv Service was done as the Sabbath Eve Service had been, that is, the chassidim in the large hall and the Rebbe in his private study. After "Aleinu" concluded the prayers, the congregants all zeroed in on the door to the Rebbe's room. The purpose was the same as on Friday evening, but the specific blessing from the Rebbe was "Gut Yahr", A good year, instead of a "Gut Shabbos".

The tables were set as on Friday evening, and the procedure was much the same, including the "shirayim". For me this was by now a familiar scene, and I was already a bit blase about it. But for the chassidim it was as though never before experienced. They were as excited, and as eager to taste the shirayim, as though it were the first time in their lives. This, I have found, is characteristic of the chassidim. As an example, they can hear a story about a Rebbe ten times, and the tenth is like the first.

They listen with the same intense awe and wonder.

The first day of Rosh Hashanah I came to the synagogue about seven in the morning, feeling a bit guilty for coming so late. What, when, who? Not a trace of a chassid was there! After nine o'clock the chassidim began to straggle in. I sat there worried. I was certain we would not conclude the long Rosh Hashanah Services until evening. For, beginning so late in the morning, the last prayers could not possibly be recited before four or five o'clock. And I had hurried so to get there on time!

I need not have been concerned. The Ba'al Shacrith called out "Hodu!", the first prayer, and he tore through all of the Shacharith and the Torah Reading in an hour and one half. (Normally, among misnagdim, this would require at least three hours or more.)

At eleven o'clock preparations were made for the shofar sounding. The Rebbe came into our large hall and stationed himself near the lectern. On it he placed all the petitions that had been handed to him on Saturday night. He covered his head with his tallith, then took up the qvittlach (plural of qvittel) to his bosom. The intent was that the requests should float upward to God on the sound waves of the shofar. I do not know whether he handed the petitions to the angels who travelled with the shofar sounds, or if

he managed to get them delivered directly to Heaven, without any intermediaries. For him all the heavenly gates of compassion were open. This is a secret that no one but the Rebbe himself knew. But all were absolutely certain that their requests were arriving at the intended place. They were confident, and content.

How fortunate are you , chassidic Jews! You need not moan and cry and plead with God for a good year, as we misnagdim do. You are supremely confident that the Rebbe will intervene successfully for you. Your requests must be answered, for they are his irresistible requests. Ah, how comforting and good that is! How wonderful to have someone take all your burdens from you!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Tashlich

We ended the Service at two o'clock. The Rebbe did not have a formal table set, that first day of Rosh Hashanah. We ate quickly, and went directly to the Minchah (Afternoon Service).

At about four o'clock the crowd began to gather. That is to say, all the Jewish residents of the town, together

with their children, joined the chassidim, to accompany the Rebbe on the way to the casting off of sins, the Tashlich ceremony. Huge as was the courtyard, it was quickly filled with people. The crowd was pressed together tightly, as though this were a living wall. There was much noise, and pushing, and turmoil. Some especially fervent chassidim tried to elbow their way forward, to get closer to the door from which the Rebbe would emerge. They pushed with all their strength, but it availed them nothing. That crowd was solid as a wall, and could not be dented, let alone pierced. They remained rooted to their place.

All stood, tightly packed, straining to see that door open and the Rebbe come out. I was also a brick in that wall. I also stood pressed against my neighbors, straining my eyes to see the Rebbe emerge.

Suddenly it became as quiet as a cemetery. That entire human wall silently bent toward the door. The door opened, and the Rebbe showed himself. Every person in that eager throng gasped, awe-struck. The Rebbe was dressed in a long satin kapoteh, with a silk sash encircling the waist. He wore a sable shtreimel on his head. He walked slowly, regally, with measured stately steps, and behind him walked his entourage. His son-in-law and heir-apparent, who was dressed exactly like him, was immediately behind the Rebbe.

Then followed the Rebbe's young son and his melamed, after whom came the Gabbaim in their order of seniority. The shamasim (sextons) came to the head of the procession and sang out, "Panu derech! Pany derech!" ("Make way! Make way!"). The human wall parted, as the Sea parted before Moses and the children of Israel. The Rebbe and his entourage went through the middle, and thus walked slowly out of the courtyard.

Once out on the road, the crowd divided itself into four sections, with the Rebbe in their midst. This was just like the Jews in the wilderness, on the way from Egypt to the Promised Land, where, in the midst of the thousands of Israelites, the Ark of the Covenant escorted by the priests moved. The Rebbe and his entourage may have been somber and solemn, but not the chassidim. They sang, danced, rejoiced as they enveloped the Rebbe, until they arrived at the Dnieper River.

Reaching the Dnieper, it seemed that the river came alive. Its waters churned and swirled, as soon as it saw the Rebbe and his chassidim. Whether it was for joy, because the saintly Rebbe had come to pray, or whether it was in anger, because all the chassidim's sins were about to pollute the river, I do not know. But, from the intensity of the water's movement, I suspect that the Dnieper was angry, because it had to receive and bear that weighty

load of sin of the entire community.

If I am correct in believing that the river was angry because of the load of sin it had to carry, then the river was wrong. Just think of that little goat that was sent to Azazel; the scapegoat of the Bible. That little goat bore so much, and you, the mighty Dnieper River, with your powerful, rushing, deafening waters, resent carrying the insignificant burden of sins of the Loyever chassidim? You must learn that this is the way of the world; that frequently one sins but another bears the burden of guilt. This is the way it has ever been, and this is how it will be.

The entire crowd stationed itself near the river's edge. They did not recite the suitable prayer, all being content to have the Rebbe's prayer speak for them. But as soon as the Rebbe concluded the recitation, and had shaken the folds of his kapoteh, all the chassidim shook out their <u>kapotehs</u> with vigor. Not content with shaking out the folds, they also turned their pockets inside out, for they knew that their pockets were not free from sin. The Dnieper swallowed up their sins, and angrily carried away their sins far, far awȧy into the depths of the sea.

Cleansed of sin, the crowd wended its way joyously

back, free from all care, since the Rebbe's prayers had removed all trace of their misdeeds. Upon re-entry into the great hall, the more affluent of the chassidim provided a seemingly endless store of whiskey for all. There was drinking, singing, dancing, until late into the night. I have never had as happy a Simchat Torah as I had that normally solemn Rosh Hashanah, among the chassidim.

After Ma'ariv, each one recited the Kiddush for himself. Since on the second night of Rosh Hashanah it is required that one should have a new fruit, over which to recite the She-he-che-ya-nu Blessing, the chassidim went into the room where the Rebbe's wife and their two daughters sat. The women gave them pieces of watermelon for the Blessing.

This Rebbitzen was not your ordinary rabbi's wife of some small town, provincial and unsophisticated. She was dressed like a princess, with expensive jewelry, and so were her daughters. I was among the chassidim who came into the women's quarters, and while I was receiving the Shehecheyanu fruit, I scrutinized the Rebbe's family closely.

The second Rosh Hashana day's morning Services were identical with the first, but the meal afterward was much different. Since there was no <u>tashlich</u> for which to

hurry, a liesurely "Rebbe's Table"--meaning the normal Sabbath menu and activity, including shirayim--was set. The Rebbe asked numerous chassidim, whom he knew by name, to begin their favorite niguním (melodies), one after the other, and everyone joined in. The price for the privilege of singing one's favorite melody, and having it sung by the congregation, was a bottle of wine to the chassidic wine cellar. (This was a communal stock of wine, presided over by the Gabbai, from which he drew enough wine for the many Sabbaths and Festivals, for the chassidim.)

Naturally, with all the merrymaking, and especially the drinking, all of the chassidim were quite happy and high by the time the meal ended. And so they all went out of the hall into the court, and there danced and sang for hours. Thus the Rosh Hashanah was concluded, on a cheerful, optimistic, confidently happy note. God had inscribed each one for a good year, because of the merit of the saintly Rebbe.

How fortunate these chassidim were! In the precise hour when the mithnagdim were sitting solemnly, tearfully, sorrowfully reading the Psalms with broken hearts and pessimistic outlooks, these chassidim were rejoiced, sang, harbored no doubts, served the Lord with happiness. I am

aware that we mithnagdim seek and find faults with the chassidim. It is true that they have many. But their good points are more numerous by far than their questionable ones. Their unity, sense of mutual identification regardless of status or money or degree of learning; their joy in being God's children; their utterly unquestioning faith and optimism; their unswerving loyalty to the Rebbe who provides them with hope and belief for the coming world--but above all their sense of absolute equality before each other and before God--far outweigh whatever sophistication and worldly wisdom we mithnagdim possess.

After Rosh Hashanah, the chassidim took their leave of the Rebbe and departed happily for their respective homes. This was exactly as it used to be in ancient times, in the days of the Temple in Jerusalem, when the Jews would make their holy days pilgrimage, and then return home.

I, also, took leave of the Rebbe. Although I did not leave a contribution--as all the other guests did--, he blessed me with the prayer that I should have a fruitful and gratifying journey. Content, I took the train from Loyev to Kiev.

Several of the chassidim were also on the train. They were riding without benefit of tickets, just with the blessings of the Rebbe. The Uncircumcised One, the conductor, was unimpressed with blessings. He wanted tickets,

and without tickets he was about to throw them off the train! Worse yet, he threatened to have them taken to the police. They turned to me. (Apparently I seemed a cultured, Russian-speaking young man to them.)

"Brother Jew," they said, "Please intercede for us. Talk with this Gentleman."

I was amused that these normally voluble, exhuberant chassidim had lost their tongue in the presence of an Uncircumcised One. In truth, my Russian was scarcely what you might call fluent, but I managed to work out a compromise: they would pay half the cost of the fare, and the conductor would permit them to end their journey where they had intended. (Thus, they saved one half of the cost, and the trainman received at least one half, rather than nothing. So both gained.) They rode on in peace.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

In Kiev.

It is unnecessary to describe Kiev. For who does not know this great city? Who has not heard the wonders of this world renowned metropolis? After all, Kiev was one of the largest and most famous cities in Russia. I shall

tell only of how I managed in that city where a Jewish foot was forbidden by law from setting down.

When I alighted from the train at the Kiev station, the noise and turmoil of the incoming and outgoing passengers was overwhelming. I scarcely was able to push my way through the crowd, seeking a Jewish coachman, who might take me to a place where I might stay several days without fear of discovery by the police. I found such a coachman. He had a pathetically bedraggled coach, and a scrawny, underfed old horse. He asked me,

"Where shall I take my dear sir?"

I responded that he should begin to drive, and eventually I would inform him of my destination. He scratched under his ear, furrowed his brow, shrugged his shoulder, lifted up my bag, and we drove off.

We travelled on the Kristchatig Boulevard. The resplendent shops with their dazzling windows displaying a wondrous world of exotic goods, fascinated me. As we rode by, these windows mirrored the drab wagon and skinny horse, riding by ever so slowly. That horse was walking step by step, unhurriedly, as though he understood that his passanger was a poor, small town Jew who was eager to see as much of the great city as he could. Or perhaps he simply did not have the strength to go any faster, for his visible

bones testified to the meager diet his master was feeding him. In any event, I thus had the opportunity to observe everything, and to marvel at the beauty of this great city. I sat placidly on the coach, and quite forgot where I was.

I had forgotten that I was in Kiev, the holy city, where Jews were not permitted to enter, because the remains of the Apostles were buried within its walls. At any moment I could be arrested, and the <u>least</u> that would happen was that I would be sent home. In truth I would have been glad to return home, but not yet, not in this poverty-stroken fashion.

When we drove by the tomb of Vladimir the Holy, I was startled back into the reality of my situation. I urged the coachman tohurry. He applied the whip to the horse, and since we were going downhill, we fairly flew. But as we came up, onto the ascending road, the horse slowed to a walk once again. He was unmoved by his master's whip, and he was completely unconcerned by my plight, petrified by fear of my imminent discovery. He wended his way lieurely, as was his normal custom.

The coachman addressed me once again, "Nu, tell me where I shall take you." I asked him to take me to such a place as would hold no fear of police for me, and suggested that if he himself could house me for several days, that

would be best of all. He expressed his willingness, but observed that his place was very small and cramped. I reminded him that our sages teach, "Better to be confined to a corner of the roof, so long as there is peace." He agreed to take me home.

He took me to Podol, which was virtually the Jewish ghetto. As we entered that section, he drove to a side little street, and stopped at his residence. It was a two story house, and he lived on the first floor, with the windows on a level with the street. Inside, the house was dark, and the walls were damp, as though they were crying because of the lot of their poor master. They were lamenting his bad luck. There were three small rooms, for a not so small family. In one of the rooms there was the setting for a shoe repair shop, with the necessary tools and several pair of torn shoes. I asked him,

"Are you, then, a shoe repairman also?"

He sighed. "This little shop, and the few rubel I pay the police each month, provide me with the permission I need to live in Kiev. I am recored in the police files as a workman, and a workman is permitted to live within the city. Of course the police know what kind of a shoeman I am, but for my regular "contributions" they leave me alone."

I slept at the coachman's house, not bothered by the

bestial police, but bothered terribly by beasts of another kind--little ones, vicious ones, biting ones. Those insects kept at me all night, so that I could not fall asleep all night. They certainly came forth with an enthusiastic welcome for me!

The next morning I went off into the city, to find a place where I might peacefully lodge for a few days. As I had once been occupied with boats, I knew that the police had no jurisdiction on the river. There a Jew could be, because under his feet there was no scared Christian soil. So to the river I went, found a friend, and I was welcomed warmly.

Each day, I would leave theboat and go into town, seeking employment. It was all in vain; no work. It was, in fact, worse than useless, for I walked about in constant fear of discovery. Finally I realized that this was foolish; that it would be far more sensible to go back to Krementzug, to my cantor's friend, and there await the cantor's arrival. With my last money I ~~boat~~ bought a ticket on the ferry, and some food for the journey. As the boat left the shore, and severed connection with the land, I breathed a sigh of relief. For I was safe, at last, from the fear of the Kiev police. Here, on the water, they had no power.

The steamer sounded out its whistle, and with a strong lurch it began to cut the water and leave the foam behind. The boat itself seemed to be angry with that city it was leaving. For the city was wicked, drawing cruel distinctions between people. I stood and stared back as the high buildings of Kiev dissolved in the growing distance. I looked with sorrow and resentment at the tall church cupolas, under whose authority our Jewish brothers were being persecuted.

Erev Yom Kippur, in the morning, I arrived in Krementchug. I descended from the steamer, suitcase in hand, and went to find a carriage to take me into the town. Touching my pocket, I was horrified to realize that I had not one coin left! From my empty purse it was evident that <u>Mashiach</u> (the Messiah) would come momentarily. For it is stated in the Talmud that the Messiah will not arrive until the last coin is spent. What could I do? With what would I secure my passage into the city?

Well, in a time of dire need, one finds a solution. Not accidentally are Jews sharp of mind. Their unfortunate circumstances, their frequent desperate need, cause them to be compelled to seek ways whereby to get out of difficulties, so that they shall be able to survive. They must exercise the "muscles" of their brain to find such ways, else they perish. Thus forced to use their brains so often, it is

sharpened, as are an athlete's muscles from constant use. The secure, affluent, satiated man, however, sits comfortably, peacefully, unthreatened. He does not need to exercise his brain to survive. And so his brain goes to sleep. This is what the sages mean when they say, "Observe carefully the children of the poor, for from them you can learn much."

I said to the coachman, "I shall stay with you for several days, until I locate my friend." He was kind, and he took me home. In truth, he was no poor Jew. I ate a hearty lunch in his house, a fitting pre-Yom Kippur meal. But "kappores" I did not indulge that day. (Note: It will be recalled that a chicken or rooster was raised above the heads and the sins were transferred to the bird, a kind of scapegoat approach, before Yom Kippur. This was called "shlaggen kappores".) I figured that my miserable lot was more than compensation for my sins. I needed no kappores!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

My Adventures in Krementchug

In my day, Krementchug was one of the largest Jewish cities in Russia. Located near the Dnieper, in the Poltava Gubernia (Province), it was a busy, thriving commercial

center. There were numerous large lumber enterprises. Jewish merchants bought loads of uncut lumber that came via the Dnieper from Lithuanian provinces, had them cut into small pieces for boards. There were also many stores, a good number owned by Jews.

At that time the city of Krementchug was considered the most pious Jewish community in that entire region. The majority of the Jews were chassidim, loyalists of various Rebbes. There were synagogues in profusion, as well as houses of study, yeshivahs, and institutions of several kinds, devoted to charity. Sabbaths and Festivals found all of the businesses closed.

In this city I felt really at home--certainly far more so than in Kiev. Here I was among my brothers, walking free, without fear--a man among men.

After lunch, I went to seek my cantor's friend. Actually, I was a bit embarrassed, coming to a stranger. But I consoled myself with the thought that I was to be with him only for Yom Kippur, when a Jew does not eat or drink. So how much could I cost him? I found him, and I gave him my cantor's letter. He welcomed me warmly, as a respected guest. He urged that I bring my things over to his house. I knew, however, that I had not yet paid the coachman either for the ride or for lunch, and so I replied that I could get

possessions after Yom Kippur. I had the pre-fast meal with him, and then accompanied him to the synagogue for Kol Nidrei. The next day went smoothly. In the area of fasting I was as well eqipped as anyone, and so Yom Kippur found me equal to all other Jews.

The day after Yom Kippur I went down to the river, where the lumber merchants had their places of business. I thought that perhaps I might find an acquaintance there, having been in the river-ferrying lumber game myself. Perhaps a friend would lend me some money with which to redeem my suitcase and pay the coachman.

Incredible! There before me stood my wife's step-brother! My eyes lit up! Imagine, looking for some chance acquaintance, I find a member of the family. My redemption was at hand! Obviously, he was a heaven-sent angel! I ran over to him. We kissed and embraced, as brothers. I told him the entire saga of my recent life and misadventures, and asked him to lend me several rubel until the cantor would arrive.

As soon as he heard my tale and my petition, he ceased to be my brother-in-law! He glared at me angrily. He demanded payment of alleged debts I owed his mother! I saw that I was dealing with a boor, an unfeeling wretch. So I told him, "I thought I had found a brother for a time of

misery, but I have found a miserable brother!"

With these words, I left him.

I wandered about, worrying. "From whence shall come my help?", as the Psalmist put it. I looked up and spied a young man purchasing some boards for a sukkah. I speculated, perhaps he will permit me to assist him in the construction of his sukkah, so that I might earn a few rubel? Even if he paid me but half a rubel, that would be enough to pay the coachman. I went over to him and inquired whether he needed help in putting up his sukkah. He looked me up and down, slowly. It was obvious that he understood. With me as his "construction engineer" he would have no sukkah! But he replied, "Good, come with me. Sit up on the wagon with me."

As we rode, I thought, "My God, what have I done? What do I know about building a sukkah? What skills do I have?"

The young man noticed my perplexity, and he began to speak to me in kindly, friendly fashion. We arrived at his house, and he immediately asked his wife to set a table. To me he said, "Before we begin our labors, let us have a bite first." As we ate, we chatted, and in response to his curiosity as to how I had come here, I told him the whole truth. Then we dealt in Torahdiscussion for awhile. Following lunch, the young man said to me, "You know what? Let the

sukkah be built by an expert, one who knows how to handle a hammer and a saw, and let us--you and I--enjoy delving into the gemorrah about the laws of Sukkoth. I was once a yeshivah bochur too."

We spent several hours in this pleasant diversion, until the workman announced that he had completed the sukkah. My host loaned me three rubel, to be repaid after the holidays. I thanked him warmly. When he invited me to spend the holiday with him, I told him that I was committed, for the first Major Festival Days, but that I would return for the last days.

I departed happily for the coachman's house, and there I earned the mitzvah of "redeeming the captive"; that is to say, I redeemed my bag by paying the coachman what I owed him. He brought me to my friend's house without charge.

The Festival went happily. On the eighth day of Sukkoth I went back to the kind young man and his sukkah. I had lunch with him, and I drank a bit also. The truth is that I did not drink to excess, but it overpowered me. I left, and I wandered about, realizing that I was not in total control. Like a homing pigeon, I went straight into a synagogue, laid myself down, and fell asleep--right in the middle of the day!

I slept all too well. I dreamed that I was sitting on a

boulevard bench in Kiev. A policeman approached me and asked, "Jew, from where are you?" And I had no passport! I awoke from fright, and I saw a Jew standing over me. He said, "Wake up, young man. We are beginning Minchah." I was embarrassed, but that was more comfortable than my fright. I realized that neither a Kiev boulevard nor a passport-demanding policeman were in my vicinity, only a synagogue, a Jew, and the calling to prayer.

CHAPTER TWENTY

My Cantor Arrives; We Are In Business.

After the Festival I went out into the city, seeking a source of livelihood. I did not want to teach. It would have been a simple matter to earn comfortably in teaching, but I had a yen to get into business. It came into my mind that since my brother Moshe Hirsch had a smoked herring factory in Minsk, he should appoint me his agent here, working on commission. In Krementchug there were no Lithuanian smoked herring, and I felt it was a good market. No sooner thought than done. I sent a letter to my brother, asking him to dispatch several cases of his herring to me, for local sale.

A week later, the cantor came, and he brought one hundred rubel with him--his payment for the High Holy Days chanting. Several days later, two cases of smoked herring--about two thousand herring--arrived. Things were looking up. The cantor and I went around to the little stores, selling those herring. They sold well, and at a good profit. The next day we went out selling again, and again the sales were good. We were very happy, for obviously we had a fine business going.

Several days later we returned to the shops where we had sold the herring. We inquired as to whether they wanted to order more. Not on your life! They had sold virtually none to their customers. We saw those smoked herring lying there, dried out, rejected. No one wanted to buy them. That ended our "profitable" enterprise. Our hopes were dashed to the ground. In fact, it was very difficult for us to get rid of the rest of the herring, even at a loss. Finally, we were rid of all our inventory, thank God! But, of course, we were also out of business.

And yet, a living must be found. Since Krementchug was not far from the place where my ill ventured boat partnership, with my brother-in-law, had foundered, we set out, hoping to collect on my boat investment.

We arrived at my brother-in-law's place, and he greeted me as a warmly welcome guest. But as soon as I told him the purpose of my visit, he said with a smile, "I would not have expected this of you. I never thought that you were so foolish. I always thought of you as a bright fellow, so how could you do this to yourself? Did you really think you would be able to collect on old debts? Why, our boat broke up into splinters. There was nothing left, and here you spent all this time and money getting here to collect on her."

After much argument and heated talk, I finally extracted twenty five rubel from him. This money I sent home to the family, and I continued to look for a job.

Really, what could we do, that cantor and I? We had precious little money. Of business neither of us knew anything. I had to face reality, and so I resigned myself to returning to my teaching profession. Regretfully, the ba'alei batim (householders) had not been waiting around for me to come and offer my teaching services. As a matter of fact, there was a surplus of melamdim available. And so, even my teaching would not bring me a livelihood.

I talked it over with my cantor. I asked him, "What can we do now?" His reply was, "Don't worry. Every week has its Sabbath, and Jews love to hear a new chazzan. We

shall travel on, to another town. There we shall find parnassah (income)."

We travelled on, as he suggested, and we arrived in Mariopol. He dovvened there, and I made the acquaintance of the Rav, who wanted me to become the community shochet. What they really wanted was that I should replace their old shochet, who was too feeble and unsteady for the work. But the old shochet refused to yield up his post, despite their offer of a lifetime pension. I did not want to insert myself in this civil strife. Besides, it would be unethical, coming into a man's domain, trespassing on another man's livelihood preserve. So I declined. The Rav gave me a gracious letter of recommendation to his colleague in Baradinah, and we travelled there.

In that town they had need of a chazzan and a shochet. When my cantor dovvened that shabbos, they all liked him. And I, I found favor in the Rav's eyes. It seemed that it was the perfect match. They needed a chazzan and a shochet; we were a chazzan and a shochet. The trouble was that they wanted both jobs filled by one man. They could not afford two. So we had to leave that town as well.

We contemplated going to Tcherkesh. By this time, the winter was setting in. Since a boat trip was necessary, and the waters had begun to freeze over, we were reluctant

to take a chance on getting stuck mid-river in the ice. We decided, therefore, to head for the Jewish colonies, where a carriage could take us. But to get there we would have to go through the German colonies, and numerous peasant villages.

Previous route:
Krementchung →
Mariupol →
Baradina →
German Colonies

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

The German Colonies and the Peasant Villages.

In the Yaketrinaslaver Gubernia there were a large number of German settlements, and twenty Jewish ones. When we drove into the first German settlement, we thought we had arrived at a city. Only the tall standing rows of ~~fruit~~ grain and straw, near the houses, revealed that this was a farming community.

The colony was divided into streets in very orderly fashion. And the streets themselves were paved with stones. The houses were spacious and well built, with one and two stories. Some were of stone, others of wood. Beautiful gardens surrounded the homes, with all manner of flowers in the summertime. Attractive fences encicled them. The streets had trees on both sides.

There were fine storage bins for the grain, and stables for the cows, horses, and sheep. There were also large, beautiful shops with all manner of goods, a splendid church, and a school for the children. Everything was built in a most orderly fashion. The residents of the colony were healthy looking, fresh faced. It was evident that they lacked little, and they were carefree.

We drove through several of those German colonies, and they were all much the same. All lived in an orderly pattern, did their work responsibly, ate at fixed hours. They worked well, lived well, and among them were numerous affluent people.

The peasant villages were, by contrast, quite poor. But their streets, while not as fashionable and dotted with elegant homes, were equally clean and attractive. Their homes were smaller, but they sparkled white, coated as they were with chalk. It was a lovely sight, the street lined on both sides with glistening white little houses, roofs made of straw, crystal clear windows, and the chimneys stark white. Near the houses stood large bundles of straw. Very little wood was to be seen, for in Mali-Russia there are few woods. They heated their homes with straw, or with "kerpitch", made of the refuse of the cows and the sheep. Inside, their homes were scrupulously clean, not like those of the Lithu-

anian peasants, where the pigs lodge in the house. The earth inside was coated with yellow clay. In the center stood a low table, surrounded by yet lower stools. This was the dining area for the peasant and his family.

One special room was to be found in every home, where the holy pictures were hung from the beams. The Mother and Child were just above a glass filled with tallow, always aflame, hanging by a chain. Opposite the picture there stood a small table covered with a white towel, and upon it lay a loaf of bread. Into this room, every morning, the peasant and his family came, and on bended knees prayed before the picture. Afterward, they would drive out with a strong pair of horses hitched to a splendid coach costing up to one hundred and fifty rubel. This was a far cry from the Lithuanian peasant, who rode with a skinny, underfed horse hitched to a little cart.

They had large acreages of earth to plant. And it was good, rich earth, not sandy. Therefore, in a rain it all became quite muddy. The mud would stick to the feet. The Lithuanian peasant, with his sandals, would never have been able to extricate himself. But these peasants all wore boots, even the women. In a rainy time, when a wagon drove through the colony, its wheels were completely hidden by the mud. When they had to travel to another village, no horses were

used. Instead, they would harness several oxen, and sometimes even four oxen, to drag the coach, very slowly.

We arrived precisely in the rainy season, and so we had to driven by the oxen. They were attached to a long, narrow wagon, normally used to haul straw. We therefore rode slowly, many hours, until we came to another village, although the distance was not great. We stayed overnight. That night a frost came, and snow fell, so that we had to extend our stop there for several days, until we could travel on sleds. Half a day's journey brought us to the Jewish colony.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

The Yekaterinaslaver Jewish Colonies Fifty Years Ago.

The Jewish colonies in that <u>gubernia</u> (province) were established by Czar Nicholas the First. He settled a large tract of land with Jews. He promised them ~~them~~ the moon, as it is said, but of course he kept none of his promises, like the other Czars. The early pioneers, the majority of whom had fled into surrounding villages, had left their farming homes for two reasons. First, these

colonists could not stand the abuse heaped upon them by the Czar's henchmen, who guarded the colonists with an iron hand. For the slightest infraction, the government men inflicted hrsh punishment. Second, in those days farming was a very hard task, and those new to this kind of life found it more than they could handle. They were far more inclined to business. And so they fled to the cities, leaving the earth and the Czar's thugs behind.

Of the hardier lot who remained in the colonies, a total of twenty four settlements stood, some small, others larger. Most of them were poor both materially and spiritually.

I went there with the thought of settling in one of these colonies, if it were at all feasible. But one look at their life and their ways, and my enthusiasm fled. I could find neither a livelihood for me nor a life for the children. To raise children in such a wasteland would be worse than moving into a peasant village.

When we entered the first colony (I have forgotten its name), we saw in the distance, between two mounts of snow, tiny, low cottages, looking for all the world like tombstones. No tree, no fence around the houses, could be seen. Only several stands of straw, now covered with snow, resembling icebergs, stood near several houses. They sent

shudders through us.

In order to get into the house of the Jewish farmer, we first had to go through a large structure where the horses and cattle stood behind boards. From this enclosure we entered the house itself. A small lamp illuminated the entire house, which was divided into two areas. One section served as a storage bin for the harvested grain, and for the produce of the vegetable garden: onions, beets, potatoes, etc. The intermingled odors filled the house. The other section served as the residence for the colonist and his family of five.

Near the frost covered window stood a table and several stools. On the other side stood a large stove, which warmed the house, and this pointed to a small sleeping area, covered with a curtain. This was the entire house.

We ate a typical colonist's supper: black, thick bread with a large herring, followed by a dairy krupnik (barley) soup. We climbed to the top of the mountain of grain, and slept there--and breathed deeply of the spoiled potatoes!

Friday evening, in all fairness, we found a genuine Jewish table. Even the zmiroth (Sabbath songs) were not missing. The Kiddush was chanted over a generous portion of brandy, but the challah had neither taste nor texture. The black noodles were blind, without eyes, and were ac-

companied by a scrawny piece of lamb's meat. Our dessert consisted of steamed carrots. We recited the Birchat Hamazon (Grace after Meals), and ascended our sleeping perch.

The next morning we all went to the synagogue. My cantor was accorded the honor of leading the Service. The synagogue itself was small, poor. The older Jews sat near the stove, to be warm. Some wore short winter coats (peltz), and others wore warm kaphtans. The front section was occupied by the eminent citizens. They had no Rav, and the shochet handled all rabbinic duties. After Shacharith the Gabbai invited the entire congregation to his home for Kiddush, because of us, the community guests.

At the Kiddush, I inquired, "Why do you live so poorly? Why do the Christians live in such more comfortable, affluent style than you?"

They replied, "It is because we have larger expenses than they. We are obliged to pay a Rav, a shochet; we need to engage melamdim to teach Judaism to our children. All of this costs money. The Christians do not spend such money. They receive such benefits from the government."

I said to them, "With respect, that is only partially true. The principal reason why the Christian does so much better is because he works the land, and does not go looking for other avenues toward livelihood. He and his large family,

from the youngest to the oldest, all work diligently in the fields. Therefore they secure a fine return from their labors. But you, while you are tilling the soil your mind is elsewhere, on business. And at every opportunity you dash off to seek additional means of livelihood. Your homes are neglected, because you pay little attention to them. You are always looking out for some business. The "Angel of Livelihood" can not find you, because you are not in any one place long enough. Precisely this happened in our little town. The Shamas was also a shoemaker, operator of the community bathhouse, and he engaged in commerce with the peasants. Yet he was abjectly poor. When he asked the Rav why, with so many occupations, he was so poor, the reply was that the angel of livelihhod could never find him. When he came to the synagogue, the shamas was in the bathhouse. He went to the bathhouse, the shamas was in the shoe shop; he went to the shop, the shamas was in the village with the peasants. So the angel gave up, and he remained a poor man. So it is with you, my friends. When you make up your minds what you want to do, and stick to it, you will also prosper."

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

The Second Colony; The Rav Tends The Oven.

We came to another of the Jewish colonies, quite early in the morning. I told my cantor that I would go and talk with the Rav who, I had heard, came from my home town. I approached his house, which was small, and covered with snow. The frost was bitter, biting through the clothing. Suddenly I spied a young man dressed in a thick kaftan, with a flat black hat on his head, large boots on his feet. He was carrying a huge load of straw, bound by a rope. I asked him, "Where does the Rav live?" He replied, "You see him. I am the Rav." And he invited me inside.

He threw the bale of straw to the ground, handed me a chair while he remained standing, so that he could sweep out some ashes from the stove. Then he took several strands of straw, threw them into the stove, and closed the door on them.

"To tend a stove, you had to labor for years, so that you could be ordained? Any unlearned man can tend a stove. Why should your wisdom and Torah knowledge be so wasted?"

His answer was a deep sigh, no word. I looked around at

his home. There was not much to examine: three tiny rooms, with sparse furniture. But there were three bookcases filled with holy books. We chatted awhile, and I found him to be a highly learned man. My heart went out to him. A man struggles for years, the best years of his life he expends on study, he wanders through yeshivahs, sleeps on hard benches, often hungry, and finally becomes a Rav. And what is his reward? Poverty, privation, a nomad existence in the wastelands; a tiny house for his family. And on top of all this, he has to tend a stove! Is this the Torah, this its reward? Is this how we Jews pay our Torah scholars?

His wife, the Rebbitzen, what a bargain she got! A Rav who takes care of ovens! She was undoubtedly the daughter of a wealthy man, for only such are privileged to become Rabbi's wives. What gain did she receive from her good birth? Would it not have been kinder for her rich father to give her in marriage to some enterprising businessman, or a fine tradesman, or worker? But no, such fathers insist upon a Rav for a son-in-law, because that position has <u>kavod</u>, prestige and honor. The quest for honor blinds the eyes, leads people off the proper path, ruins lives.

I offer only my own personal opinion. Perhaps I am mistaken. The psychology of women is foreign to me, and especially so is the psychology of Jewish women. It is possible that

the poverty stricked Rebbitzen is perfectly satisfied with her lot. Her poverty does not obliterate her spiritual joy. In addition, the Rav's wife is the most honored woman in town. Whether it is in the synagogue or in any other place, she is accorded first place. Who can judge the extent of spiritual gratification, when the Rebbitzen listens to her husband studying the gemorrah aloud, with that sweet time honored tune? And when she listens to her husband delivering a fine sermon to the entire congregation, she must feel a divine pleasure far more enjoyable than the pleasures of purely physical nature indulged in by the rich women. And so we really cannot know which woman is the more fortunate.

I realized at once that this Rebbitzen was pleased with her lot in life. For when the Rav doffed his work clothes, donned his rabbinic garments--the kapoteh with the silk waistband, and the fine yarmulkeh--, looking every bit the gentle sage, she stood off, gazing upon him with such love and happiness. It was obvious that in such moments she forgot completely the poverty and deprivation. She was content with her life. Her tender and loving eyes followed us fondly, as we departed for the synagogue together.

TOURO COLLEGE LIBRARY

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

The Brith in the Synagogue.

Following the Service, there was a circumcision ceremony (brith) in the synagogue. (The custom there was that every brith was conducted in the synagogue, not in the home.) The Rav was honored with the "Sandek" role, the holder of the baby. I noticed that his young Rebbetizen was standing in the women's gallery, looking through the little windows, happiness and pride suffusing her face as she saw her husband sitting so honored in Elijah's Chair. Only her husband was accorded this honor, no one else, her demeanor seemed to declare.

Now I ask you, did this young woman need clubs, theatres, other such pleasure places? Here, in the poor little synagogue, she derived her greatest possible pleasure. Ah, how fortunate you were, you Jewish daughter of those never to be recaptured years! You were content with spiritual satisfactions. Your heart, your soul, were pure and free from corruption. You were undeviatingly loyal to your husband, whom you yourself, or your parents, selected for you. Most fortunate was your husband who took you for a helpmeet and a companion throughout life's journey. His heart was at peace, because he knew with absolute certainty that his wife was

true, and devoted to him with her very being. With the most profound satisfaction this young couple lived in that isolated, distant corner, in the Jewish colony.

When I talked with the young Rav, I realized that he, too, was content with his life. "What do I lack?" he asked. "Bread is given to me, all prepared. Water is carried to me. Several rubel of honoraria I receive during the year. My life is peaceful, so that I can sit and study Torah as much as I wish. Honor they accord me more than I merit. So what is missing from my life? What more do I need? And my wife is also content with what we have. She does not ask for more, nor does she miss having anything more. Well, that I have to tend to my stove during the winter, that I do not regard as an undue or undignified task. My dignity does not suffer, I assure you."

I, however, not being accustomed to this kind of life, did not envy either the Rav nor his wife, and not their compensations. And if they would have wished to detain me with them, even if they promised that I would never have to touch the stove, I should have declined such great good fortune.

We said our good byes to the Rav and the Rebbitzen. We travelled on, seeking better luck. The cantor tried to persuade me to go to America, but I demurred. The truth is

that the idea appealed to me, but without my wife's approval I would not even consider such a radical move. And so we departed for Pavograd. I realized that a business I would never establish with the cantor. So I told him that I was stopping here, and he should feel free to travel on, wherever he wished. We parted as good warm friends. The cantor went on his way, and I remained in Pavlograd.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

The City of Pavlograd...

The city in which I settled, and where I lived with my family for twenty years, where I spent my best middle years, was the place where I experienced the entire gamut of life. The city of Pavlograd is located in the Yekas' Gubernia, on the line of the train to Kharkov.

The city was not very large, perhaps about thirty thousand inhabitants, Jews and Christians. The Jews constituted a small percentage, about one hundred families. But they occupied the largest enterprises in town.

Pavlograd excelled in its trade of agricultural products with foreign markets. There were also great mills,

seven of them, where white flour was produced. All of them--indeed, all of the fruit and grain business--were in Jewish hands. There were two Jewish drugs stores. Liquor stores were owned by both Jews and non-Jews. There were two secondary schools, one for men and one for women. In addition, there were numerous stores selling all manner of goods, and lumber stores.

Two synagogues functioned, but only for worship, not for Torah study. For learning purposes there were three private schools, which was all that the government permitted. They were called Jewish schools, because the faculty was Jewish and the students who studied there were Jewish. But Heaven forbid that Jewish or Hebrew should be studied there! The so-called Jewish content could easily fit on the head of a pin. Two weak flies could have carried on their backs the full load of Judaic studies in their curriculum. And even that scant bit of Judaism was in Russian translation! No Yiddish word was ever spoken there, because in truth the parents were hardly enthusiastic about giving their children s truly Jewish education. The summit of their ambition for the children was that they should qualify for the <u>gymnasia</u> (secondary school). And if there were several families who were interested in teaching their children Hebrew or Yiddish, they

found no teachers. This was because the teachers in the private Jewish schools saw to it that there were was neither cheder nor genuine melamed available. (They were able to manage this, because the government forbade such solely Jewish schools.) And so, in that entire large community there was not one place, nor one teacher, where parents could send their children to receive a decent Jewish education. Indeed, the head of the private school teachers, Herr Pakeh, zealously guarded against a genuine Judaic teacher infiltrating the faculty.

This Herr Pakeh controlled the best and the largest class in town. This was hardly because of his extraordinary scholarship, or his splendid pedagogic skills. It was because he was a clever politician. He knew just how to win the good will of the directors of the governmental education institutions, with both proper and unscrupulous methods. Naturally, the other teachers did not love him for this. In general, there was little love lost among those private school teachers. They lived, as the saying goes, "like a bunch of cats in a sack". They were united in only one area, in the resolve that no melamdim should be permitted a foothold in the town.

It was in this town that I came to settle, and to earn a livelihood from the Hebrew teaching profession. Firstly,

I had no idea that there prevailed such hostility to a melamed. Secondly, I was so exhausted, mentally and physically, that I simply had to sink roots somewhere, at the first feasible place.

My appearance, as I entered the life of the town, was of the typical Orthodox clergy of those days. The moment I came into the synagogue, I was recognized as a Rav, or a maggid (itinerant preacher), or a shochet, or perhaps a meshulach, a representative of a Holy Land institution. One point was clear to all: I did not bring any money into the community.

I quickly earned a rich supply of "shalom aleichems". Even the aged Rav, of whom it was bruited about that he was miserly, gifted me with a warm "shalom aleichem". Following the Service, I chatted with him, and he recommended me for a temporary job as mashgiach (supervisor) in the matzoh factory, a mill that turned out kosher matzoh, but had no Pesach-dig supervisor. He promised that I would be well paid. The prospect appealed to me. I thought that in addition to my earning a few rubel, there was a chance that I might find favor in the management's eyes, and I could be offered a permanent post there. I accompanied the Rav to his home, filled with hope. He gave me a fine letter of recommendation to the mill.

The mill owner scarcely glanced at the letter. Rather, he examined me, without a blink of the eyes, from head to toe, and he sent me into the factory to work. I did my job diligently. loyally. I guarded painstakingly against even the remote possibility of chametz (any leavened object) getting into the matzoh. I really believed that I was pleasing the owner very much, and that he well might give me a permanent position. Therefore I went to the inn, that first evening, quite happy.

How disappointed I was the next morning, when I came to the mill to work! For the owner came over to me, gave me five rubel, and said to me, "Young man, here is your payment for your work, and you may leave now. You are far too conscientious and pious for us!"

Devastated, I just stood there, not knowing what to say to him. Wordless, I went to the Rav and recounted what had transpired. How could being good, and pious, be a failing in such a religious enterprise? The Rav smiled and said, "That which in Lithuania is a fine quality, is here by us a flaw. Probably you were too meticulous, and were thus not suitable for his ways."

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

The Shochtim of Pavlograd...

Since the Rav was unable to respond affirmatively to my need for a livelihood, I went to the shochtim. They were my colleagues, after all. Perhaps they could provide the response I required.

There were two shochtim in the city, one a chassid and the other a mithnagged. This was not because the Jewish population was split, one half chassidim and the other half mithnagdim. Nor, God forbid, was there such a deep cleavage between adherants of the two ideologies that they insisted upon separate shochtim. In truth, the local Jews did not themselves know who they were, to whom they owed allegiance.

As I was a mthnagged myself, I naturally went first to the mithnagged-ig shochet. There is no point in my recounting his strengths and weaknesses Simply put, he was a pious Jew who had a bit of learning, a competent shochet. But of humaneness he knew little. He was niggardly, with a closed fist. I came to his house at lunch time. He invited me to sit (since that cost him nothing), and he asked me all manner of question. Early in this probing, he asked me, "Vee heist du?". I knew perfectly well that he was simply

using the universal idiom for "What is your name?". But I chose to understand the phrase literally, word for word: Vee heist du, How do you command?. I replied, "If you really mean what you say, I command that the table be set for lunch.". Miserly he may have been, but stupid he was not. He understood at once, and went along with me. The table was set, and we had lunch.

From his conversation at the table it became clear that no job would materialize from this source. Away I went to the other shochet. He wasan entirely different breed of human being. He was garbed in a beautiful robe, with a silk waistband, like half a chassidic Rebbe. He was a wise, jovial, learned Jew who genuinely liked people. I learned that it was to him that travelling clergy always came for assistance. His house was constantly open to rabbis, shochtim, maggidim, and any meshulach (representative) of any good charitable cause.

He was not a tall man, but his girth was more than ample. He had red cheeks, and his long black beard was flecked with silver. His extended curly earlocks framed a set of wise, friendly eyes. A sliver of his black yarmulkeh could be seen sticking out from under his hat. Sabbaths, he would wear his mantle over one arm, and the other arm hung empty. A very long red bandana, which was wound around his neck, as was the way of chassidim, comp-

lcted his outfit. He walked slowly, in stately fashion, step by step. The table he set was elaborate, in the way of a "Guter Id" (a chassidic Rebbe). But there were no shirayim, because he never refrained from eating every morsel on his plate. He ate without a fork, using his hands, as the chassitic Rebbes do.

(The "Guteh Idden" never use silverware, because they regard their table as the sacred altar, and the Torah says, "Ye shall not place metal upon them".)

Sabbath songs were sung lustily, and quite beautifully, since this shochet was also gifted with a fine voice, and led the congregational prayers. His son, an only child, was about fifteen, and helped his father with the singing. People used to gather outside their window to listen to the melodious zmiroth (Sabbath songs).

The shochet's wife sat at the side and derived rich "nachas" from her divine husband. She gazed upon him with profound respect and affection. This was because he was not only a learned and pious Jew, he was infinitely more good looking than she. For she, sad to relate, was his exact opposite. Where he was handsome, robust, with an open, attractive face, she was skinny, like a dried out lulav (palm branch), ugly, swarthy of color, a flat plastered nose and tiny squinty eyes. And the head covering

of some obscure faded hue was pushed down to her eyes. Her son would say to her, "Mama, you fooled Dad." Instead of taking umbrage at such a remark, she relished it. For it underscored her great good fortune in having such a handsome man as her husband. She would often say, "He is handsome and I am clever." She was also a pious Jewess, collecting charity for the poor, and for needy brides. As is natural, there were those who gossiped about her, but who can stop evilmongers? And what weight is attached to their foolish words? The fact is that she had a good heart, extended a helping hand to those who were in need, gave warm hospitality to the stranger, and especially to the learned and pious Jews.

It was to this shochet that I came and told the full story of my situation. He and his wife welcomed me with genuine friendliness. They urged me to stay with them until after Pesach, to teach their young son. In return, they promised that they would establish a good and productive <u>cheder</u> for me. The shochet told me of the hostility of the private school teachers, and of their vigilance against the establishment of a genuine <u>cheder</u>. But he promised to take care of that problem, seeing to it that those teachers should do me no harm.

I was agreeable, and I stayed with them, teaching their

young son I had taught the boy but one week, when both he and his father expressed delight with my teaching. The wife spread the news throughout the town of my fine teaching. She blessed God for sending such a gifted teacher for her son; a teacher such as the city of Pavlograd had never been privileged to have before. She cared for me as she did for her own son. She had two goats, and she used to give their milk to him, because goat's milk was considered healthful, better than cow's milk. When she gave me that milk, and I told her that I could not drink it, she fooled me, telling me it was cow's milk when in fact it was the same milk her son drank. She did this, of course, for my good.

The shochet loaned me twenty five rubel, and I sent the money to my family for Pesach. I began to develop a clientele. A neighbor, a soap maker, also had a son, twelve years old, and wanted him taught Jewishly, but found nobody to teach him. When the shochet told him about me, he summoned me and promised that if I would teach his son, he and the shochet would guarantee me a complete <u>cheder</u>.

And so it was. Between the two of them, they managed to secure ten children, with the assurance of two hundred rubel for the summer, with <u>kest</u> by the parents of my students. I was content, and at the Pesach <u>seder</u>, I identified with

the text of the Hagaddah, feeling liberated from my wanderings and from my financial insecurity at long last. Immediately after Pesach I set about my new role happily. I learned, finally, that a melamed without a clientele is a sad creature indeed.

At first it was difficult for me. For the majority of my young charges did not know one word of Yiddish. They spoke only Russian, which I did not know. But with time the situation improved, and I grew as pleased with my pupils as they grew pleased with me.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

The Same Routine But Another Name

The city suddenly realized that something new had come into the life of its citizenry. A cheder, a melamed, Bible studies, and gemorrah no less; Hebrew, Yiddish. It became the chief topic of conversation throughout the Jewish community. The three private school teachers finally heard of it, and they were far from joyfull. They began to consult as to how to be rid of me. They resolved that the only practical way was to turn the matter over to the Inspector. My parents discovered their plot, and they

warned the teachers that if they informed on me to the governmental authority, they would be reckoned with. No more was heard from those teachers.

I worked through that summer diligintly and faithfully. I did no one any harm. And yet I lived in constant fear. I feared that any knock on my door meant that the heavy hand of the government had reached out and settled upon me. Whenever there was a slight noise at my door, or when passersby were heard outside my window, I was certain it was the Inspector. In this way, peacefully on the outside but fearfully inside of me, I worked through the summer.

When the vacation period, between semesters, arrived, Herr Pakeh realized that he was losing his best students to me. He saw that the way things were going, he would soon lose his entire livelihood. And so he invited me to his home and urged me to desist. But if I insisted on remaining as a teacher in the town, I should come into his class as a Hebrew teacher, and he would pay me seventy five rubel a month. I consulted with my patrons. Most of them were unhappy with the proposal. This was especially true of the shochet's wife, who said that she would have to withdraw her son, for she would never allow him to be in Herr Pakeh's class. Nevertheless, they all agreed that I had little practical choice. And so, I was no longer a

melamed, when the winter term began. I continued to teach children, of course, but with the exalted title of Instructor. Same game, different name, you see.

It would be unsuitable, of course, for an instructor in a classroom where the Czar's portrait hung, and where the children were sitting hatless, and the principal was clean shaven--and once in awhile the government Education Inspector walked in--to wear a long kapoteh and long earlocks. So I found it necessary to wear a shorter jacket and long trousers, as was the custom of gentlemen. And while, Heaven forbid, I would not cut my payess (earlocks), I did curl them more closely around my ears. When the shochet's wife saw my transformation into modernity the first time--for I was still boarding there and teaching her son--she looked unhappily at me, and heaved a bitter sigh, as though to say, " See what has become of a fine young man!" Nevertheless, I did not lose her affection. She continued to care for me, even to the supplying of goat's milk. And when the boy recited the gemorra he had learned during the week, on each Sabbath, his father was in seventh heaven.

What did I teach my young charges? Why, simple Hebrew reading, and a passage or two of the Bible. That's all!

The fact is that even that little was more than enough, in Herr Pakeh's class. The several Bible verses they learned bareheaded, for that was school policy, or at least so said Herr Pakeh. I just managed to wring out the religious concession that for prayers their heads should be covered.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

I Begin To Study Russian

I had never been taught the Russian language, either in the cheder or in the yeshivahs. And when I became shochet, of course it did not seem a necessity. Whoever heard of a shochet who taught himself Russian? Once in awhile the thought did occur to me that one should know the mother tongue of his country. And I would begin to study Russian grammar and vocabulary stealthily. That is, I would sing out the Russian in the melody singularly Talmudic. But invariably a woman would come in and ask that I slaughter a chicken, or a customer for a cow would enter. I feared that they would discover my "goyish" pre-occupation, spread the scandalous news through the town, and I would lose my job. So I stopped, time after time.

This starting and stopping continued until I settled

Pavlograd, and especially into my new post as Instructor. I realized that here I must learn the native tongue. For representatives of the Education Ministry would visit on inspection tours. Sometimes members of the Jewish intellegentsia--who eschewed Yiddish as though it were a disease!--would come into the school. Whenever I was introduced to any of these men, I would nod wordlessly. I could not enter into their conversation, for I did not understand what they were saying. So I sat there like one dumb. They regarded me as a nonentity.

I grew angry with myself. On what did I spend all my years? Of what use was my laboring at studies for so long? What had I gained from so much time, until I was twenty years old, in the yeshivahs? Sure, I learned Torah, and Talmud, and Hebrew secularist wisdom. But I remained absolutely speechless among people. I could not understand or join in any conversation. Here is my principal, a man of little knowledge, and he is the learned one and I the ignorant one.

Therefore I resolved that, come what may, I must learn the Russian language. Realizing that I could not do this in the shochet's house (for that would be <u>bitul zman,</u> wasting time on non-Torah pursuit), I moed to my own room elsewhere, and engaged a Russian tutor. By the end of

winter I had made considerable progress. While I was far from fluent, I could be among a group of Russian speaking people and understand most of what they were saying. I could even limp along in making myself understoo, also.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

My Family Joins Me; I Become a Melamed Again

I had not been home in eighteen months, so I went there for Pesach. They tried to persuade me to settle down there, but I refused adamantly. It was obviously my destiny to be deriving my livelihood from teaching, and I much preferred to do it in Mali-Russia than in Lithuania. In Lithuania there was neither money to be earned, nor a decent life to be made. In Mali-Russia a melamed earned five times as much as in Lithuania. He could live decently and in dignity, a man among men.

I returned to Pavlograd, and I taught in Fakeh's class. This time, however, my family was with me. I taught there that summer and the following winter. At that point, I saw that my salary could not cover our

expenses. My wife persuaded me to launch a cheder of my own, even though that would involve me in difficulties with the private school teachers. That would be preferable to living in such tight circumstances.

Before Pesach, I began to create my cheder. It went delightfully easy, because I had established a good name. Some of the most affluent Jews sent their children to me. I had one major problem, however, and that was a shortage of capital. This was not Lithuania, where a melamed could secure several small rooms as a residence, and convert one of them, with a bare table and stools, into a cheder. Here I would have to rent a substantial house, and furnish the cheder as a dignified, spacious classroom.

God was good to me. He sent a good and generous man to me. This was my lifelong friend, R. M. Zaidlen, who to this day remains my intimate friend, he and his family. Although we are thousands of miles apart, our hearts are intertwined to this very day. This noble man helped us, and he also sent his children to my cheder. They studied with me until the Zaidlen family emigrated to the United States in 1905.

I rented a handsome house, established a thriving cheder, and at last lived contentedly. The fear that I had harbored, of the government inspectors and other po-

tential trouble makers, did not materialize. Everything went smoothly. A year later, a circular was distributed in our town, stating that the government would, from then on, permit anyone who would pay a three rubel annual fee to open his own cheder. Although this naturally evoked a proliferation of melamdim, it did me no harm. I always had the most successful cheder, without undue exertion. I began to live the life of a comfortable melamed.

The happiness and good fortune amongmen is not the same for all. To whomever it is vouchsafed to be among the blessed, the cord of good fortune remains unbroken. It is extended from his cradle to his grave, uninterrupted. His sun shines constantly as at mid-day. No dark clouds cover his horizon. His sun shines in the ever blue sky from early morning until sunset, until she settles herself down in the west. Even then, she leaves bright golden rays shining on the tall trees, and on the tips of the mountains. The birds, with their evensong, escort his sun until she is hidden from our eyes, as night falls.

So goes the life of the fortunate man. He lives out his life happily, from his childhood until he concludes his sojourn on this earth. He traverses the sea of life from one end to the other without travail, with happiness. He sees his little ship floating placidly over the waters, and

the waves are gentle. He is well and happy throughout the journey, until he reaches the far shore, with a smile on his lips and with a pleased countenance, as he leaves this world.

There are many, however, whose good fortune in life is no more than the sun on a winter's day. It shines for a brief moment in the dark, grey sky, and immediately it is overwhelmed by black, dread clouds. It becomes dark in the middle of his day, as though it were deepest night. He swims the sea of life which is very stormy for him. Rarely does his little ship float calmly in the seething waters. At any moment, it may overturn, taking him into the depths. His entire journey is filled with fright and with danger, until he reaches the far shore. Little does he savor of the joys of life, throughout his mortal years, until he concludes his human travels.

CHAPTER THIRTY

A Disaster Overtakes Us After Sukkoth

My peaceful and enjoyable days, in my modest melamed circumstance, did not last long. For a brief moment in my normally dark horizon, the sun shone. Quickly it was

obscured by black clouds. After Sukkoth, when I had already put my cheder in order, and I was so pleased to have my livelihood secure--although with hard labor--for at least six months, my world was disrupted by a disaster. It was such a disaster as, until my last days on earth, I shall never forget. Even time, the alleged healer of all wounds, cannot muster up the power to obliterate that disaster. The wound was deep, and it has remained deeply imbedded within me, in my heart. It left roots within my inner being, in my broken heart. Frequently the recollection evokes painful cries and bitter sighs from my depths. It is almost forty years since that tragedy, and the wound is yet fresh; the burden heavy on my heart.

In the Intermediate Days of Sukkoth, in the year 5653, our youngest daughter Raizele (affectionate diminuttive for Rose) became deathly ill. Her illness brought not only her tragically young death, but also a terrible epidemic within our household. My wife and four of our five children were smitten by the disease. Only I and our son Eliyahu, at the time seven years old, remained well. The cheder was closed. Every room in the house became a sickroom. My house was transformed into a small hospital. It was quarantined. No one was permitted to enter, no one to leave. The sole exception was my dear friend Chaim Tzvillman, a fellow melamed.

He took Eliyahu home with him. Evenings he would come to our house to help me with my stricken family. Exhausted, I made the sorrowful rounds day and night. I was fearful lest I, too, fall ill. Who would care for my beloved family then?

God helped us. My wife and my daughter Anyutah, as well as our younger daughter Eda, recovered. The older daughter Nechamah Leah, and our other girl Henlah died, the former on the 12th of Kislev, and Henlah seven days later. We were whisked from that dread house into another residence. I described that tragedy in my book of memories. With ink and with tears I wrote the inscriptions on their tombstones...

We moved into our new house, far from where the disaster had struck. The cheder was re-established, and soon was flourishing as before. The keen edge of the pain was dulled somewhat. It never departed entirely. A sigh, a soft moan, would accompany each recollection. But a semblance of normalcy returned. As it is said, "What the earth covers, must not be resurrected". One must try to live, while one yet has life.

The following year another daughter was born to us. Because she arrived on Purim, we named her Esther, the great heroine of that story. Besides, that year my father's sister, my Aunt Esther--gradmother of the renowned humorist

Eddie Cantor--had died, and so our daughter continued her memory. In addition to this arrival in our family, my wife's mother and her daughter, came to live with us, because my stepfather-in-law had died. And so our family was enlarged substantially, and it was a happier household.

Several years went by without any mishaps. My wife bore another son. On Shushan Purim 1896, at his Brith, we named him Shalom (Peace). All of our friends wished for us peace and tranquility; we should live with serenity, and know no more sorrow.

The two new children comforted us against the tragedy of our terrible losses. The oldest daughter, Anyuta, I sent to the gymnasia (high school). Eda studied with me in the cheder, preparatory to her going off to the gymnasia. In my cheder I had several top grade Russian instructors, although strictly speaking the government forbade Russian instruction in a cheder. But, as it is said, "a custom is stronger than a law". All the melamdim had Russian taught in their little schools. We surely brought no harm to anyone thereby.

I toyed with the idea of standing for the examination to receive a certificate from the Education Ministry as an Instructor (that is, in secular studies), so that I might open my own private school. So I travelled to Yekaterinaslav, to take counsel with my young friend, Dr. Shmaryahu

Levin. He discouraged me from that course. He said,

"You are a fine melamed, and children learn Judaism and Hebrew very well with you. It is much better to be an excellent melamed than a mediocre instructor. And so I remained a melamed.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

My Nephew Becomes My Partner

I yearned, nevertheless, to have a class in Russian, even if I did not teach it. I therefore searched for a qualified teacher, who would join me as a partner. I received a letter from my Minsk nephew, in which he expressed interest in coming to our town to open a class. He had permission, because he had a diploma to teach up to the seventh grade.. He was also a fine Hebraist, and he had a nice appearance. I knew that with such a man a real success could be gained. I wrote to him, inviting him to come and join me.

My hopes were realized. Very soon after our opening of the expanded studies, we had more than fifty students. It all went beautifully. We even surpassed Herr Pakeh.

My nephew did not bring his whole family with him.

He brought only his oldest daughter and his older son. His wife and his younger children he left back home, in Minsk. I must not write too extensively of the reasons why he felt compelled to leave his home, although he was earning good money from teaching there. I shall tell the reason in brief.

My nephew was a very learned man both in Hebrew and in Russian, and a fine mathematician also. Indeed, he was among the most brilliant mathematicians in Minsk. A graduate of the Gymnasium, he was far from religiously observant. But he fell in love with Lippah the Shochet's daughter, and she with him. She was an only daughter, and she had been promised by her father to a Rav's son. Her father, incidentally, was a noted scholar, and rather a religious fanatic. He was hardly ready to accept as a son-in-law a radical, irreligious young man. Besides, he was humiliated that his daughter had run off and got married to one other than her intended bridegroom, just one month before the planned wedding. He was angry with the couple, and remained estranged from them for the rest of his life. In fact, only her mother ever came to visit them, and then only in secret, so that her husband should not know of it.

Did Lippah the Shochet act properly, or improperly?

I offer no opinion. I write only of what transpired. The young bride was, indeed, lovely, but she was far from brilliant or cultured. She was a young girl who had never progressed beyond the Yiddish translation of the Bible. Even the "Tzena Ur'enah" (Bible Tales for Women) she had not mastered. This was the way her father had insisted she be reared. She could not write one word of Russian, nor could she speak it. Her father--and then her husband--could not bring her into intelligent company.

The world has a saying, "Love is like the ague. At first it throws off heat, and then it grows cold." Precisely this kind of "ague-love" was my nephew's lot. His fervent, burning ardor lasted but several years, and then it cooled to the point of frigidity. He realized that she was not for him. At home she was no mate, and among cultured strangers she simply did not belong. He could not sever his marriage bonds, because she refused to receive a Get (Jewish divorce). Besides, despite their less than loving relationship, she had borne him five children. And so, he was always seeking opportunities to be apart from her.

For three years, he managed to be separated from her by making an extended pilgrimage in Palestine. Upon his return, he sought once more for an excuse to be far from

his wife. Therefore he accepted my invitation with alacrity.

Half a year went by smoothly. Then I noticed that he was uneasy, troubled, distracted. Somehow, his teaching was not as exciting or effective as before. I asked him what was troubling him, and he would not tell me. But several weeks later, the "cat jumped out of the bag". His wife suddenly appeared, with their children. That day he was as one stricken. But, what can a man do? She was there, and he had to accept her as a reality. He reconciled himself to the fact that he could not escape her forever. He was tied to her as a horse is to the wagon. No matter where the horse runs, the wagon is with him.

He rented a house, installed his wife and children there, resumed an overtly normal married life. But he was never again the jolly, bright, sprightly nephew he had been. And his teaching was never the same, either.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

I Take Leave of My Nephew

My nephew's wife noted that he spent far more time in our house than in his own, with her. All day he would spend with his class, at our place, and in his free time also he

was at our house. She insisted that she wanted to move into the house where the class studied, and my family and I should move to another place. Unreasonable as this was, for the sake of "Shalom Bayith" (peace in the home), I consented. We moved out, and they moved in.

Of course this availed her little. The moment the class had ended, he hurried over to our house. I did not wonder too long as to why our house was so magnetic for him. His eyes wandered constantly to my oldest daughter! I censured him severely, and I cautioned him against even thinking such nonsense, because nothing could come of it. He said not a word, and took his leave.

It is well known that when affection is dependent upon some other consideration, when that consideration is disturbed the affection is also disturbed. And frequently the friendship based upon that affection turns to enmity. Day after day I saw my nephew's friendship turn sour. Day after day he found faults in my instruction. He often expressed his negative criticism with ill concealed hostility. At last I was compelled to speak to him as Father Abraham did to his nephew Lot, "If you take the left road, I shall take the right; if you wish the right road, I shall take the left." The city is big enough for both of us, but separately. Let us part, divide the pupils between us. Whoever

wishes to be taught by you will transfer to your class, and whoever by me, to mine. I shall leave another classroom, and my students will come to me there."

The idea appealed to him. He thought that all of the students would elect to go with him. After all, he was our cultured principal. But he reckoned without the decision-makers. Virtually all of the pupils chose to study with me. At that point our previous friendship gave way to open hatred. Our affectionate relationship, which had originated in our childhood years, turned to enmity. And this enmity has lasted to this very day. I do not know where he is, nor does he know my whereabouts. He did not stay much longer in Pavlograd. He returned, with his family, to Minsk, and I remained there in my occupation, a melamed with my own cheder.

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

After My Nephew's Departure

My class grew larger after my nephew's departure. I no longer had to engage a Russian instructor, for my elder daughter Anotta taught the class, and Eda helped her. Things went rather well, to the point where I was able to purchase a house for me and for my little school.

The next year, I built a large, substantial house in the courtyard I owned. My friend Mr. Zeidlen helped me, and all went well again. At this time there was born to us another son, Yaakov Yashe, now known as Jake. My mother-in-law, who lived with us, with her daughter, found a man of her age-- a respectable and affluent man--, and she married him. Well, what could be better? To bring matters to an even more heartwarming situation, my sister-in-law also found a fine life's mate, a young man from Bobroisk named Jacob Hyman. We made a wedding for them such as we would have made for our own daughter, after which she and her husband left to make their home in Bobroisk.

And so we remained, our family, consisting of me and my wife, my three sons and three daughters, may they live and be well.

In those days the recently kindled flame of Zionism burned fiercely in our community. It was several years before Dr. Herzl's death. I took an active part in the movement, and I was one of the active preachers for the cause of Zion Redeemed. Not only did I give frequent Zionist lectures in the synagogues, but I planted the seeds of the cause in the hearts of my young students. I imbued them with love for Zion, and I taught them the songs of Zion.

Once the great Usishkin came to our little town. As we

sat at the reception we gave for him, I asked him, "What can I do to help the Zionist cause." He responded that I, and many others like me, could do much for Zion.

"You teachers, if you will implant the love of Zion in the hearts of your children," he said, "then we shall soon have an entire generation of those loving Zion. Therefore you have both a great challenge and a great opportunity, you teachers, who are fashioning our Jewish tomorrow."

I always bore in mind Mr. Ussishkin's words, and I did my best to fulfill the promise I had given. My students, as it turned out, were very pleased with my many references to Zion. They were especially interested when I read to them the words of one of our great prophets who foretold the redemption of Zion. They soaked up such lessons of comfort, as the parched. I do believe that from the many students of my years of teaching in Pavlograd, many became and remained ardent Zionists to this day.

In this conviction I raised my own children, as well. I tried to implant in them love of the Holy Land, and of their People Israel. I never forced, or imposed my beliefs upon them. But with love and gentle words I tried to guide them into these paths. I thank God that my children, to this day, are respected by others; that they are trustworthy people with good and noble character; that they conduct themselves

with integrity. All of them are educated--some more, some less--; all married to suitable husbands and wives. My sons-in-law and my daughters-in-law are fine, decent children. In this I take much pleasure and pride--that I leave after myself a generation in tune with my deepest feelings and convictions. This has been among the most profound desires and dreams of my life...

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

The 1905 Revolution and the Pogroms.

I do not intend to write a history of the Revolution of 1905. Great historians already have recorded it for posterity. I write only of my experiences during that terrible time. But in order to do that intelligently, I must say something about the circumstances of the time, even if altogether too briefly.

The Russian people under the reign of Nicholas all suffered badly, the non-Jews as well as the Jews. It was impossible to bear the heavy load of the tyrannical Nicholas the Second, and the brutality of his agents. But of course, as always, the major portion of the burden was carried by our Jewish people. Almost daily new regulations would come forth, each designed to render the Jewish lot more miserable. This

was hardly surprizing, in view of Nicholas's own acknowledged antiSemitism. Not only that, but he was surrounded by a coterie of antiSemites more vicious than he. They constantly goaded him on to ever more severe decrees against the Jews. He accepted and implemented their counsel eagerly. The Jews sighed and suffered in silence, under this terrible yoke.

The Czar was no more merciful to the poor Russians of any faith. He squeezed them drier and drier. Every heart in Russia was filled with bitter hatred for Nicholas and his minions. It was as though a dormant fire was there, ready to be ignited. And ignited it was. Like some horrifying flame it rushed forth and consumed all of Russia. Suddenly a general strike of all workers spread spontaneously throughout that vast land. Black, all enveloping blackness, engulfed the Russian Empire.

Even the tyrant Nicholas recognized that he must yield to a degree. And so he pronounced that henceforth Russia would be a constitutional monarchy, with a Duma (parliament) whose deputies would have a voice in public affairs.

Great joy overtook the country! In every town and village the citizenry took to the streets, singing the revolutionary songs of freedom. The taste of liberation was wondrous. All of the repressive authorities, especially the police, slinked sullenly. The end of the oppressive government had come!

But the joy was short lived. A black cloud came over the horizon of the Russian people. Darkness overcame all of the citizenry, and especially the Jews. With fervent zeal the agents of Nicholas lashed out against any who had evidenced the spirit of freedom. They shot, slaughtered, imprisoned, persecuted anyone upon whom the slightest suspicion fell that he was disloyal to the regime.

With powerful, iron hand, with blood and fire, the revolution was suppressed. Singled out were the Jews. It became a basic truth--false as the accusation was--that Jews were responsible for the 1905 Revolution. Therefore it became not only permissible but almost a patriotic deed to inflict damage and hurt upon the Jews. Since, as it is well known, the Russian peasant was in any event antiSemitic, he took to the persecutions with fervor. The Revolution was a good excuse for them. They burned Jewish houses, looted, murdered, all in the cause of "Mother Russia" More than one hundred Jewish little towns and villages were destroyed by them, with the men wounded or killed, Jewish daughters raped and brutalized. Life became unending terror for our people. There was scarcely a place in all of R ssia where a Jew could feel safe. Even locales where there were no pogroms lived in fear that a pogrom would be visited upon them. In brief, it was a terrible time for the Jews in Russia. All of the ills

of every society are attributed to the Jews, and so it was in the post-Revolution days of Russia. It has been the destiny of the Jew to be the scapegoat for all the sins and troubles of humanity. He must carry the sins of mankind on his shoulders. He must pay with his life for all the misdeeds and travail of the world...

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

Our City During the Revolution

Just as it came to all the other cities of the Ukraine, it was expected that the pogrom would come to Pavlograd. After all, Pavlograd was surrounded by villages of Russian peasants. They had already converged upon our city several times, in their thousands, to do mischief. But we had discovered that wherever the government agents refused permission, the peasants would not do damage. And so we had to resort to the time honored strategem of our people, which had originated with Father Jacob. He, as you will recall, sent gifts to Esau. And so did we. We knew that by securing the protection of the government agents, our town would be safe from pogroms.

We collected five thousand rubel, and gave this sum to

the Police Chief and to the Commandant of the troops stationed in our town. Thereafter, whenever the peasants from the surrounding area gathered to descend upon us, the soldiers and the police dispersed them.

By this expensive ruse we escaped pogroms. But we lived in constant fear. Each time we heard a shout in the night, or the drunken yell of a Russian peasant, we scurried to our hiding places, in the attics or in the basements.

There was another defense that we undertook. Like many another Jewish settlement, we established a civil guard, a self defense organization. We decided that we must be capable of taking care of our lives and our families, by ourselves. We bought all manner of weaponry: revolvers, knives, and the like. We prepared ourselves to go forth to do battle against Amalek (traditional Biblical enemy of the Jews). Weapons were to be found in every Jewish household, even in my house, although I feared to touch them.

You may well ask, who were the military defenders in our house? Who could shoot? My sons were little boys; my daughters knew nothing of such things. And so I myself was the defender. But in truth I was less of a soldier than my little ones. And yet, Hillel says, "Do not separate yourself from the community." Every other house was armed, so my house was armed.

When the agents of Nicholas learned that the Jews had

armed themselves, they were displeased. How do Jews come to be armed? A Jew has the inalienable right to cry out when he is struck. But to strike back, this was not for the Jew! This is the proper thing for the non-Jew, Esau. So an edict was proclaimed, that in whatever Jew's house a weapon would be found, he would be punished severely. Actually, the edict did not specify Jews. No citizen was permitted to have weapons in his house. But we all understood that the plan was devised against the Jews. And indeed our instinct was proved correct. Only Jewish houses were subjected to search.

With this edict, a pall came over our community. Fearing the zealous government agents even more than we feared the foraging peasants, we undertook such a house cleaning as we normally reserved for erev Pesach. Some cast their weapons into the ovens, to melt them. Others threw them into the lake. Still others buried them deep in their yards.

I was among those who buried their weapons, but I made a "golden grave" for them. Each time a threat of a pogrom came, I placed all the gold coins I had in a box, and this box I interred, together with our weapons. It was as though there were an invisible inscription over the grave, "Here Lies The Jewish Security". I planted onions on top of the grave, so that no one suspected what was hidden underneath. When the pogrom threat was past, I caused Resurrection to occur.

The police searched every Jewish house diligently, and mine also. They came not once but time and again. One midnight, my house was surrounded by the police and gendarmie, as though it was a notorious murderer they were after. With weapons on display, they turned our house inside out. Tables and chairs were overturned, drawers were pulled out and overturned. Closets were pillaged. They kept searching, even though it was quickly evident that no weapons were in the house. Perhaps they hoped to find incriminating papers. When they could not find even papers, they departed, unhappily. We were left shaking with fright, but at least no punishment of more horrible nature was visited upon us.

Once, when the governor of a nearby town was assassinated, the Police Inspector marched into my classroom, with a company of soldiers. I thought that they were ready to arrest me for teaching anti-government doctrine, fomenting disloyalty such as had caused the assassination. Instead, the Inspecttor barked, "Is your name Alexander? Do you have a son Jacob?" I replied in the affirmative to both questions. I noted that he was filled with joy, as though he had trapped the enemy. In a sharper tone he sounded out, "Where is he?" "He will be here at once, " I replied, and I sent several of my students to fetch Jacob Alexandrovitch (as the Inspector had referred to him). The little barefoot four-year-old came

into the classroom. "Here is Jacob Alexanderovitch!" I said. "He is the one you are looking for?"

The Inspector glared angrily at me, certain that I was pulling his leg. I had to explain to him at length that it was true; that this was indeed my little boy Jacob. When he could no longer deny the obvious fact, he grew red in the face, spat several times angrily, and stalked out of the house. The children in my cheder laughed at the frustrated Inspector, and at the idea of the little revolutionary, my little Jacob, who was waging battle against the mighty Czar!

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

The Polish Soldiers in Russia

My daughter Anyuta was then studying at the University in Odessa. We heard that the police often raided the university student dormitories, searched the premises, hit the students with truncheons, and often they had to be hospitalized. We wrote immediately, urging her to return home. She had been there scarcely a year, and had not made the acquaintance of the police, nor they her acquaintance. But she did get to know someone, a fine young man, originally from our town. His name was Grischa Makarovsky. She was engaged to him eventually.

He finished his studies at the University, and then, of course, he had to pay his debt to Nicholas; that is, he was inducted into the army. He was sent to serve his duty in Poland, in the city of Sedlitz. This was the system in the army of the Czar, Polish soldiers would be stationed in Malt-Russia, and the Russian soldiers were sent to Poland. In this way, it was assured that all of the conscripts were far from home, thus less likely to desert.

The Russian soldiers were not too badly off in Poland, because they all knew the Russian language, and they knew what was required of them. But the Polish soldiers had a difficult time in Malt-Russia. The young Jewish men among them knew nothing of the world outside their Rebbe's domain, and Russian was naturally totally alien to them. Now imagine these unsophisticated boys, heretofore sheltered in their tiny, confined Chassidic world, suddenly thrust among gentiles, having to learn military regulations, and the numerous names of the Czar and his family and the army officers! They were dumbfounded, made innumerable errors, received their due from the tough sergeant. Well, while they understood all too well the corporal punishment, at least they were mercifully spared awareness of the vile curses directed at them--because they knew not one Russian word!

If you were to have seen them, these precious young chassidic recruits, arriving in town on the train, disembarking and walking to the barracks, and if you did not notice the non-Jewish recruits among them, or the veteran soldiers leading them, you would have thought this was a group of chassidim escorting their Rebbe to tashlich on Rosh Hashanah. For they were dressed in their own chassidic garb; the long kapotehs, velvet hats, with little unshorn beards, all of them. (Until they arrived at the barracks, you see, they wore their own clothes.) Truly, they were "silken young men". Even their walk was most unsoldierly. They straggled, ambled along without any order, or formation.

Only their sad faces, and their lowered heads, offered witness that they were not on the road toward the Rebbe's "shirayim", but rather to the barracks, to eat treifah food and to receive physical punishment from their new "rebbe", their drill instructor who knew no mercy. Much pain and many lashes were they to sustain, until their new teacher taught them the rudiments of military life. And they had no sooner begun this painful learning process, when the trauma of eating was visited upon them. These pious young men, who would not dream of permitting a piece of non-kosher meat to pass through their lips; who would prefer infinitely to starve rather than eat treif food, were compelled

to stuff themselves with pork. The sergeant, blessed humanitarian that he was, watched carefully, lest any of his charges eat insufficiently. If he saw any of his recruits abstaining from the pork, he ordered several beefy veteran soldiers to hold him while he forced the pork through his lips. Many a young Jewish recruit adamantly refused to eat, and was beaten badly. Often a twenty four hour period of solitary, on bread and water--stale black bread and murky water--was the punishment for such insubordination.

After the elegant dining experience, the marching and basic training began. The recruit had to jump over other soldiers, and then over a fence. Never in his young life had the Polish <u>chassid</u> jumped, except for the "<u>Kedushah</u>" prayer, when one raises onself on the toes three quick times in succession. Naturally, when commanded to jump over planks, or over the fence, the new recruit fell again and again. At such times, the drill sergeant was not content to let him lie there, or to try again. No, he was too impatient. He would seize the young man and toss him over the fence. Ah, those poor young men went through the tOrtures of the damned before they began to bear a remote resemblance to soldiers!

Sabbaths and Festivals were as oases in their desert.

Those were their days off. Every householder in our Jewish community regarded it as a great mitzvah to give hospitality to one or two of the Jewish soldiers on such days. Indeed, this mitzvah took on a permanent character. Each recruit knew who would be his host every week throughout his service. There were many fine learned young men among them. But most of them managed to be transferred, after a short while, back to Poland, closer to their Rebbe. For their Rebbe remained very dear to them, dearer than their own families. Their ardor and reverence did not diminish during the four years of their army service. And when they were finally discharged, it was usually to their Rebbe that they would go, before returning home.

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

Our Daughter Marries in Sedlitz

Our Russian young men serving in the army in Poland did not have such a hard time as the Polish boys had in Russia. Indeed, some of them even entertained thoughts of marriage while yet in service. This is what happened with our daughter Anyuta's fiance Grischa. He was serving in Sedlitz, and even before his duty was ended he wrote to our

daughter, asking her to come to him, to be wed. She told us that she wished to return to Odessa, to the University. We saw her off, but of course she wound up in Sedlitz, not Odessa. Several days later we received a telegram from both of them, asking our permission and our blessing for their impending marriage. We had a choice? So of course we dispatched our permission and our blessing. Eight days later, a letter from the Rav of Sedlitz arrived, certifying that he had officiated at the marriage, and that all was done completely in accord with Jewish law and tradition.

Several months afterward, Anyuta and Grischa came home, and thankthe good Lord, they began a happily married life, which goes on blessedly to this day.

Our son Eliyahu managed to be freed from military conscription, and went to Charbin. He also soon requested our permission and our blessing for his marriage. This we also granted, and he was married in proper Jewish fashion. Thus we married off two of our children, although, since we did not attend the ceremonies, I should say that thus our two children married themselves off.

Those were the days of the Russo-Japanese War, and my brother-in-law Jacob Hyman, a war veteran, was called up for return to military service. He reckoned, however, that it was preferable to go to America than to fight Japan.

He emigrated, and one year later he sent for his family to join him there. Another of our friends did precisely the same. It was such a time of trial, that whoever had the opportunity and the capability to flee Russia, fled. It was the period of the most extensive pogroms against the Jews under the reign of Nicholas the Second. I, too, yearned to escape to America, but I could not. So I wanted at least to change the location of my distress, that is, from my little town to another Russian town. As the sick person shifts from one side to another, hoping the new position will be more comfortable, so I hoped that by moving to another locale my family and I would be better off.

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

I Take My Leave Of Pavlograd

We resided in Pavlograd some twenty years. There I had the best years of my life, from age thirty to fifty. These are the most energetic and most creative years of a man's life. It is for this reason that our Torah ordained that the Levites should serve in the Tabernacle during these years. I worked in Pavlograd, during those years, and lived through all kinds of times, joyful and sad, sunny and cloudy. My spirit never faltered. I battled, worked, strived, but I never gave in to

feelings of discouragement or despair, even in the worst of times. I geared my life to the honored Jewish maxim, "Be not fearful of the daily troubles; as theycome, so they go". This is the best formula for a man's existence, the gift of God's benevolence. This is what God intended, and this is how we are meant to endure.

Generally, during the latter years of my stay in Pavlograd, my lot was not at all bad, in terms of the normal needs of a man. I had good health and a good livelihood. What was so very hard to take was the succession of decrees and limitations against Jews, promulgated by Czar Nicholas and his ministers.

My children were all eager and bright students. My daughters finished the Gymnasium with top grades, receiving medals for academic achievement. They were fortunate, because there was no quota enforced, in education, for women. But for males there was a strict quota: only one Jew for every nine Christians was admitted to higher education. Just as the tyrannical Pharaoh decreed that all the males should be drowned but all the females could live, so did the Nicholas regime decree. Since to be uneducated is to be scarcely alive, the cruel Russian regime shut of that life from our Jewish boys.

My sons therefore were not admitted into the Gymnasium. This, of course, was not because they were poor students. It

was because their father was not wealthy. You see, the tenth one, the Jewish boy, who was admitted, was always the rich man's son, for his father could bribe the Gymnasium Director. Not qualification but affluence was the key that turned the lock. We are much more progressive now, and yet I wonder, how much as this really changed?

My children came to me with just complaints. They did far better, in the examinations, than others. Yet they were not selected. I was compelled, if they were to be educated, to engage private tutors for them, at home. Well, at least Czar Nicholas did not prohibit this, as he did so much else!

I yearned to change to another town, although I had no reason to believe that it would be better for me there. After all, wherever I moved, the long hand of the Czar would control my life. So I went to seek counsel from our Rav. Even though the front of his hat was always turned backwards, and he was a batlan (impractical person), he was a shrewd analyst, and his advice was frequently brilliant I asked him if I should leave Pavlograd. He replied with a Talmudic saying, "If it is not good for a man in his city, he should go to another". The idea, of course, was that when he would see that it was no better in the other town, he would return home content.

"You must know," he said, "that the lot of the Hebrew

teacher is never wonderful. Whether you teach here or elsewhere, it is inevitably the same. But obviously it ~~is~~ /s your feeling that it could be better elsewhere, and so you will never be content until you try it. So go and try it!"

His counsel pleased me, and I went immediately to Yenaveh, to look into possibilities there. (I had heard that they were seeking a Hebrew teacher and a Russian instructor.) Apparently they approved of me, for several days later I received a telegram inviting me to move there, with a guarantee of 150 rubel monthly. Right after Sukkoth, accompanied by my daughter Eda (who was a competent Russian teacher), and my older son Sholom, I moved to Yenavah. At home I left, temporarily, until I could see how matters worked out, my wife and our two younger children.

CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

We Settle in the Townlet Yenaveh

The town of Yenaveh had been, until some years before my arrival, a wilderness, a wasteland, what was called in Russia one of the steppes. Then some Belgians discovered iron ore there. They boughut up huge tracts of land, built iron foundries and many houses for their workmen and their executives, engineers and supervisors. Thus it became a lively

thriving community.

More than ten thousand workmen labored in the iron works. They were all Russian peasants. The mechanics and the engineers were brought from Belgium and France. Since such a sizeable community requires many of the needs of normal life, an entire little city of merchants, craftsmen, tradesmen of all sorts, grew up around the factories.

The first such arrivals were Christians, and they preempted the center of the new little town. Then Jewish families, about 150 of them, moved in. Most of these were from surrounding towns, looking for better opportunity. The reason why Jews were among the last to settle there was a Czar decree that Jews were forbidden to move to a village, only into a town. And until Yenavah grew to the size of a town, the Christians had secured the most strategic locations.

The Jews, however, wasted no time in setting up fine shops, and soon they built nice homes with gardens. Within several years it had grown into a respectable town, with all the appurtanences: a cemetery, a synagogue with a mikveh, a Rav, a shochet, and severalmelamdim. One of these was quite a figure, aristocratic, and he had it really good, until I arrived and broke his monopoly.

Their mode of life was so inconsistent that to this day I do not know how to designate them, Orthodox or Freethinkers. For they lived as both. Were you to stepinto the synagogue on a Shabbos, you would find a genuinely Orthodox congregation typical of a Lithuanian shtetl. All of the male worshippers had their taleisim (prayer shawls) over their heads, and wore large black yarmulkes, and they davvened with loud fervor. In their homes it was also as among the most pious Jews, and the dietary laws were observed scrupulously.

Were you to step outside the synagogue on a Shabbos, however, and glance into the market place--no Sabbath, no Jewishness! Shopkeepers were working busily as in mid-week, workmen labored as every day, the women went around with their baskets, haggling with the peasants over the foodstuff, especially the chickens which were brought in every Saturday. The last morsels of the Shabbos cholent (dish of meat, potatoes, and vegetables cooked the day previous) were scarcely swallowed, and they were already wheeling and dealing, weighing and measuring as though it were an ordinary weekday.

This was irrelevant to their Sabbath synagogue observance. For when Minchah time came, they were all back again, praying devoutly, through Ma'riv and the Havdalah, during which they looked down at their nails carefully, as the Blessing for fire was chanted--as though they had seen no fire all day! It

was a community study in contrasts; two ways of life being pursued side by side, Jewish and non-Jewish together.

On Jewish education, however, their was neither inconsistency nor compromise. They all attempted to give their children the best possible education. And they readily paid the highest salaries to the Hebrew teachers.

The hastily built little town did not have many of the normal conveniences of the day. There were no gutters at the sides of the streets, as an example, so that after every rain it became so muddy that walking was impossible. We had to stop, every once in awhile, to clean off the mud from our shoes. For this purpose walking sticks were carried. People wore either galoshes or boots. It was no rarity for someone to sink in the mud--either one foot or both feet--and have to be pulled out.

To even things out, since there was altogether too much mud, there was altogether too little water. A town well had not yet been dug, so that there no community water supply. Some of the more affluent householders had wells dug on their own property, and the other residents would purchase drinking water from them, at a monthly rate, depending upon how much water each used. At these private wells there were two buckets, connected by a rope to each in a pulley system. As one bucket descended to take on water, the other would come up,

filled up, and then the reverse. There was no delivery, of course. Whoever wanted to secure water had to come to the well himself, or send a servant.

There were no paid firemen, only volunteers. They had a little wooden shack where empty barrels stood. Whenever the fire bell was sounded, these men dashed home, put on their metal hats, and rushed to the shack. Each one would then place a barrel on the two-wheeled little wagon and drag the wagon to the closest well. Filling the barrel with water, the fireman would then pull the wagon to the fire, drawing out the water with which to battle the blaze. Naturally, by the time this extended process was fully underway, the fire had plenty of opportunity to do its work. Invariably, the fire was totally quenched only after all possible damage had been done.

Houses were very expensive, for so many people rushed into the booming town that there was no time to build enough homes. But at least heating fuel was inexpensive, because there were huge mounds of soft coal all around the town. Wood, however, cost a great deal, and was sold by the <u>pood</u> (forty Russian pounds).

It was to this raw, booming, newly formed settlement that I came, to bring Torah to the community...

CHAPTER FORTY

How I Fared Until My Wife Arrived.

I am no psychologist. I do not pretend to understand each person's nature. But I have observed myself carefully, over the years. I have noted that it has always been my nature to justify every decision in advance, to be totally persuaded of the correctness of the step. But when finally confronted by the decision itself--that is, once launched upon the move--I would hope for some good reason to dissuade me, to force me to change my mind. And when no such deterrent came along, I was compelled to go ahead, even though my heart was no longer in it.

This is what happened with my move away from Pavlograd. At first, when I began to think about the move, every argument, every consideration, convinced me that I should go. But when I was ready to move, I had a change of heart. I really did not want to go. I should have welcomed some plausible reason not to go. But no such reason came along. And so, unwillingly, I departed Pavlograd, the city to which so much of me was bound, and went to an alien place, to unknown strangers, to a small, muddy little town, there to make my way for long while alone, that is without my wife.

We came, I and my daughter Eda and my son Sholom, to Mr. Tira's house. It was a rainy, muddy day. Since we did not yet have a place of our own, we stayed at the Tira house overnight. I grew lonesome, immediately, and thoughts of a speedy return came into my mind. But after all of my probing and planning and deciding, how could I, now?

The next day, Mr. Tira found us a nice house, right in the market section. It had three large rooms. I set about putting my cheder in order. Food and water was brought to us from Mr. Tira's house. But we had great trouble with heating. Houses were heated with coal, there, and we were unaccustomed to handling the coal. We had very large pieces, too large to be used as they were. But we did not know how to break them into smaller pieces. We tried dropping one large piece of coal on another, in the attempt to fragment them. It was hard work, and we did not succeed often. Worse yet was our attempt to kindle the fire. For this, small pieces of wood were used. While Mr. Tira supplied us with the wood, we had to start the fire ourselves. We labored mightily, and often we slept in a cold house, because we could either not get the fire going, or we could not keep it aflame. It is difficult to describe adequately how much we agonized those six first weeks, until my wife and the children finally joined us. With their arrival, a fresh, far better life began.

CHAPTER FORTY ONE

Our Life In Yenaveh Until Our Departure For America.

When God created Adam, he said, "It is not good that man should be alone". Regard Adam. He sits there in that beautiful garden, and he has everything at hand. Fruit of all kind is his for the stretching out of his fingers. Water he has from no less than four rivers. He lacked for nothing, it would appear. And yet God thought it was not good that he should be alone, without a wife, a helpmeet.

If this was true of Adam, in that plush place, how much more was it true of me, in that small, muddy shtetl, where I often did not have sufficient food or water--for these were not always brought to us on time--, and where we were cold because the coal was too big for the fire.

It is small wonder, therefore, how much I missed and needed my wife. And, indeed, when she finally came, everything fell into place. We began to live decently. We even engaged a servant girl, and we found time to visit friends, of an evening, and to invite friends to our house.

My cheder developed quickly and well. My pupils were

from the most affluent homes in town. My daughter Eda had splendid success with her Russian instruction, and she received high fees. We began to live quite well. When this went on for awhile, and I saw that our life was working out better than I had envisioned, I sold my house in Pavlograd, receiving 4,700 rubel for it. I paid the balance of my mortgage, and I was left with more than three thousand rubel. This, for a melamed who does not use his capital for investment, was a significant amount, in those days.

Word of my affluence did not take long in travelling throughout the community. "A rich man has many friends", as is well known. Soon many people came to the door of "the wealthy melamed". This one sought a donation, the other a loan. And they all received sympathetic response from me. They came to me as to a "Guter Id" (a chassidic rebbe), seeking help.

At once my status was transformed. No longer was I the humble melamed who had to bow to the householders, and flatter them, and praise the son who learned nothing. No more. Now it was they who had respect for me, for they needed me. It became a matter of pride for a student to be accepted in my cheder. The truth was that the students did get an excellent education, both in Judaica and in Russian. And so they were all quite pleased with us. As I look back, I realize

that the two and one half years we spent in Yenaveh were probably the best years we had, in all of our life in Russia. But the time came when we felt compelled to leave not only Yenaveh but Russia. Of this I shall write in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FORTY TWO

Why We Had To Leave Yenaveh, And Russia, Too.

In the first year of our residence in Yenaveh my wife's mother came to live with us, because her husband had died. She herself died during our last year there, and she was interred in Yenaveh on the second of Cheshvan, 5671.(May her soul be bound up in the bonds of eternal life.)

This was the first cloud on our clear horizon. The winter passed by without untoward incident. But in the early summer, following Shavuoth, the first signs of the dread cholera epidemic became manifest. It grew and increased, until the horrible disease became a full blown epidemic. More and more victims fell prey. Especially hard hit were the iron works laborers. The poor people suffered more than the rich. For some reason, the cholera finds more fertile ground in

the homes of the poor. The poor laborers lived either in cramped rented quarters, or in company houses. All were small and stark and crowded. In two or three little rooms as many as seven or eight had to live. It is small wonder that the unwelcome "guest", the cholera, found it easy to get in and settle down. Where there is room for eight, a ninth can also find a place. Because of the cramped crowded condition, and the filth, and the inadequate diet, the terrible disease was able to travel from one person to another. It was as though the "guest", wanting more space for himself, destroyed others in the rooms.

From one house to the next, without letup, the epidemic travelled. It was like in the Egypt of the Bible, of whom it is written, "There was no house without its dead". It was frightening to go out on the street. Whenever one went out, the sight of black cloth-covered wagons could not be avoided. Otherwise the streets were empty, deserted. Most of the shops were shuttered. In front of those that were open, the shopkeepers sat with downcast faces. There was no happy sound heard, anywhere. People would not even greet one another, and surely did not shake hands, out of fear of contamination. At most, there was a nod of the head.

The synagogues and the <u>chederes</u> were closed. No assembly of any sort took place. Even the churches were closed. All

sat in their houses, alone and frightened. A dead silence reigned over the town. Only the church bells, tolling unceasingly in mourning for the dead, could be heard. But that horrifying epidemic was not deterred by those church bells. The cholera marched inexorably from house to house, taking its toll in human lives without mercy, twenty to twenty five lives each day.

This went on for an entire week.

Wondrously, as in Biblical Egypt in the Tenth Plague, the angel of death skipped over the Jewish houses. In Yenaveh a precise duplication of the Bible story was enacted. While victim after victim fell prey to the cholera in Christian homes, not one Jewish Home was struck. This, however, was no inexplicable miracle. It was a natural, inevitable course. For the Jewish homes, no matter how poor and humble, were always clean. This, as is widely known, has always been a characteristic of the Jewish home. Both religiously and as the normal way of life, the Jew does not permit dirt and filth to gather. And everything that is eaten is cleaned, as are the hands. Especially in the time of the epidemic, the Jews were meticulously clean, guarding zealously against anything that might be unclean, giving the angel of death no entry. Therefore the epidemic did not reach into the Jewish homes.

This was a mixed blessing.

The Christians in the town began to murmer that the epidemic, not having touched the Jews, had been brought by the Jews. It was a replica of the infamous libels of the Middle Ages, when the Christians blamed all the catastrophes upon the Jews. The most notorious and the most tragic of these, it will be remembered, was the Black Plague, when the Jews--who escaped the scourge--were blamed with poisoning the wells. In our town, too, word spread that the Jews had poisoned the wells. The proof, of course, was that no Jews had succombed.

What was to be done to those Jewish scoundrels who had wrought this disaster upon the Christian community? Why, a pogrom, of course! That was the only way to still the enemy.

A fright, a double fear engulfed us. From the outside there was the fear of the pogrom; from the inside, the fear of the cholera.

We did not know what to do. We knew, from unhappy past experience, that when the Russian peasant threatens a pogrom, he must be believed. What to do? We went around and around, seeking some solution. In the end, a most ironically cruel solution came. Jews began to die from the cholera too! The suspicion thus fell away from us. But of course our fear of the epidemic increased and deepened.

Great heroism was exhibited by Jews in the community. Especially heroic were the young men who, braving death, went from house to house where stricken people lay, giving the treatment the doctors had prescribed. They risked infection, but they saved unnumbered lives. Many would not be alive today, but for those young men.

One day a husband and wife died from the cholera at the same time. The entire community went into mourning. At Minchah, after the funeral, everyone gathered in the synagogue, to recite the Psalms. There was moaning, and heartbreaking cries were lifted heavenward. I, of course, was also among the Psalm-sayers. The crowd was agitated, and the mourning reached fever pitch. I realized that from this an even greater tragedy could come, and so I went out, seeking the Jewish doctor. When I reached him, and told him what was transpiring, he also reacted with concern. He ran to the synagogue and dispersed the congregation.

"Gather when you shall have cause to rejoice, not now, to lament!" he cried. They did disperse, but with hearts torn apart, and with downcast faces.

And the epidemic raged on, unchecked. Sacrifices on its altar mounted each day, now among the Jews as among the Christians. And although most of our neighbors realized that we were victims too, and not villains, some of the

virulent antiSemites among them still murmured against us.

We, my wife and I, began to speculate, "Why should we remain here? What prevents us from leaving this mud-filled town, with the pogrom agitators and the cholera epidemic? We have neither heavy investment nor family roots here, so why shall we continue to endure this frightening scene? We can go toYekaterinaslev, where our daughter Anyuta and her family live. There no word is heard of pogrom or cholera. It is a large city. We shall find a means of livelihood with the several thousand rubel we have."

I was ready to pull up stakes and go, when second thoughts came to us. This was not a good idea, we saw. To take our small fortune, invest it in another Russian town, and take our chances that what happened here would not recur there, did not seem very prudent. Who knew what could happen in Russia? Nicholas, the antiSemitic tyrant, was still sitting on his royal stool; the pogrom-chicks were far from gone. How long would it be before a pogrom would overtake the next town? and the next? The same story might well be repeated, and where would we be then?

No, this was not the way! It would be "going with a healthy body into a sickbed". And so, there were really only two alternatives: either remain here in Yenaveh, or leave Russia altogether! Why should we not heed the admonition

of our brother-in-law Lifshitz, who had written to us frequently from America? With our bit of money we could earn a decent livelihood there, in that free land. He was an American only several years, and already he had a good business and was living a liberated life.

We decided that we would listen to our brother-in-law, and we would leave for America. Said and done! I immediately went to the government offices and secured a passport for our entire family. I came home and announced proudly that we were going to the United States of America! We would sell everything that we could not take with us.

The shtetl was agog, when our announced plan was made known. Many people came to our house. A number of them tried to persuade us that we were making a terrible mistake. "Why should you flee to America?" was the refrain. "Laborers, poor people, political people for whom it is dangerous here, these flee. But why you? Respectable, non-political, productive people like you should not be leaving."

They gave us no peace. They insisted that we should not do this foolish thing. But their talk did not dissuade us. Our minds were made up. We were going! We had young children. There, in America, we could give them a decent, uninterrupted education. There we could live free from fear. No one who had the capability should remain in bloody Russia!

"The steps of man are ordained by God,
The path is beyond man's comprehension."

It is by God's guidance that man is led. He himself is blind. True, he seems to be doing what his will commands, but actually his will is determined by heavenly forces. Nothing happens by chance.

We left Russia. We had closed our mind against the numerous nay-sayers, dear friends as they were. This turned out to be most fortunate for us. Had we heeded their admonitions, had we remained in Russia, their friendly counsel would have wrought a great disaster for us. Indeed, we should have suffered that same fate that overtook them.

It was only several years later that World War One broke out upon the earth. It was a blood bath unprecedented among mankind. The very earth itself was soaked with blood. Many cities and villages in Europe--and especially in Russia--were destroyed. And the Jews of Russia sustained the most calamitous losses. ~~In~~ The terrifying pogroms, throughout the Ukraine, left hundreds of towns devastated, and our little Yenkaveh was among them. Less than one half of our town's Jews remained alive.

Following the war, and the pogroms, the detestable Bolsheviks came along to complete our destruction. They destroyed the Jewish remnant. The wealthy became beggars. This

was the tragic ending of the fabric of Jewish life in our Yenkaveh as I knew it. Had I remained there, there is no reason to believe that either I or my family would have been spared. Therefore, we must thank God who deterred us from heeding the well intended counsel of our friends.

On the fifteenth of August, in the year 1910, we took leave of our friends in the shtetl. Half the town accompanied us to the station that evening. We parted as dear and cherished friends do, with abundant blessings and good wishes. These did not begin to taper off until the conductor sounded the first whistle, as indication that the train was about to begin rolling.

As we said our last goodbyes and began to enter the car, my heart was siezed with anguish. At any moment, now, I was about to leave my native land. True, it was a land which persecuted us, a land in which the blood of our brothers was all too frequently spilled cruelly, a land where even at that moment the tyrant Nicholas and his minions made life miserable for our people. And yet, it was our Mother Russia--well, then, our Step-Mother Russia, which had nurtured us. It was the land which had given birth not only to us but to our parents and grandparents, for many past generations. It was here that I had spent my youthful years--those fortunate days--and the major portion of my life, an entire half-century.

Here I had enjoyed pleasures and suffered sorrow. Love and hate, lighter and heavier moments, tragedy and rejoicing, were mine, here. Ah, how beloved to me were the fields and the woods, the lush meadows in which I had spent so many of my carefree childhood moments.

Thus I mused, and my thoughts grew more sombre as I stood there looking out of the train window. "I leave with you my older beloved children, my sisters and my brothers, my acquaintances and my dear friends--all defenseless. In your earth rest my sainted parents and grandparents, and my deceased young children, and so many more of my family. They rest peacefully now, under their mounds of earth, safe at last from the monstrous hands of Nicholas the Tyrant.

"Ah, it is difficult, heart-wrenching to leave you forever, Mother Russia, but leave I must. You have swallowed too much of the blood of my innocent and defenseless brothers. And who knows how much more such innocent blood will yet be shed by your kings and their agents. Were it all to stop even now, this brutal slaughter, it would take generations for you to become clean of your horrible sin. Your thorns are too deeply imbedded; you cannot blossom and grow afresh. There is no decent, dignified life here for us. And so I must leave you.

"Farewell!"

CHAPTER FORTY THREE

We Travel To Yekaterinaslav, To Take Leave Of Our Children

I was so pre-occupied with my brooding, that I failed to hear the conductor's second and third whistles. The louder, final good byes of my friends, startled me out of my reverie. I ran over to the window to wave to them, and to receive their windblown farewell kisses. With a shriek and a harsh grinding of wheels, the train got underway.

The last view I had of our home town was the waving of handkerchiefs, the inaudible (because of the noise of the train) cries of "Be well!", then the enveloping of all our friends in the black smoke spewed out by the engine--and they, and the entire town, disappeared! For the night into which the train took us was black, coal black.

We took our seats, and for a long while none of us said a word. Each was occupied with his own thoughts. Each of us was dwelling on the immense change this ride was to make for us, and on the unknown future in the new land for which we were bound. Silently we sat, and only the sound of the wheels broke the silence. Each clickety-clack of those wheels told us that we were leaving our birthplace.

Thus we rode, a good distance, until the conductor came

into our car with a small, dimly lit lantern, and cried out, "Gospoda Billetti!", we should show him our tickets. Only then did we rise up out of our inner worlds and began to speak to each other. We talked of all of the hectic procedures of our departure, and before we were aware of it, we arrived at the Yakaterinoslav station. Our children, Anyuta and her husband Grischa met us, for this was their home, and we were with them two days.

A pall of sadness hung over all of us, for we were too well aware that the parting from each other--who knew for how long?--was imminent. Indeed, it was in each of our minds that we might never see each other again, and so it became increasingly difficult even to look each other in the face, for fear of breaking down. Only parents, taking their leave of children, can truly comprehend how we felt. Much as we loved them, we did not suggest the possibility of their joining us in the adventure to America. They were nicely settled, with a good livelihood. How could we persuade them to leave their satisfactory situation for the great mystery of the new land? Who knew what that kind of future would bring them? After all, there was no guarantee that every immigrant would find good fortune at the end of the journey. Indeed, we knew that for some immigrants the new life was a terrible struggle until the first rays of sunshine came. Therefore we were

far from sure that it made sense for the children to give up a fine job, home, settled position for the questionable destiny in America.

We thought it best to wait until we ourselves were well settled in that other land, and then we would write to them about their doing as we had done. Therefore we did not speak of it during the two last days we had together. Those days sped by too quickly, and we were forced to part.

With our son Elyusha and his wife we could not have a face-to-face leavetaking, for they lived very far away, in Charbin. It was out of the question for us to undertake such a long journey. And so we left our children and went across the sea to America, with the hope that we would see each other again, some distant day. Anyuta and Grischa accompanied us to the station, to see us off on our long trip.

I cannot describe adequately what transpired during our final parting from the children. Tears were flowing from all of our eyes. Through our tears we saw the thousands of miles across the great Atlantic Ocean about to separate us. And only God knew whether any of us would ever conquer that distance, be reunited. We embraced each other repeatedly, tightly, pressing our hearts together, kissing each other and dampening one another with our tears. Who knows how long that sorrowful scene would have been extended, had not the con-

ductor's whistle called a shrill ending? And so we had no choice but to part, leaving them tearful and sad as we were. On unsteady feet we entered the train, stood near the window to catch one more glimpse of our beloved. We wished fervently that the train should never start, but the conductor knew not of such wishes. He sounded his whistle, and we were parted!

CHAPTER FORTY FOUR

We Begin Our Journey To America

Lonely, despairing, we left the railroad station, in our sorrowful car on that insistent train. The parting from our children had left us deeply disturbed, our nerves raw, our very beings disoriented. We all sat dumb. Only the occasional sigh was heard. The other passengers looked at us with speculation, wondering, obviously, why this family did not say one word to each other. Gradually, however, as the train continued, and various passengers alighted and were replaced by others, our spirits were raised somewhat. When we arrived at the beginnings of the Polish area, our interest came alive. A new type of person came into our view. We had seen none like such people in Mali-Russia, and especially among our Jewish brethren.

Jews both old and young, with long beards and short beards--but none ... shaved as in our communities--communicated with each other in Yiddish, but in such a Yiddish as we could barely comprehend. They were dressed in long kapotehs, wore velvet black hats, and some had pointed yarmulkes. They all wore sashes around their waists. They regarded us scrutinizingly, and we them.

Some time went by, silently. But Jews are a gregarious folk. And soon the silence was broken. We began to talk, and soon knew each other familiarly. We told them of our journey, that we were leaving Russia and going to America to settle there, because in Russia the Jews were oppressed by the government; every day new decrees, new tightening of restrictions, new limitations of the Jew's freedom and rights. They told us that in Poland it was scarcely better. The same government--that of Nicholas--ruled there, and all the anti-Semitism we knew, they knew too. But in one respect it was better there. A Jew could still earn a decent livelihood without undue hardship.

They did not fail to tell us of the Rebbes, their divine qualities, their miracles. So excited were these Polish Jews in their recounting the wonders of their Rebbes that each tried to outshout the other. We delighted in the knowledge that fellow Jews in Poland lived such robust lives spiritu-

ally, and that even materially they did not have to struggle against antiSemitic oppression, as the Russian Jews did.

The next morning we arrived at the German border. We went through the passageway. Policemen let us go through a small door, one by one, passing like sheep. The police stood on either side of our column, and as each of us went by, they examined carefully the photos on our passport, comparing it scrupulously with our faces. God forbid that the two should not match. When they found that we were all who we claimed to be, they permitted us to leave Russia. Amazing! As much as the Jew was hated in Russia, all manner of difficulty was placed in the way toward his departure.

We went over into German territory without incident. With joy I recited the Blessing "Shepterani", (that He freed me), meaning that I was infinitely grateful for being free at last from Czar Nicholas and his miserable agents; that we were now free to breathe the air of another, more enlightened land. We took deep breaths, and set foot on German soil.

CHAPTER FORTY FIVE

On The Road: The Yelloveh Station

Rid of Nicholas and his bloodhounds, I felt that I was virtually in Eretz Yisrael (Israel). But I was soon disabused. The same policemen, with the same imperious manner, although garbed differently, and speaking another language. They were somewhat more polite, with their silk kerchiefs and with their "zie" instead of the "du". But in essence they were the same. The policeman asked me,

"Where are you going?"

Had I replied that we were bound for Berlin, it is possible that we would have been treated much better. But I did not know the secret, so I told him that we were going to America. This meant, to him, that we were common immigrants. Our status was thus automatically of the lowest.

The conductor remarked, "So, they are going to America?" And with this he looked down upon us, as though we were some lower region creatures. I saw at once that this was to be no pleasure trip. When we arrived at the Yellovah station it was pitch dark night. A man in some kind of uniform got up on the wagon, and instructed us to follow him. Our baggage he placed on a little wagon with two wheels, which

he pulled, and which he told me to push from behind. I was beside myself. Why should I push the baggage wagon? In all my life I had not done this. Was this to be worse than Russia? But, I was told, and so I did. Then a thought came to me. Perhaps the Russian practice, a small bribe, would be as effective here? I gave him half a rubel, and in my half-broken German told him to push the wagon alone, for I was too weak. He accepted the coin with pleased alacrity, and he apologized profusely for having suggested that I should push it.

He brought us into the immigration hall. He showed us a place where my wife and my daughters could sleep. To me it had the appearance of the hen house I had in Russia. Me and my two boys he told to climb up to the second storey. These sleeping arrangements did not suit me, so I gave him another bribe, and asked him to find us a decent place to sleep. He took us to another chamber, said "good night", and left us.

When I looked well at this new room, I was horrified. I would have given him another large coin to take us back to the first room. But I did not know how to get back there, and he had, judiciously, disappeared. Upon a thorough examination of the cavernous place, I became frightened. It was a huge room, filled to the ceiling with empty sacks,

and nothing else! Only one small lamp illumined that entire large hall. Aside from us there was no one in that great cave of a place. There was much more than enough with which to make our beds, what with all those sacks. But I was afraid to go to sleep there. Who knew what kind of place this was? Perhaps he had led us there to rob us in the middle of the night. (I still had about a thousand rubel with me, for the purchase of our boat tickets.) We stood there, wondering what to do.

I wanted, I yearned, to sleep. So I lay down with my treasure, and the two boys lay down on either side of me, as my guards. Well, of course in a moment my two stalwart night watchmen were fast asleep. But I tried mightily not to fall asleep. I permitted myself only to drowse a bit, and then forced myself awake again. It was as in the "Song of Songs"--"I am asleep and my heart waketh".

As I was lying there restlessly, I suddenly heard someone snoring loudly, somewhere in the sacks! I was petrified. I quickly awoke my two young guards and told them what I had heard. They heard it too. What was happening? What would happen to us in this wierd place? We sat there, unmoving, for a whole hour, and the snoring went on, steadily, unabated.

Our fright did abate, however, after awhile. If the man

was sleeping so soundly, he could do us no harm, we figured. And perhaps it was just another poor immigrant like us, who had sought out a comfortable place to sleep. But I could not fall asleep the rest of that night. I sat all night, propped up against the empty sacks, and listened to the music the unknown sleeper was playing with his nose. Ah, our compassionate Russian do-gooders of the social services; they provided the immigrant with everything on the journey--even music!

Why the social workers, you ask? Well I had not requested any help from the Kiev Committee, only counsel as to how I should arrange our trip. With their sage advice, we had wound up here, in this frightening huge hall filled with empty sacks. Such great good deeds they perform, and then they trumpet to the world how indispensable is their aid. Think of the good fortune that had befallen us. If an immigrant is affluent enough to bribe the porter, he is freed from the obligation to push his own baggage wagon. More, he is privileged to sleep among the empty sacks. But if he has no bribe to offer, he must push his own wagon, and sleep in a hen-house. This is the first joy the immigrant finds on his journey. And as you read further, you will learn what further pleasures the heartwarming social workers of the Committee provided the immigrant along the way...

CHAPTER FORTY SIX

The First in the Seven Steps of Hell For the Immigrants

The Yelavah station was the first stop for the immigrants crossing the German border. All aiming for embarkation at Bremen had to go through there first. Near the station there was an immigration center, and a small shtedtl where Jews resided. Mostly Galicians and Rumanians, they were not notorious for their hospitality, especially to Litvaks (Lithuanians)--unless, of course, the Litvaks were prepared to pay handsomely, and then even Litvaks were wondrously welcome.

We left our sack-filled sleeping chamber without further problems, and we sought out my wife and daughters. How had they fared? They told us that they could not sleep all night because of the little beasts--bedbugs--, entire battalions of them welcoming the immigrants. We went to wash, and were directed to a large barrel of murky water where all immigrants were supposed to wash themselves. When we asked for tea, we were shown the communal "samovar", a large, tin, open tub of hot water. Every immigrant would come with his tin cup, dip into this tub, and make his tea. This was not for me! Such filth I could permit neither myself nor my family.

I decided that we should go into the entedtl for our tea.

This happened to be Saturday morning. We entered a house, and asked if we could have some morning tea. The Galician housewife, a big, fat, coarse woman, who was sitting hunched over a steaming bowl of boiling milk, drinking her coffee, was shocked, and began to upbraid us humiliatingly. "Look at these Litvaks!" she cried out. "Shabbos in the morning they waltz in and want tea, hot tea! Imagine, Jews wanting hot tea to be made on the holy Sabbath! Only Litvaks!"

But as soon as I indicated that we were prepared to pay, and well, her sense of shock suddenly disappeared, and she was all smiles, the perfect hostess. She ushered us in as the most respected of guests, and ordered her servant girl to offer us the hot milk. We drank it thirstily, and paid her handsomely. In her eyes, therefore, we were most pious Jews. Apparently in the Galitzianer (Galician) Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) hot milk paid for on Shabbos is quite all right!

Returning to the immigration center, we found a maelstrom, a busy, bustling, noisy place, like a country fair. Some sixty people--men, women, children, old and young--were milling around, shouting in various tongues. There were cries, laughter, shouts, curses. Children were running around, slipping and sliding over the remains of numerous meals. They fell.

Mothers screamed. It was a deafening, overwhelming jungle of sight and sound. In addition, the stench was unbearable. Foods of numerous nations had been prepared and eaten. For there were immigrants from Russia, Bessarabia, Roumania, Galicia, Poland, Lithuania--and all had prepared such foods as was characteristic of their locales. The combined odors of herring, pickles, onions, garlic, cheese, butter, created a powerful odor that permeated that immigration center.

We barely managed to down our own food, and then we went to purchase our tickets for the voyage. We found that all tickets for the second class had been sold, and so we secured tickets in the third class. Although we could afford better than steerage--which third class really was--, we were loathe to wait a whole week for another passage, in this Gehinnom (hell).

When we had concluded the financial arrangements for our ship's journey, we were all taken over to a doctor, so that he could check as to whether we were healthy enough to get into America. Our family, thank God, passed all the examinations, but there were many who did not. Children were separated from parents, wives from husbands. It was heartbreaking. In such cases, entire families had to wait there, until the one who had not passed could be cured--if they could be cured.

After the physical examinations, we were all instructed to go into the bathhouse. One must enter America, it seemed,

thoroughly cleansed--and not only one's body, but also his clothes! For we were instructed to boil our clothes in hot water as well. I was repelled by the idea on two grounds. First, it was Sabbath afternoon, surely no time to get into a cleansing operation. Second, I was accustomed to bathing alone, not with a horde of people.

When the official told me that unless I complied with the bathing and clothes-cleaning procedures I could not board the ship, I went over to the cashier. I demanded my ticket money back, insisting that if I had to go through the humiliating procedure I would rather not sail. I said that if the third class passengers had to undergo the embarrassment, then the first and second people should, too. And if the second class passengers were not thus obligated, then I wanted such a ticket, for I had the money to pay for it. Under no circumstances, I declared, would I be subjected to a public bath and the boiling of my clothes.

Thus confronted, a compromise was reached by the officials, after lengthy consultation. It was agreed that if I took a shower, and changed my undergarments, that would sufficient. And so I was made "kosher" for America!

CHAPTER FORTY SEVEN

Second Phase: Onward to Bremen

A special train was designated to take us to our embarkation point, Bremen. The scene as we boarded the train was a study in chaos. There was pushing and screaming as each little immigrant group sought to secure places on the train. Everyone wanted to be first, to have the first selection. Here a woman was shoving her children, they should go faster. There a Jew was dragging his bags and packages, including several tin teapots clanging against each other. We wanted to get into one car, but a large, perspiring woman was attempting to pull her perreneh (feather quilt) through the narrow door, without success but with unremitting perseverance. We could not get through this obstacle, of course. After awhile, I realized that there was no point in our waiting there. For either she would fail to get the quilt through, and it would remain stuck in the door, or she would finally succeed--and the perreneh would take up all the space, and we should have no place to sit! So we left that car, and the conductor found another carriage for us. Whatever happened with that woman and her perreneh I never did learn.

Our train began its journey. Its wheels turned just like

the wheels of any ordinary train. The smoke from its chimney was as thick and black as the smoke of all ordinary trains. Indeed, after awhile, we were all rather happy, as those who launch a holiday trip are happy. We did not feel at all like the fleeing immigrants we were.

We felt thus, carefree, only until our train brought the great city of Berlin into view. We thought that we might get out of the train there, have a look at this famous place. But we were starkly reminded who we were--third class immigrants. The train did not even go into the city, nor did it pause. We sped by, on the outskirts of Berlin. We caught a fleeting glimpse of that capitol of Germany. Our feet never touched its ground.

A long way out of Berlin, our train stopped at a station especially reserved for immigrants. It was a central point, where outward bound immigrants were gathered--but only third class passengers. They were brought from all points to this station, where the special train bound for Bremen began its journey. We descended, and entered the large hall, where some five hundred of our prospective fellow immigrants waited.

They were a very mixed crowd: Russians, Poles, Greeks, Turks--and of course many of our own, Jewish brethren. A babble of languages filled the hall. The mixture and the texture of the sounds evoked an immediate headache. There

was, in addition to the very loud talk in so many tongues, also singing and harmonica playing, and flutes. There was wild, leaping dancing, characteristic of the places of origin of the immigrants.

We sat quietly in a corner, gazing upon this wild, noisy, boisterous scene before us. It seemed there was not one person in that entire throng who was behaving in civilized fashion. We looked at the kind of people who were emigrating, our fellow immigrants to America, and we were, truth to tell, a little frightened and regretful. Regretful, that is, because of our decision to go to America. We had been cautioned that upstanding, proper people were not the immigrants. Only the coarse, those of the lowest levels, made the move. And here there was seeming proof. We had sunk to a level unprecedented in our lives, among people with whom we had nothing in common. I began to brood, and to regret my decision.

We went back into our railway carriage, and we were sad. All of us regretted our decision to go to America. But, the die was cast. We had gone too far to turn back. On we would go.

My wife comforted me.

"Do not be so disturbed", she said. "Do not regard all people with jaundiced eyes. It is quite likely that among these people there are many of fine character, and cultured.

In their current situation, fleeing their homes, bound for the unknown, it is no surprize that they act as they do. Don't forget that these are all people oppressed all their lives by Nicholas, and today they have their first taste of freedom. All the restraints of fear, terror of the Russian bloodhounds, have been suddenly removed. They are free men. And so they are intoxicated, and they go past the bounds of normal dignity. Do not judge them harshly, or inferior, because of that natural reaction."

I confessed that she was entirely correct; that her insight and understanding were better than mine. She changed my mind, and I began to see our fellow immigrants in a more kindly and fairer light. I realized, too, that whatever their actions, or reactions, these were not their fault but the fault of their--our--previous tyrannical masters. Here I refer not to Nicholas and his crew, but to the Committee, who had arranged matters so that the steerage passengers were herded like cattle, and treated so callously, like animals. (I should indicate here that many of these immigrants were travelling on the budget of the Committee, receiving subsidies.) They were made to feel that they were of the lowest class of humans. And if you treat people that way, they soon take on that coloring.

I thought about this, my unfair judgment of our fellow immigrants, for awhile. I became certain that if they had been accorded civilized, dignified treament, they would have behaved in quite gentlemanly fashion. There is a saying, "One dances according to the music". And yet, I should be unfair also if I blamed all of this on the Committee people. They must have been noble, decent, compassionate people. Otherwise, why would they be involved at all in this thankless task? I became certain that their motives were of the best. They wanted to do whatever they could to ease the situation of the poor immigrants, helping them in every way they could. The trouble, I concluded, was they did not supervise their paid officials closely enough. It was, after all, in the hands of these paid Committee officials that the lot of the immigrant fell. And these officials lorded it over the immigrants, as if they were nothing but animals, dealing with them in coldly callous, unfeeling, coarse manner. These officials acted as though they were the masters, and the immigrants had to do precisely as they commanded. They forgot that they were actually public servants; really the servants of the immigrants, with whose welfare they were charged.

Oh well, this is one of the oldest and most prevalent of societal diseases, the arrogance of the bureaucrat, who mistakes his role as owner and boss, rather than as public servant.

It is such a deep rooted disease, that there is probably no cure for it. It is that from which all charitable enterprises suffer. The recipients are degraded and abused by the agents of the givers, who act as though the institution were founded for <u>their</u> benefit, instead of the benefit of the needy. This is the way it goes, everywhere in the world. Whoever sits at the pot takes the best portion. So these paid officials took the Committee function as a ticket to their easy livelihood, and the immigrant they treated like dirt. Recognizing this, my attitude toward my fellow traveller changed from censure to sympathy. I felt sorry for them, because their poor estate had brought them into the heartless hands of those Committee functionaries, and thus had brought them to the unseemly behavior.

CHAPTER FORTY EIGHT

<u>We Arrive in Bremen; We Board the Ship</u>

These thoughts meandered through my mind as I dozed in the railway car. For I could only doze. Genuine sleep was impossible for me, because all of the incidents through which I had just lived kept returning to my mind, in mixed fashion. The scenes were intermingled. I saw Russian gendarmes, the German with the baggage wagon, the Jewess-hostess in Yelaveh,

the Galician woman with her hot milk, the repulsive bath-house, the stout, sweaty woman with her perreneh stuck in the railway car door, the cavernous hall with the empty sacks...These and other scenes unfolded in disorderly fashion in my mind, keeping me from sleep.

Early in the morning, our train stopped at the Bremen station. We gathered our belongings, and I looked about for a porter to help us with our baggage. Instead, a big, husky, overweight man approached us. His hat bore a sign indicating that he was a Committee official, and he was wearing a short, yellow shirt, with shiny boots almost meeting the waist. In German, he began to shout at us imperiously,

"Why are you standing there? Why don't you pick up your bags? Hurry! Hurry! Take your baggage and go to the platform!"

All of our fellow immigrants were ready to obey his command. But I stood there and looked at him. What kind of animal was this? What kind of unshitenish (miserable fate) had been visited upon us? So I told him,

"I am about to find a porter to take our things."

He stamped his foot angrily and cried out,

"A porter? Would you look at this delicate gentleman? Porters he needs! He is too fragile to carry his own bags! Where do you think you are, at home? Here there are no porters! Quick, quick, go, my proud gentleman!"

"Reb Yid," I said to him, "don't be so excited, and don't shout. You do not frighten me. I am not travelling as an indigent receiver of the Committee's charity. I travel on my own resources. And for my own money I shall secure a porter. I need no one's permission for this, and you cannot tell me what I must do. And if you will not permit to engage a porter, please be so good as to get out of our way. We shall leave to find one, and our bags will remain here. I do not have the strength to carry all this myself."

With this, we left him standing there, and we went off into the station. The bureaucrat, unaccustomed to such independent back-talk from a mere immigrant, muttered under his breath, and walked out. We went out onto the platform.

All the immigrants were standing in straight rows, like soldiers on parade. The children were sprawled on the baggage wagons, with the bags and packages. One of the officials was perched on a bicycle. He was to be our guide. He led the entire crowd of immigrants through the town. That is, he was supposed to. But no one was allowed to move until that officious man who had yelled at us came out and commanded, "March!" Only then did the bicycle rider begin to ride and the whole company walked after him. Every immigrant was carrying something: a bag, a package, a suitcase. But the very heavy items were transported on wagons.

In this manner we all marched through the town, and finally reached the immigration center. We, on our part, stood near the terminal and regarded this procedure silently, not taking part in any of it. The imperious one glared at us, but said not a word. We went over to the inn, and a little while later a carriage brought our baggage there to join us. The frustrated official began to understand that he was dealing with another kind of immigrant. Well, perhaps this taught him a lesson, that he should not deal so coarsely with immigrants--but I doubt it!

The immigrant inn was not much better, but I had learned by that time that a bit of bribery works wonders. With a few coins, one could secure almost anything. Our Father Jacob thought that only Esau was susceptible to goodwill gifts. But Jacob's grandchildren have learned, as did I, that the identical formula is equally applicable to agents of Jewish Relief Committees as well. And so, for my bit of bribery, we were treated very well at the inn, both in refreshment and in lodging. Indeed, we were given the freedom of the city, toured the sights, and spent several pleasant days there.

CHAPTER FORTY NINE

We Receive Our Ship Cards

The next morning we went to the office, to exchange our receipts, for which we had paid in Yelaveh, for ship tickets, and all the other costs for getting to America. The office was filled with passengers like us, all seeking to exchange their receipts for tickets. I waited for our turn, and finally came up to the Director. As I handed him my receipts, I was frightened, because he looked at me strangely, as though he had found some fault with me. I stood there, fearfully wondering what he would say to me.

He told me immediately what my problem was. It was my hair, my grey hair both on my head and in my beard. He gave me to understand that because of my age I might be refused admittance into America. I might be sent back alone to Russia. I showed him my passport, on which my birthdate was written. It proved that I was not so old, only fifty one years old. He responded that this was not enough. It was my appearance. I looked much older than fifty one, and the American doctors would go by that, not official records. My looks testified to my advanced age, he said. "America does not want old men who cannot work," he told me.

"In that event," I said to him, "my entire family will return to Russia with me, because they will not part from me, nor I from them. Therefore it would be better for you and for us if you would return my money to me,(some eight hundred rubel) and we shall return now to Russia."

The prospect of his returning money to me was not enchanting for him. His forehead was furrowed, he scratched under his ear, asked me to wait awhile, and he left the office. In a few moments he returned, and asked me to go over to the secretary across the room, a young man from Kiev. The secretary addressed me gently, in Russian, and in quite friendly fashion began to make out my tickets. Suddenly I was being treated not only like a gentleman, but like a very important gentleman. When I expressed my concern that I might not be permitted to land in America because of my aged appearance, he reassured me. He was confident that I would experience no difficulty in being admitted.

"Indeed," he said, "the doctor who will examine you here, in a moment, will tell you the same thing. You will see. Have no fear."

I took the tickets from the young man, and returned to the inn peaceful of mind. And yet, not completely peaceful. It began to depress me that I was being regarded as an old man, of no further use to the world. How the world changed.

Many years ago, when I was young, whenever I wanted to inject my opinion, whether in the synagogue, or at some gathering, I used to be told, "Young man, you are too young to be voicing your opinions!" In those days I was very eager to age quickly, so that people would listen to me. And now, the exact opposite. "Go, go, you are too old!", I was being told. Strange how I was not useful when young, and now when old I was again useless. That is the mazel (misfortune) of a melamed! Ah, well, at least that nice young man, the secretary, had lifted my spirits somewhat. He did not think I was too old!

The people in the inn had begun their preparations for boarding the ship, and we began to do the same. We bought medications for sea sickness, and also such items as we could not secure while on the ocean. Like our ancestor Noah, we took along everything we could possibly need on the long voyage.

As soon as we were finished with our preparations, that same bicycle rider led our entire company out on to the street. Once again he formed us into two rows. He went ahead, and we all followed him. As we had wended our way here, so we wended our way back, to the ship. We, however, our little family, did not walk like robots in line. We again hired a carriage, and rode to the ship in style.

Upon arrival at the ship, each of the immigrants was obliged to go into a little room, where two doctors examined him or her, to determine if permission should be granted to board the ship. Fortunately, no flaw was found in any of us. Even I, with my white hair, caused no problem. There were other families, however, who had children with eyes that did satisfy the doctors. All of their tears and pleas were unavailing. There was no mercy. That was the law--at least for third class passengers--and no exceptions were allowed!

CHAPTER FIFTY

We Board The Ship "Kellin"

In the year 1910, on the fifth of September, at four o'clock in the afternoon, we boarded our ship. It was standing peacefully moored, at the water's edge. The passengers of all three classes crossed over the little bridge, the plank that connected the land to the ship. First the first and second class passengers were permitted to board, and their baggage was taken aboard for them. They themselves ambled on board, unencumbered.

Then the third class passengers' turn came. There was a rushing and a shoving, and the din was deafening. Everyone wanted to get on board first, everyone at the same time. For

each one wanted to grab the space at the higher level of the boat. It grew really dagerous, and often it appeared that some passengers would be pushed into the water. We were among the last. When things quieted down a good deal, we boarded. A porter brought our things to us. We stood in the middle of the deck, surrounded by our baggage, wondering where to turn. Wherever we looked, there was no unoccupied space. Each time we thought we had found adequate room for the long journey, someone would shout, "Reb Yid, where are you crawling? Can't you see this place is taken?" And in fact it was. Again and again, wherever we wanted to settle down. I did not know what to do. How could we possibly travel across the wide ocean, not only I but my wife and children, without a place to rest? I also realized that even if by some miracle we would find a place for ourselves, we would be in the midst of turmoil and strife the entire way. For here on board, unseparated, were Litvaks)Lithuanians) and <u>Galityaner</u> (galicians). And, as the world knows, the two simply cannot mix together. What is proper for the one group is horrendous for the other. Had Noah been compelled to take Litvaks and Galityaner on his ark, he would have needed a much larger ark, and would have had to divide it into two separate rooms, one for each group, if he were to have any peace!

I resolved to do whatever I could to secure some decent place for our family. I went up to the captain and asked him to exchange our third class tickets for second, and I would pay the difference. He regretted that this was impossible, because the entire second class was sold out. But for an additional eighty rubel he would provide us with a private cabin. This would cover our entire cost, all the way to Galveston.

I paid him on the spot, and we were ushered into a room with large windows, portholes but spacious ones, covered with clear glass. There were four beds, a table, a washstand, a mirror, and several stools. It was quiet, serene; not a sound from the outside penetrated. Within moments, the cook came and promised that he would bring us kosher food, of the fine quality of the second class. We were very pleased with our new residence. We put everything in order, and then we went out on deck, to watch the ship's departure.

At five o'clock precisely, a loud whistle was sounded, signalling that we were about to start out. Then a grinding noise of machinery was heard, and a rumbling began--and the water was all around the ship. Its nose sliced the water, as we moved out into the ocean. Those on shore, who had come to say farewell to passengers, shouted and waved hats and handkerchiefs at the departing friends, who responded from the

boat's side with the same signals.

All of this happy leavetaking, you understand, was only from the decks of the first and second classes. The third class passengers were as orphans. No one had escorted them, and there was no one to whom they should say farewell. The third class was essentially wanderers, people from distant points, fleeing their misery. Their good friends were far away. They had shared farewells before, in their numerous home towns. Here there was no one who cared about them. They stood awhile at the rail, silently, and then hurried back to secure their precious places on deck, so that no one should take those hard won prizes from them. They felt that they had to establish undeniable possession, before they could feel free to move around in the confined space.

CHAPTER FIFTY ONE

Our Voyage On The Sea

We descended to our cabin and looked around at the place where we would be living for the next several weeks. It was not a large room, but it was peaceful, orderly, and quiet. Our food was, indeed, brought to us promptly. We ate, and then we went up to the deck, to catch some fresh air, and to see the first sunset at sea.

We watched as the sun descended close to the water, its red-golden rays playing over the high columns of spray created by the ship's cleaving of the ocean. The sun finally permitted itself to sink into the water, the last rays drowned deep, deep down. Suddenly it was dark. But the skies were clear, not the faintest trace of a cloud visible. Stars began to make their appearance, sparkling like diamonds above our heads. This visual feast filled our eyes, and we could not get enough of this wondrous beauty. But our fatigue, from that long and draining day, asserted itself, and overcame us. We went to our cabin, slept soundly and well through the night, and arose on the morning refreshed.

The cook brought us breakfast, although the coffee we prepared ourselves, on our little benzine machine. We decided to go out on the deck and see how our fellow immigrants were faring.

It was quite pleasant there. There was the jovial noise of camaraderie. Metal tea and coffee pots were out everywhere, and almost everyone was dunking bulkes (hard rolls). The hot coffee and tea were contained in large community urns, and so there was a general pushing and shoving--but pleasantly spirited--to get close to the source.

The deck became calm after awhile, with each family group breaking the fast. After this refreshment, the mingling re-

sumed. The children played as though they were on dry land. Their parents sat in circles, getting to know each other--Jews and Christians from numerous lands, speaking many tongues. Each one recounted what had happened to him as he stole his way across the border with his family. Others told of their fright and of the horrors they suffered in this fifth year of the pogroms. They spoke bitterly of the oppression and cruelty visited upon them by the terrible government of Tyrant Nicholas.

Gradually, these persons' sorrowful reminiscences cast a sadness over the gatherings on the deck. But not for long. Their faces took on smiles and joy, as the sound of their young people's singing filled the deck. They were singing revolutionary songs, songs of freedom. They were no longer fearful of the terrifying agents of Nicholas. They were free! The hands of the Russian Bear could no longer sieze them. They could speak and sing whatever their heart dictated. No more fear!

The morning was lovely, without a cloud in the blue sky. The great Atlantic Ocean was calm, and the sun's rays glistened on the serene waters. The ship, therefore, sailed in complete tranquility. All of the passengers, from all three classes, were out on deck, savoring this delightful scene. The first and second class people, of course, were on the

elevated section, on the balcony, as it were. They sat or lay on soft, flexible deck chairs, with their feet crossed comfortably, as in their own living rooms. Nearby stood little tables, laden with fruit and candies and cakes. It was, for them, a liesurely, enjoyable sailing. Soft music played, and some couples were dancing. The cheerful sound of laughter came through the air, down to us. The scene above us was that of an aristocratic ball, muted and genteel pleasure permeating the air.

The far less privileged third class passengers turned their gaze from the serence ocean, and looked upward on the decks. One could hear, "Ah, how fortunate are the rich. For them it is always good, wherever they find themselves--at home or away, on land or on the sea. Why, their gold's influence even extends to the Committee minions. They were not required to bathe publicly, or boil their clothes, or be scrutinized by the doctors. Among them, obviously, there could be no physical flaws, no detention, because their endowed pockets deflected all such unpleasantness. Fortunate are you, the blessed of God!"

This scenario was replayed each day of our voyage. There were no storms the entire way. Once in awhile a bit of wind would come along, and the more delicate stomachs would react in natural fashion. But on the whole, the agenda consisted of

eating, drinking, chatting, singing, enjoying the pleasant hours.

Upon reflection, as I recall the occasional brief disturbances of the water and their effect on my fellow immigrant passengers--for even a temporary wind makes the ocean cross and angry--, I wonder, did those ocean swellings and the waves tossing our ship, have the same effect upon the first and second class people? Or were they immune from such things, the winds not having the chutzpah to disturb them? All that I know is that, during such high-wave incidents, none of us looked up at our elevated travel companions.

Our two week voyage brought us to Philadelphia. We were ecstatic upon seeing dry land again--perhaps no less than Noah after the Flood. As we drew close to shore, and began to make out the figures of people walking, we thought we would disembark for awhile, buy a few things unavailable on board ship, and look around at this great American city, the first, for us, in the new strange land of which we had heard so much.

It turned out, once again, that we were only fantasizing. The poor of the third class were permitted only to look upon the Promised Land, not to touch its soil. Like Moses our Teacher, to whom God said, "From afar you will see the Land", our captain ordered that third class passen-

gers be forbidden to leave the ship. The first and second privileged classes, of course, were given free choice. And happily they descended on dry land. The lowest class passengers looked at them with envy.

My family, although we sustained few of the inconvenience of the third class, for we had our private accomodation, nevertheless were not quite up to the status of the upper classes. In the matter of descending at Philadelphia we were categorized as third class passengers. We were not permitted to disembark. Fortunately, in the third class there was a couple who were American citizens, returning from a European trip. They were permitted to go ashore, and they purchased all the things that we wanted.

We were in the Port of Philadelphia for two days, until the cargo of our ship was unloaded. The dockworkers, all black, spoke in a language we did not understand. We did hear certain words--which were unintelligible sounds to us--such as "Hurry up!" and "All right." We were intrigued and curious as to the meaning of these phrases. Our American couple explained them to us, adding that Americans do not like loitering on the job. One had to be alert, and quick. Hence the importance and frequency of the phrases.

Among those who came aboard to look over the immigrants, there was a policeman dressed in a blue uniform, handling a

thick, short blackjack, which he twirled endlessly and expertly. It was as though he was demonstrating that he could use that stick effectively upon anyone who disobeyed. He also had, stuck in his mouth, between his gold teeth, a fat cigar which, according to our American informants, cost ten cents. This, I realized, was twenty Russian kopecks. My Talmudically trained head did its mental gymnastics and followed this track: "If an ordinary policeman can afford to smoke a twenty kopeck cigar, how much more expensive cigars can the more affluent Americans afford? So apparently it is true as they told us. America is indeed a golden land. A policeman has golden teeth, and he smokes expensive cigars!"

CHAPTER FIFTY TWO

We Sail From Philadelphia To Galveston.

The last part of our voyage, from Philadelphia to Galveston, was considerably more comfortable. Many passengers had left us, and so there was much more space. The food had been replenished, so that there was not only a larger quantity, but it was more fresh. Although we were enjoying the trip more, we were all increasingly impatient to arrive at our final destination, and leave the ship.

On the twenty second day of our setting foot on the ship, the captain informed us that at noon we would arrive in Galveston. With mounting and happy excitement, we began preparations for our landing. We packed our belongings, washed ourselves, had our hair trimmed. For some this hair trimming was a rejuvenation!

What I mean is that there was an older man, with whom I had discussed Torah on deck daily--he was a learned, pious Jew--, suddenly came out, on that last day, completely shorn of his grey, long, luxuriant beard! He looked like a young man! Only a thin moustache was on his face. He was virtually unrecognizable. You will remember that Joseph's brothers could not recognize him, because when they cast him into the pit he was beardless, but when ecountered again his beard had grown full. With our fellow immigrant it was the opposite! We teased him a bit. He was unperturbed. He said,

"Why do I need to have the Americans laugh at my beard until I take it off? Better to have you laugh at me for a little while, here, and an end to it!"

CHAPTER FIFTY THREE

We Arrive In Galveston.

We stood at the rail, eagerly watching the ship's progress as we neared the American shore. At one o'clock we heard

the ship's whistle, proclaiming our imminent arrival in port. Immediately, the commotion began. Everyone grabbed their packs and rushed to the rail, to be closer than anyone else to the exit; to be first to set foot ashore.

The ship stopped at the dock, whistling all the while. The sailors put down the plank, and all the passengers rushed to the opening in the rail. But the sailors quickly placed a rope across the exit, and began to help the "yachsonim" (pedigreed, privileged) down to shore. All of those first and second class passengers disembarked without delay or hindrance. No one stood in their way. Only after they had all descended, were the third class people allowed to begin disembarkation. But this was a very different procedure indeed from that of their "superior" fellow travellers.

We had to exit singly, and pass through a space where two doctors examined each immigrant. They looked carefully into our mouths, our eyes, searching for some flaw. If they did discover some physical deficiency in a person, that person was instructed to stand at a side, awaiting the awesome judgment. "Who will enter, and who shall be denied entry?" Only an immigrant, fleeing at long last from his homeland, longing for the freedom and opportunity, for himself and his family, planning and dreaming and exercising immense courage, can appreciate fully what this fearful moment of doubt means.

It is probably correct and proper that those with illness or defects should be held back from American entry. But the question that agitated me was, why were the rich permitted to go ashore without examination? Perhaps there among them also the sick, the deficient, those who might infect others? Is illness, then, confined to the poor? They are, after all, human, and as humans they are also subject to physical problems. So why were they permitted to get into America scot free?

I was able to reply to my question satisfactorily. It is true, of course, that the rich are susceptible to illness as well as the poor. But they have the wherewithal to deal with their illnesses! Why should America be concerned with whether a rich man is sick or well? Indeed, the sick person is a blessing to America. For he will provide the doctors and hospitals with added income. No less will the medication manufacturers and dispensers gain. But from the poor sick, what benefit can come to the economy? They will have to cared for, free, and their families will have to be fed from public funds. What does America need with that?

The conclusion is, obviously, that if you are healthy, able to earn your livelihood, and the land can gain from your productivity, you are a welcome guest, and the gates are wide open to you. But if you give evidence of perhaps not being

able to work and earn and be productive; indeed, if it is possible that you will be a burden, then go back to where you camefrom. You are not for America!

The third class passengers were therefore carefully examined. Whoever was found in complete good health was permitted to disembark, free to become an American. But whoever was found to be flawed, was detained, and not allowed to enter the Promised Land. No arguments or pleading made any difference. There were no exceptions.

My family, thank God, went through the inspection without difficulty. But when it came to me, the immigration officials cast a jaundiced eye. They regarded my silver-grey hair, and began to mutter among themselves. I was frightened, recalling the admonition I had received before boarding, that my aged appearance might mitigate against me. But, praised be the Lord, they let me through! My relief was indescribable.

We left the ship, and went down into an office where various officials were sitting. The chief doctor was one of them. Among them was Rabbi Cohen of Galveston. He was the designated representative of the Kiev Committee, and he was looking out for the welfare of the immigrants. This commission also stopped me, because I appeared too old. But Rabbi Cohen asked after my precise age, and my profession. I showed him

my passport, which showed my birth date as being fifty one. I also informed him that I was a certified shochet. I added documented proof that two thousand rubel had been transferred from my bank in Russia to an American bank. There was no danger of my becoming a public charge. I was permitted to pass.

Rabbi Cohen also inquired as to whether I wished to eat in a kosher restaurant. I thank him warmly for his noble heart, and I saw that he was equally considerate of all the immigrants, with gently reassuring words. He did whatever he could do to make the adjustment for the immigrants easier. He sought out jobs for them, and until these materialized he saw to it that they had adequate food, drink, lodging. He was as a compassionate father to all of the poor, lonely immigrants. If all of the paid professionals of the Joint Distribution Committee had fulfilled at least in part, their responsibility, as did Rabbi Cohen, the immigrants would not have suffered even a fraction of what they had to bear, both in getting to this country and in being settled here.

Rabbi Cohen sent, at once, for someone to take our baggage from the ship. As soon as we landed and looked around, we spied our nephew Zalman Lifshutz. He had come from San Antonio to meet us in Galveston. We were delighted to see him, knowing thar he would take care of all the necessary arrangements. The moment we set foot outside of the immigration center,

we breathed deeply of the free air. At last we are in the free land, was our thought; free from Nicholas and his bloodhounds, free from the ship's officious agents, free from the Committee's bureaucrats.

We went out to explore the city, to see Americans, to enter a restaurant and see what Americans ate. Then we made our way to the train depot. We saw at once the difference between an American and a Russian train terminal. The coarse and brutal police were not there, the filthy rooms and benches were missing, the ragged peasants with their dirty clothes and foul mouths were absent. No curses, no shouting could be heard. There were no divisions in the stations; all were alike, and the cars of the railroad were glistening clean. The conductors, unlike those to whom we were accustomed, were the soul of politeness.

Only one thing disturbed us, and diminished our joy. We were as the totally dumb. We understood not one word of what these Americans were saying. We had no idea what the others were saying about us, although their glances were friendly and sympathetic. The conductors took up our tickets with such graciousness, so that we were enchanted with the whole situation. We could not imagine how it could be better.

Then, however, we realized that the black people were sitting apart from us. This made a bad impression on us.

In such a beautiful, free land, where the cultures of all lands flowed so smoothly, it seemed inconsistent and wrong to distinguish between one race and another. How had these blacks sinned? Was it just because they were born with black skins? We asked our nephew about this, and he explained that this was no governmental decree. As far as the national govenment of the United States was concerned, everyone was equal to everyone else. But the people of certain states had this prejudice. There was a well established history of such prejudice, and it would take a long while before it could be changed.

We arrived in San Antonio, and we took a street car to our nephew's father's house. Through the streetcar's windows we looked out upon the streets and the stores of the city. We saw also the homes, and the opulent shop window displays. Seeing these, I thought, "It is true that America is the golden land." But, riding on a little while, through some of the side streets, and as we came closer to my brother-in-law's house, the attraction of America lost some of its allure.

What I saw disturbed me so much that I said to my nephew, "Is this your golden America? Muddy streets, unpaved, with miserable little shacks lined along both sides, with small and poverty stricken shops, just as in Russia's <u>shtedlach</u>!

Was it worth allthe trials and difficulties and money to come all the way here, to this? Dirt roads with poor people we had there in Russia, so why did we have to make the long trek here? A poor man I could have remained in Russia!"

I waxed angry at Columbus and at my brother-in-law, who had counselled our coming here. Even though my nephew explained that this was not typical of America; that this was a newly developing city, in its infancy, recently settled, only lately taken from the Mexicans, but that other cities were wonderfully developed--as San Antonio soon would be--, the first heartwarming blush of America, I confess, was dissipated, and I was disappointed.

CHAPTER FIFTY FOUR

Cityof San Antonio Twenty Two Years Ago

We arrived in San Antonio on the twenty eighth of September, in the year 1910. It was a typical Texas town, just like all the other Texas towns. These cities were just beginning to grow out of their first years, both physically and spiritually. All of Texas had, only some years before, gone over from the Mexicans to the United States. Gradually, all the Texas cities developed, to the point where today, two decades later, they are unrecognizable. During this interim, San Antonio

has grown and developed, matured and increased its population. Today, it is enriched with many beautiful homes and fine stores, both elegant and large.

When I arrived here, however, there were only less than one hundred thousand people, as against the more than three hundred today. The city had a half-wild appearance. It did not look like an orderly, settled community, with planted trees growing in rows along the streets. It was more like some wild-wood where, for some inexplicable reason, houses had been set up here and there. There were sizeable houses, modest houses, and a great many poor shacks. The streets were overgrown with thorny bushes. Horses, cows, and goats wandered freely there. Dirty puddles were everywhere in the streets, all of which--except the few where the great business establishments were located--were unpaved, and therefore muddy after every rain. Indeed, there were manyplaces where one could not extricate the foot from the lime mud. When a carriage drove past, its wheels could not be seen for the mud. Where there are now the most prestigious houses, there were then the miserable little Mexican shacks, constructed of boards, like a <u>sukkah</u>, covered with rusted tin. Whoever went by could not but be saddened that human beings lived like this. The wild cries of the burrows, who stood at the front of these shacks, pierced the ears. Other streets seemed deserted, with scattered pathetic little

Mexican huts visible now and again, midst huge piles of garbage which was eventually carried away out of town.

The air was filled with vicious flying little beasts, mosquitos, which fattened themselves on the filth. Summertime they permitted no sleep, and they carried many diseases.

The citizenry was divided then, as it still is today, into white, black, and yellow races, Anglos, Mexicans, and Negroes. The Anglo-Americans had the best houses in town, and they owned much land. Their forebears had purchased the land for a song, and now it was worth a hundred times the original price. They occupied the most important positions in the city government and in civic life, as well as in the banks and the large hotels. It was they who controlled the politics of San Antonio. Among them were lawyers, doctors, engineers. They were the leadership of the city.

After them came the Jews, who were themselves divided into two categories, German "Yahudim" (East European derogatory term for German Jews, implying assimilationist snobbery) and Orthodox. The "Yahudim" were the affluent Jews in town. The largest commercial enterprises were theirs, and there were about one hundred families of them. Among them were some very wealthy men. They had a large, imposing Temple with a "Rabbai" spiritual leader, as the Reform way of life dictates. They

had little to do with the Orthodox. It is unnecessary to add that there was no social contact between them. The Reform Jews "made Shabbos" for themselves.

There were several hundred Orthodox Jewish families. Among them there were also--but fewer--affluent men with large businesses. But the majority were of a poorer class, small shopkeepers and peddlers. But abjectly poor there were none. When a "greener" (new immigrant) came to settle, he took at once to peddling. If he had a bit of money, he bought a horse and wagon, secured some merchandise, and took his "itinerant store" into the Mexican neighborhoods. They paid him on the installment plan, and since the risk was very high, so were his prices.

Many of those long ago peddlers are now the most prominent and wealthiest Jews in San Antonio.

If an immigrant, however, did not have the means to buy a horse and wagon, he simply secured some cheaper merchandise, put it in a suitcase, and peddled just like his more affluent cousin, but on foot. With time, most of these peddlers progressed to being larger scaled peddlers, then storekeepers, and became the most respectable citizens. In fact, some of them became presidents of a synagogue, or of a Talmud Torah.

In those days, some Jews were fruit and vegetable peddlers, but there are no more today; the Italians took that over.

There was a small, wooden synagogue. It was quite old, and the Shamas was quite old too. He was a Russian Jew, and had been one of Nicholas's soldiers. He led the Service on Saturday mornings until the prayer "Shochen Ad", that is through the Introductory Blessings. His Hebrew pronounciation was much like the Litvak's erratic setting of stakes in a garden. But he was a fine Jew, with a beautiful, ample beard. This beard, apparently, covered over all his flaws, and the congregation was content with both his sexton performance and his "davvening".

CHAPTER FIFTY FIVE

The Rabbi, The Cantor, The Shochet, The Mohel---All In One!

The synagogue was closed all week, for there was never a Daily Minyan (morning service). If someone had a yahrzeit (anniversary of a family death), or was in mourning, and he wanted to recite the Kaddish, he was obliged to go up and down "Jerusalem Street".(It was called this, because on it were many of the Jewish stores.) There he could gather ten men for Minchah and Ma'ariv Services. Friday evening, for the Welcoming of the Sabbath Service, the Shamas barely scraped together a minyan (ten male Jews). Saturday morning it was

not much better. Several more than a minyan came, essentially the older, retired people, or those who had no business of their own. The store owners, of course, could not bear to leave their places of business and come to the synagogue. For the best business day was Saturday. The workingman collects his weekly wage at the weekend, and the farmer comes into the city to purchase his needs on Saturday. Therefore everyone in stores awaited Saturdays eagerly. Just as, in Europe, all the Jews keenly anticipated Saturdays, when they could rest, attend Services, relax, have a spiritual uplifting, so here in America they waited keenly for the Sabbath, when they could "do good business". They all had their stores open on Saturdays, for they all insisted that without the Saturday trade they would go bankrupt.

A cantor-shochet was there, an elderly man, Reb ~~Sloan~~ Solomon. He was a learned Jew, and a fine Ba'al Tefillah (Services Leader) He was also regarded as the religious leader of the community, and he was the mohel (circumcizer) and officiant at weddings. In addition, he would instruct a boy, once in awhile, in his preparation for the Bar Mitzvah. In short, he combined all the skills that the Jewish community required.

In America, the man who occupies the dual post of cantor-shochet in the smaller towns, was called Rabbi as well, so that a genuine, ordained Rav was unnecessary. In truth, what

need did they have of a Rav? Ritual questions nobody had, and rabbinical arbitration they did not need, and obscure points of Jewish law they cared nothing for. So with a man like Rev. ~~Sloan~~ Solomon they had more than they required.

There was no Hebrew School. If a man wanted his son to learn how to recite the Kaddish after his demise, or if someone wanted his son to learn his part for his Bar Mitzvah, he simply sent the boy to Rev. Sloan. He took care of the need admirably.

This was San Antonio Jewry, and its clergy.

About one year before our arrival, an older man, a quite well learned and pious Jew, began a minyan in his house for the scrupulous Sabbath observers. A young man, the son of the previous, deceased shochet, whose name was Sadovsky, helped him. Together they labored to recruit the necessary ten Sabbath observers, and were finally successful in establishing a minyan. Whether each Jew who attended was really a bona fide shomer Shabbos (Sabbath observer), only they knew. Credentials and proof were not required. But in any event, a separate little congregation was thus formed.

This was not too challenging a task, this establishing of a new congregation. After all, a congregation must have its leadership, the officials, a president, trustees. What Jew does not love such honors? And in addition, one could receive a nice,

fat aliyah (a calling up to the Torah), both on Sabbaths and Festivals--without having to pay for it! So that minyan began to grow. Membership increased. No one inquired into their degree of piety. In a word, the minyan grew like mushrooms after a rain.

Well, a prospering congregation must have its clergy, to be genuine, no? A cantor, a shochet, a mohel, a Torah Reader, a Shofar sounder--and all of this for very little money. For it was still a congregation in its infancy.

They found a bright, able, talented young man, and promised him the world. He agreed, and he came to them as their shochet-cantor and Rabbi. His name is Rev. Chanoch Lubel. That San Antonio surely did not need two shochtim, for there was not enough livelihood even for one, this did not deter them. As long as they got what they wanted, that was all they cared about. To give you an idea what business there was for a shochet, let me tell you that the old shochet, Rev. Sloan, in addition to his multiple duties at the synagogue, also dealt in real estate, buying and selling small houses, sold religious books and talet sim, handled the matzah and wine for Pesach, and taught the occasional child. With all this, had his wife not take in itinerant lodgers--rabbis, emissaries, shochtim passing through the city, as well as local observant Jews who yearned for a kosher good meal--(from which she probably earned more than he), he

would have been the poorest Jew in town.

So ask yourself, what did they need another shochet for? Why should they have brought down a fine young man, with a family, to a non-existent livelihood? But this was not their concern. Let the new shochet worry about getting his own clientele. Let him increase the size of the Jewish community, so he will have a livelihood.

This bright young man, this Rev. Lubel, looked around, and he quickly saw what he had fallen into: a handful of worshippers in the little minyan, no synagogue, another established shochet and an enormous (comparatively) other congregation--and a clientele barely adequate for one shochet. From such a situation he could hardly hope to make a living. But he was an energetic, ambitious, capable young man. And so he set about building up both his congregation and his butcher business.

He made many friends, and he found favor in the eyes of many of the Jewish householders. He worked hard at pleasing every customer who bought his meat. In fact, he himself delivered their meat to their houses, with horse and wagon, very early mornings. After awhile, a number of the congregants of the other congregation, customers of the old shochet, became his regular customers. The battle was joined!

The warfare between the two shochtim went on for a long time. Partisans of both men regularly fuelled the flames with

rumors and exaggerated charges of all sorts. Flaws of character and similar accusations flew about. The tempo of the battle quickened, and both sides fought vigorously. At last, the younger man overcame. What really did it for him was his realization that without a cemetery his fledgeling congregation could not grow. No one wanted to join a synagogue unless he was assured of an eternal resting place. Rev. Lubel decided that he must have a place to bury his members, or he would have no members. And so he purchased a tract of land for a cemetery. He next worried about finding someone willing to be the first to be interred there. For everyone wished to be buried among his friends. This obstacle, too, he overcame, persuading a man that it would be to his advantage.

With much travail, young Rev. Lubel managed to establish himself, solidifying his congregation and earning an adequate livelihood.

CHAPTER FIFTY SIX

San Antonio Today, Twenty Years Later

In the previous chapter I described the San Antonio to which we came, twenty two years earlier. Now I should like to write of the San Antonio of today. I confess that it is dif-

ficult for one who has lived steadily in one place, as I have, to note the daily changes that come over a city. The city changed so gradually, that I was scarcely aware of it. But were a man who had not seen this city for these years to suddenly return here, he would cry out with astonishment, "Is this the city? Is this really San Antonio?"

The city has changed so very much, in so many ways, that it is hardly recognizable from the vantage point of those years. The little wooden homes, the unpaved muddy streets, the wildness, the crazy-quilt pattern of trees--these are no more. Gone also is the peace, the tranquility, that prevailed then. No more horses, donkeys, wagons dragging their way through the mud-filled streets. Now thousands of automobiles speed on the slick, paved roads. And on either side of our streets, orderly rows of trees, carefully planted, shield the passersby from the burning Texas sun. Of those old, decrepit little houses clustered in what is the downtown of today, nothing is left. In their place there now stand large, modern, beautiful buildings, some thirty stories high. There are huge commercial concerns now, both retail and wholesale, just like in all the big cities of America.

The city has numerous institutions now, both private and public, as is required by a quarter million population.

There are numerous beautiful parks. Outstanding among these is Brackenridge Park. It is unusual, not only for Texas but any large city in this country.

The city is regarded as one of the most healthful in the country, because no factories are here to becloud the skies with bad smoke. The rays of the sun shine through unobstructed in the pure blue heaven. The air is clean and dry. There is virtually no winter. Frosts and snows are extremely rare. Once in awhile, during the winter months, it gets a bit cold, but this fleeting, and rather mild. Many frail, sick people come here, and they find help for their conditions, breathing the clean fresh air in the warm sunshine, and benefitting from the sulphur baths located nearby.

During the winter, all the hotels both large and small are filled with our "winter residents", or, as they are called, "Winter birds". Not only the weak and ill come here; there also come the healthy ones, healthy in body and healthy in pocketbook. They come here from northern cities where it is bitter cold, to warm themselves and enjoy the warm and cloudless skies. In mid-winter, when the bitter frosts and freezing storms rage elsewhere, we have green fields, and flowers bloom. Therefore numerous large hotels abound for these fine guests, and our city thrives in the winter.

The economy of San Antonio is blessed because of this

excellent climate, both because so many winter guests come here, and because there is much farming all around us, the elements being conducive to very good crops.

CHAPTER FIFTY SEVEN

We Settle In San Antonio:
My Business Disaster

In the previous chapter I described briefly the city as it is now, several decades after our arrival here. But of myself, how we settled here, how we found our livelihood, how I have lived these intervening years, and my situation today--of these I have not yet written. Nor have I dealt with the history and development of our Jewish community during these years.

What kind of people reside here? What enterprises are they engaged in? What of the institutions, the synagogues, the Talmud Torah, and their leadership?

All of this you will find in these coming chapters. I begin with myself first. For, as our Torah instructs, "And he shall atone for himself, for his household, and for all the community of Israel"; hence my pattern: first of myself, then of my family, then of the Jewish community...

We arrived several days before Rosh Hashanah 5671, in

the fall of 1910, and we were given the hospitality of my brother-in-law, Z. Lifshutz, of blessed memory. His children had brought him over several years earlier. At home, in the small shtedtl in Lithuania where he lived, he was a respectable, pious Jew. No, more than pious, he was a religious fanatic. He brought to America all of his small town ways, casting none of them into the ocean on the trip over. In fact, he gathered up all of the old world obsolete nonsense which the other passengers left on the ship, made a package of them, and brought them with him, intact, to America! Here, naturally, there were few customers for his goods. Frustrated, he then resolved to impose his way of life and values on his family. His family also wanted none of it, and he attempted to force his will upon them, as Moses did with the Torah at Sinai. American young people, however, do not frighten easily, and his children remained unintimidated. They refused, adamantly, to do as he commanded. And so there was constant quarrelling in the house. Because he was a sickly man, he was also given to outbursts of anger. He was always shouting and often furious, in his frustration.

It was to this home that we came. My brother-in-law received us with warm friendliness, and made us most welcome. His wife, my wife's sister, of blessed memory, was a good, religious Jewess, of excellent character. Indeed, he too was of

fine character, but stubborn and irritable. No matter that they were hospitable and kind to us, we saw that we could not stay there long. The constant shouting, the hostility that permeated that home, was not for us. And so we selected a house for ourselves.

The house we rented was not of the elegant or expensive kind, and the furniture we bought was also inexpensive, plain. We had determined not to do as so many immigrants did, taking a beautiful home, buying elegant furniture and, not having the money to pay for it, becoming slaves to the installment plan with its high prices.

In fact, we had the money to pay for much more than we undertook. I had brought about 2400 Russian rubel with me. But I was loathe to part with that money until we had an established livelihood. Who knew what could happen to the green immigrants in a strange land, without the native language? We always lived carefully, guarding that the expenses should not exceed the income. This was not because we were stingy, but because we wated always to take care of ourselves, not to be compelled to take from others.

Settled into our new home, we began to think through what we should do with our small capital. My brother-in-law counselled that we should do as he had done, and as almost all of the new Jewish immigrants were doing: become a peddler.

This, he explained, even an immigrant without the language could handle. The Mexicans bought the goods, paid for it, and neither the goods nor the money knew that a "greener" was involved!

No sooner said then done! And since we had sufficient money, my Talmud brain figured out a logical sequence: If a peddler does well with only one horse and wagon, then with four horses and wagons he should do four times as well! The idea appealed to me, and I promptly bought four horses and wagons.

I say that I bought. What did I know of horses and wagons? All I knew was that a horse has four legs. Is that adequate expertise with which to make such an imposing purchase? Well, at least in this one respect I used good judgment. I went to a landsman (European compatriot) who knew horses.(He had become as learned in horses, in America, as he had been adept in Torah, in Europe.) He selected the horses and the wagons, we hired four driver-salesmen, and I was in business!

No longer in the clergy! I was, at last, a merchant, with excellent prospects, especially in view of what my gemorra kopf (Talmudically sharpened mind) had concluded in the matter of quadrupling my income.

Alas, what I had not figured out was that four horses had four mouths to be fed, and four wagons meant four maintenance

and repair bills, and four drivers meant four salaries. But this, at that early euphoric stage, did not enter my mind. I gave the drivers goods to sell, sent them out, and I myself, in all my glory and nobility, sat at home relaxed. After all, it was hardly fitting for a Jew like myself, a Torah-learned Jew, a certified shochet, and a respected teacher of Judaica, to bring myself so low as to go knocking on Mexican doors and asking the poor customers to please buy my goodswithout money. Indeed, the very idea of changing my title from 'shochet' to 'peddler' was repugnant! This was an occupation for an ordinary, common, unlearned Jew. In fact a goy (gentile) could do it just as well.

So I reposed comfortably in my cozy house, exerting myself only to write checks for the goods my drivers took, and contemplating the lovely dollar bills soon to flow in gratifying increasing number, toward me.

Well, as of course was inevitable, within eighteen months, having relied on Talmudic logic in business, I conformed to a Talmudic adage, "He who seeks to lose all his money, let him engage workmen and not be with them". Quickly I was bereft of my money, and disabused of my foolish notions, and of my false pride.

The fact is, however, I am convinced, that if I had done the sensible thing, bought only one horse and wagon and gone

out peddling myself, while I would have lasted much longer, in the end I would have lost what I had anyhow. I proved once more that I was not for the business world. I emerged from that "bath" clean; clean, that is, of my money, but not entirely clean. For I was still heavily in debt to the shopkeepers who had given me goods on credit, to the tune of six hundred dollars--not an insignificant sum in those days; indeed, a frightening debt.

Had I been a seasoned merchant, I should not have become so fearful, improved my business system, and perhaps I could not only have extricated myself from the debt but have grown into one of the successful San Antonio citizens. But such has been my lot all my years. I was a melamed, and I remained a melamed. A merchant's ways, and thinking, and business sense, were simply not in my world. Having never been a merchant, and never having been in debt, I was really scared, and I cas away the peddling occupation.

It is more correct, I suppose, to say that the peddling occupation cast me aside, and I began to scout out possible ways to honor my debts.

First, I sold the horses and the wagons. That made a meaningful dent in the total package of what I owed. I remained, as it is quipped,"only with the whip.". But this was far from what I needed to pay. It was then, with no prospect

that I knew what I must do: resume offering the only 'goods' I really had, and knew well how to handle, here just as in Russia. For such a business one did not need drivers, or horses and wagons, and in fact no capital either.

And so I became a Hebrew teacher and shochet.

I went to Rev. Sloan, and was hired at a salary to slaughter, and to deliver the meat to his customers in the mornings, and then I taught children in the late afternoons. I found myself feeding the physical needs of the Jewish community by day, and the spiritual needs of their children by night. With all of this, I managed to earn a decent living. I was with him four years, and in that time I was able to pay all of my debts. This, however, was with the assistance of my wife--her memory be for a blessing--who sold the milk from our two cows. In this way, with meat and with milk, we cast off the mantle of the debtor, thank God.

It was in that period that our beloved daughter Eda married a fine young man, Harry Hessel. He is a fine, Jewishly learned young man, from an excellent family. I had known his father well, in Europe, as a noble, scholarly Jew who sat and studied Torah. The wedding was celebrated in completely traditional Jewish fashion, just like at home. God bless the couple with years, and good health, and good fortune.

CHAPTER FIFTY EIGHT

The Pattern of My Life Resumes

The years that I was with Rev. Solomon were hardly bedecked with flowers. In Russia I lived in much more comfortable fashion. It was a better, more respectable life there than here, in the Goldene Medinah (Land of Gold).

I labored hard at such work as I ~~would~~ never had done in Russia. Neither I nor my wife and children had had such a hard life there. But I did not complain, or grow bitter. I did what had to be done, philosophically. I would awaken before dawn, daily, hitched up my horse to the wagon, and drove to the butcher shop. This was no easy task. My horse, a horse like horses, with a horse's head, understood that he was dealing with a European melamed, no knowledgeable horseman. So he gave me all kinds of trouble before he would permit himself to be hitched to the wagon. At first I had to struggle for a long time, until I managed to get him in place. When it rained, it was far worse. I could not extricate the wagon from the mud, and my wife had to help me.

I was in the butcher shop, working, making up the orders as well as slaughtering. Then I would carry out the heavy boxes of orders and load them on the wagon. It was still dark when I began to deliver the meat to the customers, and I

could not devote his time to his education. He remained a businessman. But the younger son, Jacob (Jack), completed his studies in college as an Electrical Engineer, and my daughter Eda graduated from Business College.

Four years after I started working for Rev. Solomon, he closed his butcher shop, and both of us went to work, on salary, for Rev. Lubel. For me, it was simply exchanging laboring for an old shochet, for a young shochet. It was the same hard work, the same livelihood, the same degree of affluence, the same teaching the uninterested children--no real change.

At that time the World War had already begun in Europe. While the fields of the old land were soaked in blood, the United States still remained out of the fray. We had not yet leaped into the bloodbath. To the contrary, far from suffering the anguish of war, our economy prospered. Our city, San Antonio, also reaped the benefits of the war economy, and everyone gained from this upswing. Everybody, but not we of the Jewish public servant group. We had the identical labor, the same wages. For us there was no change.

The only change that did come to us was our deep concern for our families overseas, caught up in the maelstrom of war. I, who had left a son and a daughter there, both with families of their own, could not rest, for worrying about them.

Mail did not get through, in either direction. The borders were sealed. In this constant agony of not knowing we lived through the entire period of the war.

CHAPTER FIFTY NINE

An Historic Change in Agudas Achim; Accidentally, a New Cantor!

Rev. Solomon cared scrupulously for his business. During the week he attended to his butcher shop and his shochet duties, and Sabbaths he performed his cantorial function in the synagogue, Agudas Achim. I am certain it never occurred to him that some day his congregation might engage another cantor. He was, after all, an accomplished cantor, not only proficient and knowledgeable in all the prayers, but also qualified by his luxuriantly full white beard. (This beard, by the way, had become a rarity among American cantors, and was thus much prized.)

What he did not suspect was that there were people who yearned to hear a modern cantor, the kind they heard on their gramaphones; the renowned great cantors who could tear your heart with their crying and with their sighs, and who could crawl right into the inner recesses of your being, your very soul, with their chanting of the prayers. In point of fact,

there were a good many congregants who had tired of Rev. Solomon's davvening, but no one had the temerity to stand up and demand that a new cantor be engaged. But because of an incidental occurrence, a new, young cantor was engaged by Agudas Achim.

The Sugerman brothers, members of Congregation Agudas Achim, were both charitable, communally active Jews. The older brother, S. Sugerman, was a generous, gracious, open-hearted man who took active part in all charitable enterprises. His younger brother, H. Sugerman, has always conducted himself in the same fine manner as his older brother. To this younger brother a son was born. To the Brith, his wife's brother, from Chicago, came. He was a young man, and a fine musicologist, with a beautiful voice. He was a cantor, the son of a cantor. His father had been one of the renowned cantors in Europe.

Well, this young Rev. Kantor chanted the Blessings at the Brith so appealingly, and pleased everyone so much, that he was asked to stay over Shabbos and chant in Agudas Achim Synagogue. His cantorial gifts captivated all who heard him. He was immediately engaged as Cantor, with a one year contract.

This is "Minhag America" (custom of America). A rabbi, a shochet, a cantor, is hired only for one year. At the end of the year, either his contract is renewed, or he is sent away. This was not so in our old country home. There, when a Rav, or a

cantor, or a shochet took a post in a town, he had life tenure. Even after his death, if he had a son or a son-in-law who was skilled in his profession, the community would not think of engaging anyone else.

My father-in-law, of blessed memory, can be cited as an example. He was the shochet of his town for fifty years, until his death. He was also, as you will recall, the cantor. Even though in his last years he could scarcely perform his duties, the post was his, irrevocably. His shochet duties I took over when he grew feeble (although a cantor I could never be!), but they never dreamed of hiring another man in his place. "Chazakkah", the right of possession, was a sacred, inviolate thing. Even when I left that town, I was able to convey that "right of possession" to a relative for good money. This was called "Chazakkah Gelt" (tenure concession money).

But in America such time honored traditions mean nothing. If they want you, fine; if they don't, go!

So they gave Rev. Kanter a one year contract, and he has been in his post eighteen years! This is because he pleases everyone so well. He is an excellent cantor all year and on the High Holy Days as well; he enhances all the simchas (celebrations) with his sweet melodies, and he conducts himself in dignified, honest, upright manner. He also gets along well with everyone, and everyone likes him.

Rev. Solomon was thus no longer the cantor of Agudas Achim. He was quite put out. He had been the cantor for so many years, and so many people had repeated their delight with his singing, and suddenly, no more cantor! Well, that is America for you, no "right of possession".

Several years earlier, Congregation Agudas Achim had established a Tamud Torah. They had engaged a bright young teacher named Epstein to teach and conduct the Hebrew School. He was an excellent pedagogue, and he taught the children "Hebrew in Hebrew", that is, translating the Hebrew text into simpler Hebrew, rather than into English or Yiddish. He also founded a Hebrew speaking club for adults. Several evenings weekly, about twenty of us would gather to converse in Hebrew, read the news aloud, in Hebrew. It was a spiritually uplifting and exhilarating experience, and sheer joy. This lasted all the time that Mr. Epstein was with us. But one day he went home, to New York, and he never returned. Our Hebrew conversation group fell apart, and the Talmud Torah was left without a teacher.

The powers that be at Agudas Achim decided that what we needed was a young man able to fill both positions, teacher and rabbi.

When word got out that San Antonio was seeking a Rabbi-Teacher, many young men descended upon us. We no longer hungered

for sermons. But with all of the candidates, it nevertheless took quite awhile until the right one was found. This was Rabbi Gerstein, a young man with a winning personality, bright, and his English was not bad. His sermons pleased the people. Of course, there was really no basis for comparative judgment, since Rev. Solomon never preached, and so even a poor sermon might have been considered better than no sermon at all. (Although some might disagree with this statement.) And so, Rabbi Gerstein was engaged as Rabbi-Teacher.

See what the Congregation did! They exchanged one old man for two young men. For one Rev. Solomon, who was both Rabbi and Cantor, they took the young Cantor Kanter and the young Rabbi Gerstein. More expensive, but worth the price. Less Torah among both the young men than in the one Rev. Solomon, but less accumulated years, thus greater life ecspectancy. Besides, who needs Torah learning here? Rev. Solomon never had to deal with a question of Jewish law, for no one asked him what was kosher and what was not. For our San Antonian Jews, everything was kosher! And surely for the young scholars in the Hebrew School, both Rev. Solomon and the younger man had more than sufficient Torah.

There being too many children for Rabbi Gerstein to teach, all by himself, he engaged me to assist in the School.

Between us, all of the educational needs of the congregation were taken care of. In addition, Rabbi Gerstein preached every Sabbath and Festival, and on such other occasions as there was need. ~~Within, too,~~ I frequently assisted. Thus it came about that Rev. Solomon lost both his cantorate and his rabbinate completely. He was deeply hurt, and his resentment festered. Finally, he resigned from the Congregation Agudas Achim altogether, and, with a coterie of his partisans, established another congregation, with him as Rabbi and Cantor.

Once more he was raised to the pinnacle of Jewish professionalism, even if with a tiny constituency, without a synagogue, in a rented house. Nevertheless, he was re-established again, his dignity restored. A rabbi and cantor as before!

San Antonio was thus blessed with three congregations, one large one and two small ones, in addition to the Reform Temple. In one respect there was no difference between the Temple and the three Orthodox congregations: none of them had any Services during the week. On Friday evenings, the rabbis preached. Rev. Solomon, too, realized that sermonics had become essential to the rabbinate, and so he also spoke every Sabbath Eve.

Saturday mornings, however, a scant minyan of older men

came to davven. I began to persuade the membership of the two small congregations to come together and create one unified congregation. Rev. Lubel, now the spiritual head of the congregation from which Rev. Solomon and his group had seceeded, raised no objected to the merger. The truth was that he had little joy or satisfaction from his people. Indeed, he had nothing but trouble from them. He therefore gave over his "Rabbinic Seat" to Rev. Solomon, and he himself became a member of Agudas Achim, where he took the Torah Readership.

The two small congregations duly became one, with Rev. Solomon as Rabbi. In time, the membership constructed a fine new synagogue, with the bimah (Torah reading platform) in the center--rather than at the Ark--, a women's gallery with little windows. It was all precisely as in the Old Country. This congregation took the name"Rodfei Sholom", meaning the Pursuers of Peace. And so peace came both to the congregations and their rabbis.

I remained with my shechitah (ritual slaughtering), attached to the other two shochtim, and continued teaching in the Talmud Torah. In my time, in the eighteen years that I was with the Hebrew School, there were many rabbis and principals. But I earned a respectable living, although I labored from dawn until seven in the evening. At that, I was ~~not~~

not unhappy, for I was earning my livelihood in honest fashion. There is great satisfaction in knowing that whatever you earn, however much or little, you have really earned.

It was during this period that I sent our son Jacob to the university. We were also able to buy a house. And God blessed us with the ability to bring two more of our children to the chuppah (marriage canopy): our son Sholom wedded to my brother-in-law's daughter, Channah, a lovely and gifted girl, and our daughter Esther, wed to a fine boy from Philadelphia, Meyer Libman. We celebrated both of their marriages in the same day, at our house. They were both marriage ceremonies according to the time honored law and custom of our people. May both couples live blessed with good fortune!

CHAPTER SIXTY

Rabbi Gerstein Dies Campaigning; A New Rabbi Is Engaged.

That Congregation Agudas Achim had secured a fine young rabbi and a fine young cantor was fine. But the synagogue was old, and was now too small. During the High Holy Days almost one half of the congregation had to stand outside. There was simply no room inside. True, there were certain

advantages in the structure. For one thing, it stood on a hill, near which a river flowed. Come Rosh Hashanah, when the congregants went to tashlich, all they had to do was step outside, and their sins could all be cast away. Indeed, the VIP's, who sat at the eastern wall, did not even have to go outside. They could simply open the windows, shake out their pockets, and the sins would get right into the water. For the river flowed right outside the east wall.

This great advantage, however, turned into a near disaster, and was the cause of both Rabbi Gerstein's premature death and the building of a new synagogue for Agudas Achim.

What happened was that there was a torrential rain, and the San Antonio River overflowed. Half the city was inundated. Many streets were under water, and many houses as well. The river waters near the synagogue overran their shores, and flooded the entire floor. The benches were floating, and indeed there was grave danger that the entire synagogue building might be washed away. This brought very real fear to the hearts of the congregants, and impelled them to begin casting about for the means wherewith to build a new synagogue. In addition, it became clear that a new Hebrew School also should be constructed.

Where does one secure the awesome amount of money with

which to build two such buildings? It was resolved that the Jews of surrounding towns should be asked to help. They were affluent, and always generous. Surely in such a sacred twin cause--a House of Prayer and a House of Study--their hearts would be touched.

To do this properly and effectively, however, a highly respected man would have to approach the prospective donors. The concensus was that this great honor should be accorded Rabbi Gerstein. Truth to tell, he would have been delighted to decline the honor. But, since the president and the Board of Trustees had already designated him, he could not very well step away from the role.

His reluctance to undertake the solicitation responsibility was, lamentably, vindicated all too soon. Within days of his leaving on the mission, a telegram was received in San Antonio. Rabbi Gerstein had died, suddenly. This tragedy affected everyone deeply, for he was a much beloved and respected leader. With his abrupt passing, the community lost a rabbi, a new synagogue, and a new Talmud Torah building--for he surely would have succeeded in securing the funds for the new facilities.

Rabbi Gerstein was brought back to San Antonio. He was given the greatest honors, indeed, far more than when he was alive. Elaborate eulogies were delivered, and his ex-

cellent qualities were described. (This, naturally, did not cost the congregation anything.) This is the way, unfortunately, that our Jews act. After the death of a public servant, he is honored far more than during his lifetime.

Balaam, in the Bible, when he was compelled to bless, rather than curse, the Jews, said, "May my end be like theirs". What he meant, of course, was he wanted to be praised after his death just like Jewish leaders were, but during his life he wanted to live like a goy!

The most impressive eulogy was delivered by Dr. Feigenbaum. All those present were profoundly impressed with him, and it was decided to offer him the post of Rabbi. He accepted the post happily, for although he was a genuine doctor of medicine, he had no practice, and was indeed seeking another means of livelihood. Congregation Agudas Achim thus acquired a new Rabbi, and the Talmud Torah a new Principal.

I taught with Rabbi Feigenbaum some six years. The School, under his administration, was well run. He was both a fine pedagogue and a splendidly organized director. So well did it go, that an additional teacher was required, and engaged. We had close to a hundred boys and girls. The people were much pleased with Rabbi Feigenbaum, both as Principal and as Rabbi. He was an eloquent speaker, conducted

his rabbinate well, and there was a general sense of well being in the community.

It was during Feigenbaum's tenure that both a beautiful, large synagogue and a fine new Talmud Torah building were completed. He himself was largely responsible for this, having secured a ten thousand dollar contribution from a wealthy Reform Jew who wished to honor the memory of his father.

The United States, by this time, had been drawn into World War One. Even though the actual warfare was being conducted overseas, all of us were naturally disturbed, affected in various ways, and deeply worried. We might have been physically safe where we were, but we knew all too well that the thousands upon thousands of our young men who, drafted or volunteer, were being sent away, would be facing death every day.

Among the multitude of such young men was my son Jacob. He was studying at "Texas A & M" University, which was a military college, and so of course he was sent off to war. But thank God, peace was declared before he could be sent overseas, and so he remained here.

Understandably, there was much rejoicing and much sorrow, when the soldiers returned home. The sons who came back well, uninjured, were greeted with great gladness and

relief. The ones who did not return, or returned wounded--some injured and crippled for life--caused profound sadness and gloom among their loved ones. In general, however, there was a lifting of spirits. We were able to breathe freely at last. Peace had come. The black clouds had disappeared, and the skies were bluer, brighter, in half the world.

This relief and gladness came to millions of people, but not to our Jewish people...

CHAPTER SIXTY ONE

We Bring Our Children To America

Our brothers in Russia suffered terribly during the war. Their lot there, in that land viciously ruled by the tyrant Nicholas, was worse than the lot of their fellow Jews in other European countries. (Not that the latter had good fortune, either!) And after his downfall, when peace was declared, they suffered no less from the marauding bloody murderers, especially in the Ukraine. The most frequent pogroms, mass slaughters, occurred there, when for more than a year after the signing of peace roving bands of brutal, senseless butchers roamed the Ukraine, looting, raping, pillaging, killing. Like wild tigers they tore apart tens of

thousands of Jewish lives; men, women, and children sacrificed on the altar of antiSemitism. The horrifying story is inscribed in blood on the pages of history.

In the midst of this hell, our daughter Anyuta, with her husband and two daughters, and our son Eliyahu with his wife, were trapped. There is much to tell of what they endured during those terrible years. But, praised be God, they lived through that holocaust, suffering only pain and terror but retaining their lives. When the Bolsheviks took over, and the roving killer bands were dissolved, calm was restored, and the pogroms against the Jews ceased.

With the advent of the Bolsheviks, however, life was no bed of roses for the Jews there. While there was a certain equality, it brought no joy to the Jews. That is to say, hunger stalked the land, Jews and non-Jews suffering alike. And the fear of imminent death was there, again equally for Christian and Jew. Whoever was not enrolled as a member of the Communist Party, or upon whom the slightest suspicion was cast, was in constant danger of immediate execution.

We sent our children money, however much we could, to sustain them until we could bring them over here. It was not until 1922 that we managed to get our daughter and her family to the United States. Our son and his wife we were

unable to bring into the United States, and so, several years later, we brought them into Mexico. Our daughter and her family soon adjusted quite well. In Russia her husband was an engineer, but here he became a businessman, and does well. At this writing, they have been here twelve years, have already been blessed with the marriages of both of their daughters, Leda and Vera, God give them good fortune. My son and his family reside to this day in Mexico City, and he is well established.

I may say of myself as it is said in the Bible of Joseph. Indeed, he said this to his brothers--that it was a blessing granted by God that he should be taken to Egypt, so that in the time of hunger he could sustain his family. This is precisely what happened with me. Many of our friends had derided our leaving Russia when we were doing so well, but I was pulled magnetically to America. I cannot explain this in any other way but that it was the will of God that we should come to America, from where we would be able to save our children from the hell of Russia.

And just as Joseph endured all manner of trial and trouble until he achieved the position in which he could help his family, I too had to struggle and endure hardship until I could extricate my family from their hunger and misery. Of course, it is true that, unlike me, Joseph was

cast into prison, and so it might be judged that I was more fortunate than he. But Joseph attained great heights, became Viceroy, rode in princely chariots with purebred horses, whereas I, in America, did not even become a schul president, and amassed no royal fortune. I remained the same shochet-teacher I had been in the old home, and I drove out before dawn each morning in a simple, plain little wagon, to which was hitched a skinny, bony horse, with absolutely no fanfare. Perhaps this is because I was never consumed with ambition to strive for great wealth or renown. I thank God, nevertheless, with all my heart, because He guided my steps in the right and proper way, so that I was enabled to help my children. With this I am very pleased, because I consider this my greatest reward. This is, after all, one of the most important goals of every decent human being.

A year after the arrival of my daughter, in 1923, we were privileged to celebrate the marriage of our youngest son Jacob with the lovely daughter of a local businessman, named Lebman. The wedding was outstanding, in that it combined the best features of American custom and religiously correct ritual.

God grant them good fortune.

CHAPTER SIXTY TWO

The Times Change...

The situation of every people, every nation, as of every individual, does not remain static. It twists and turns, often seeming to be attached to a revolving wheel, moving now up, now down. There is a mystical force that, like a hidden motor, propels everything and everyone.

The lot of our people brings us far more changes in our state of being than other peoples. This is largely because our Jewish people is not rooted in a firm place of our own. We do not have a country of our own, with our own government, as other nations do. It is almost two thousand years that the Jew, staff in hand, has been wandering over the face of the world, with all his worldly possessions in a pack on his back. All too frequently he is forced to depart his always temporary home. Sometimes he has to leave a place where his forebears lived for centuries, because of the fear of the sword over his head, the fear of destruction. Supremely fortunate are those Jews who find a place of peace, under a democratic government, which does not distinguish between Jews and non-Jews. On the other hand, extremely unfortunate are those Jews whom destiny has

compelled to settle in a barbaric land, where they are oppressed mercilessly.

American Jews should consider themselves among the most fortunate Jews in the world, because here, in these United States, we have found a resting place best suited to us; a country whose affairs are conducted democratically, so that the Jew enjoys the rights and privileges of citizenship exactly like all other people. Now, at this moment, when Jews in many other lands are victims of antiSemitism, American Jews are living in security. This country is the finest "city of refuge"--as the Bible puts it--for our people.

In the days of Alexander the Third, and of his son Nicholas the Second, tens of thousands of Jews fled to the safety of America, from the Russian pogroms. They fled also from a similar fate in Roumania, and in Poland, and other such barbaric countries in Europe. And the United States admitted them, accepted them as welcome refugee immigrants, Jew and non-Jew alike.

The economic situation was much better here than in Russia, or in the other European lands of the immigrants' origin. But in terms of Jewish spirituality, it would have been a disaster. The Judaism of the Jewish immigrant generation might well have gone under. For the newcomers did not come here seeking Judaism. That they had in their old home.

They came to seek a livelihood, a means whereby to improve their lot, and their future; to ease their life, which was so hard in Europe. And so they sought every which way to accomplish what they had strived for in their flight: business, labor, education--anything and everything that could be used as an instrument, a vehicle to reach their goal.

This kind of one track obsession led, inevitably, to neglect of the sanctity of the Sabbath and Festivals, gradual ignoring of sacred Jewish laws and customs, dereliction in providing a decent Jewish education for children. Were there no strong outside force or influence, that first generation Jewish immigration might well have led to destruction of everything that our people mean, and have meant, in the world.

Fortunately, God sends the antidote to the poison, always in time. Daily, new Jewish immigrants came to these shores. They came fresh from the Judaism-soaked villages and <u>shtedtlach</u> of Russia and Poland; just yesterday from the Rebbe's table, from the yeshivah. They revived, by their very presence, the heart of Judaism in their fellow Jews here. As to them the Jewish way of life was vibrant, so they brought constantly renewed vibrancy to their "older brothers" in America. This is the way it went, for many years. American Jewry drew its constant rejuvenation from the persistent flow of new Jewish immigrants.

But times change. The mood of the American people underwent

a transformation, after the war. In fact, both the economic and the spiritual status of the whole world changed. In both areas there was an appreciable downward trend. True, in the United States the economic situation did not quite match that of the falling state in other countries. But in the arena of the spirit a dark period was ushered in. Freedom began to be limited. And there arose people across the country who demanded a halt to immigration. They insisted upon a quota on newcomers, for these immigrants were taking the jobs of Americans. They were eating the fruit of the land, while the citizens had little to eat.

These were the charges, and they swept the country. A cry arose to limit immigration; slow the stream of refugees from persecuted lands. Unfortunately, this unAmerican spirit prevailed. Immigration was cut down to a trickle. And, quotas being what they were, very few of our Russian and Polish brothers were able to gain admittance henceforth.

The establishment of the quota system was a blow to all, but especially to the Jews. Jews were oppressed more stringently, in more places, than anyone else. And they had nowhere to flee, now that the gates to blessed America were all but closed. If the American Jews did not suffer unduly economically, their spiritual well being was surely threatened by the quota system. From where, now, would come the infusion of Jewish spiritual strength, with immigration closed?

God watches over the welfare of His Jewish children. In the hour of need, help came from an unexpected source: the Balfour Declaration.

CHAPTER SIXTY THREE

The Balfour Declaration

During the beclouded days of the World War, and in the days immediately following, the Jewish people throughout the world was in despair. Not only had scores of thousands been killed, many more made homeless, but even the hope for some new progress on the Zionist scene had weakened. It was a somber time for us. Suddenly, breaking through the black clouds, a wondrously bright star shone through. It illuminated the entire Jewish world, and reawakened the hope and the faith of all Jews everywhere. This was the Balfour Declaration.

Like some mystical balm, the Declaration quickened the spirit of Jewry. Suddenly there was the feeling that the long yearned for end to Jewish dispersion had begun at last. Jews were about to be re-settled in their own land, in the Fatherland called "Eretz Yisrael", the Land of Israel. It awakened all Jews, of all persuasions. It impelled every Jew to get involved in the upbuilding of Eretz Yisrael, some with

money, some with talents, some with personal involvement.

Tens of thousands of young, strong, courageous men and women chose the latter course. They went to Palestine as chalutzim (pioneers), to work with their hands. With their might and with their sweat they came, to build the land. There were also other pioneers, people with money, who came with their resources to re-create the Holy Land.

Within this brief span of a few years, a substantial Jewish population has grown up in Eretz Yisrael, with large cities. Many colonies have been developed where once there were only swamps and rock-strewn hills. Now there are huge fields of fruits and vegetables, and numerous vineyards. No less important, many yeshivahs and Talmud Torahs have been established, and such world renowned cultural institutions as the Hebrew University, which excels in all studies, and is recognized as one of the great universities in the civilized world. It is clear, even at this early stage of development, that the prophesy, "For from Zion shall come forth the Law", is already coming true.

This rebirth in the Holy Land gave a strong impetus to the Jewish pride and culture of our people here in the United States. Jewish nationalism, Jewish identity, Judaic knowledge and values, have grown strong within our community. America no longer has to depend upon infusions of the ways

of Jewish life brought by new immigrants, from other lands. This country is itself becoming a nurturing place for Torah, with yeshivahs springing up everywhere, and giants of Torah scholarship flourishing in abundance. Two major centers of Jewish learning--Yitzchak Elchanan and Hebrew Theological College, of New York and of Chicago respectively--are living testimony that we have arrived as a great world Jewish community, culturally and spiritually. From both of these institutions a steady stream of learned young rabbis issue forth, to serve and to strengthn the fabric of Jewish life. They are American born, and they are as expert in the Talmud, Jewish law, even in the gemorrah tunes, as were their European predecessors. From the windows of these yeshivahs can now be heard "the voice of Jacob", that is, Torah study, as it was in the yeshivahs I knew.

The secondary Hebrew schools, too, are much improved, with certified, well educated pedagogues bringing Judaism to the minds and hearts of our growing American Jewish generations in effective, intelligent fashion. And if there are yet flaws in the education system, they will surely be dealt with constructively, as we go on

The spirit of Jewish nationalism has been strengthened in many homes. The secular Yiddishists founded their own "Schulas" (schools), where their children are being imbued

with the ideals of nationalism. They learn Jewish history, love of their people and of Zion, and a powerful sense of loyalty to Judaism as a civilization and culture. And what has brought all of this renaissance about? Why, it was the Balfour Declaration, and the Zionist awakening it evoked.

Not only the war years, but ever since then as well, Jews in Europe have been suffering from persecution, and even from privation and hunger. American Jewry, the one large Jewish community in the world whose economic situation did not break down as did that of their brothers, has established and maintains large, generous organizations to sustain the Jewish "family". Such agencies as HIAS, Joint Distribution Committee, and ORT, are maintaining the lives of countless Jews. Tens of thousands of these Jewish men, women, and children, would perish, were it not for these institutions, and for the charitable American Jews who give generously, with open hands and hearts.

God bless these many fine Jews. They are truly, as our people has been called, "Compassionate children of compassionate fathers".

CHAPTER SIXTY FOUR

Rev. Lubel Discharges Me; I Open My Butcher Shop.

All three of us shochtim--Rev. Lubel, Rev. Solomon, and

I--lived and worked amicably together, made a modest living, and were quite content. Rev. Lubel, who owned the butcher shop, paid Rev. Solomon and me weekly wages. In addition, Rev. Solomon had extra income from his rabbinate and cantorate at Rodfei Sholom, and I earned my supplement teaching in the Talmud Torah. This went smoothly for a number of years.

From some unknown source, a rumor began which caused all of us much grief. Someone, somewhere in our Jewish community, expressed shock that such a substantial Jewish population as ours, with almost five hundred Jewish families--all of whom surely observed the Dietary Laws!--had only one Kosher Butcher Shop. This ludicrous talk was bruited about in ever wider circles, and with increasing intensity, until a man was persuaded that it had merit. He opened a second butcher shop.

They reckoned, as rumor-mongers always do, without checking the facts. First, not only one family made its living from Rev.Lubel's shop but four, the three shochtim and the butcher--that is, the meat cutter. Secondly, not five hundred families were eating kosher meat, but, at the very most, less than one half of them. And even among these there were those who never stepped into the butcher shop except for the High Holy Days, when, I suppose, they felt awkward about approaching God to ask Him for a good year, with treifah meat in their stomachs! And some others bought kosher meat only for the

week of Pesach.(Somehow, the idea of eating matzah with ham or other non-kosher meat bothered them, it must be assumed.) But other than these two weeks in the year, there could have been less than two hundred and fifty Jewish families in San Antonio--as far as the kosher meat business was concerned.

Nevertheless, a young butcher from New York came along, and he brought a shochet with him. He opened his butcher shop, and began to entice the Jewish housewives with cut-rate prices. Captivated with his bargains, numerous customers went over to him, and Rev. Lubel's shop lost considerable patronage. It reached the point where the income simply did not warrant--nor was able to pay for--all of us. Rev. Lubel was compelled, therefore, to let me go, as well as the meat cutter.

My salary from the Talmud Torah could not possibly provide the livelihood I needed for my family. So I engaged the discharged meat cutter, and opened my own shop! Suddenly, you see, the San Antonio Jewish community, which could barely sustain one kosher meat market, had three! The Jewish customers, of course, were delighted. With this competition they were buying kosher meat at unheard of prices! The truth was that we all lost money on our less-than-cost prices. Within one year, that New York butcher

departed. Rev. Lubel took my butcher and me--at a higher salary--back with him, and we were at our previous content state. In fact I was pleased to get rid of the responsibility of both my shop and my meat cutter. Both had given me nothing but anguish.

From that point on, my situation was quite satisfactory. The combination of my two salaries--the butcher shop and the Talmud Torah--provided me with a rather nice living. I was able to pay out my house in full, erase all of my debts, and live much more comfortably and peacefully.

This happy state of affairs did not last long.

Tragedy struck, in the form of a terrible illness that attacked our daughter Anyute. It was so serious, and so lingering, that our very life was embittered. It was the same story, over again, as it had been all my life. The times and fortune changed erratically, back and forth, from good to bad to good to bad. I was never able to hold one position of well being for long. As the winter sun, so was my fate, shining through for a short while, and behind the clouds again. A man connot avoid these fluctuations, nor hide from them. There are some few exceptions, people on whom the sun shines all day, every day. But these are very rare. For the rest of us, our destiny leads us up and down, where it will.

CHAPTER SIXTY FIVE

The American Rabbi's Lot Is The Lot Of European Women.

In our old home, when a community engaged a rabbi and gave him the rabbinic agreement, no time frame was included. It was an agreement for life. Whether the people had made a wise or unwise selection; whether they liked him or not, he stayed as their rabbi throughout his career, unless he wished to leave. Even after his death, if there was a qualified son or son-in-law, he succeeded to the post. This was the system with regard to all clergy--cantors, shochtim, et al. (The above, repetitious, paragraph, is deleted on the tape.)

Here in America, ~~however,~~ the rabbi is dealt with just as the wife in Europe was treated. That is, if a husband found some fault with his wife, however minor--even her salting of the soup!--, he simply had a get (divorce document) written, and delivered to her together with the few rubel he had pledged. She was dismissed! Indeed, this was true even if he found no flaw in her but found a more attractive woman whom he wanted to marry. The husband, in a word, kept his wife only as long as he wished.

With the American rabbi it is the same. He is retained only for as long as the people want him. Should any fault be found, real or imaginary, major or minor--even if the "fault" is that they can get another rabbi they like

better, for the same money!--, let alone if he speaks too long, or says something which displeases one of the pillars, or maybe even the president himself, that's the end of the rabbi! He might as well pack up, set out on his way, and seek another pulpit.

Dr. Feinberg was the Agudas Achim Rabbi five years, when a new president began his term. He was a president much like all other presidents of congregations in America. That is to say, he had made a little money, served as Gabbai, and was elected to the presidency. As such, he sat at the front, by the eastern wall near the Ark, and ruled over his domain. All of the clergy--the rabbi, cantor, shamas--must pay homage to him. His word was, for them, a command. He set the tone; they must stand before him with awe. After all, he was their provider; without his assent their families would not eat. Woe unto the member of the clergy who disobeyed, or who ignored the will of the Absolute Ruler!

Dr. Feinberg, however, had no desire or intent to bow down before the new president. He was a doctor of medicine and a doctor of philosophy. Why should he demean himself before this unlearned autocratic president? He forgot, unfortunately, that in America the "Golden Calf" stood on a much higher plane than scholarship or academic degrees.

Before long, he was made to understand this. He was discharged from his pulpit. Neither his doctoral knowledge nor his philosophic wisdom was of any avail. He stayed on as Principal of the Talmud Torah, however, because his contract there yet had a year to run.

To succeed Dr. Feigenbaum there came a young rabbi, Rabbi Benges, with whom everyone was most pleased. He was an eloquent orator, although in scholarship he was far behind his predecessor. But who needs learning in an American rabbi? As long as he can speak well, he is fine. And, indeed, if he did not speak eloquently, all the learning in the world would not make him a desirable rabbi.

This created a pathetic situation for Dr. Feigenbaum. As head of the Talmud Torah, he was naturally obliged to attend Services regularly. How would it look if the man in charge of the Jewish education of the children did not <u>dovven</u>? So he was compelled to sit in the pews and observe his enemy, the man who had taken his livelihood from him, conducting the rabbinate and delivering eloquently unlearned sermons! This preyed on his mind, and made him miserable. A weak heart he had, and this aggravation did him no good. Within that year he grew terminally ill, and he went to the Eternal World--where congregation presidents had no authority. And so our cemetery was further enriched

by a young rabbi--an addition to one who had preceeded him there. He was accorded proper honor, and Rabbi Benges eulogized him and lamented his passing---eloquently.

Dr. Feigenbaum's demise caused a vacancy, of course, in the leadership of the Talmud Torah. Rabbi Benges, although this was neither his field nor his desire, was propelled into the Principalship. Since he was not as talented as Rabbi Feigenbaum, a fourth teacher had to be engaged. Nevertheless, he was much admired, and he continued in the dual post for the next two years.

A public servant, however, cannot satisfy everyone for long. Sooner or later, his critics inevitably arise. When Rabbi Benges began to sense that this process had begun, he did not wait to be discharged. (Undoubtedly, he had no taste for the prospect of being the third of the young rabbis to be interred at the Agudas Achim cemetery!) He simply left San Antonio, without a word to anyone, and took another pulpit, in another Texas city.

Imagine! A rabbi "discharges" a congregation! The reverse of what everyone knows to be the proper procedure! A congregation may tell a rabbi to go, but a rabbi should, in effect, tell a congregation where to go! Inconceiveable! Even his best friends were outraged. Nevertheless, gone he was, and a new rabbi was urgently required.

The fact was, of course, that two vacancies existed, the Talmud Torah Principalship as well as the Agudas Achim Rabbinate. But in the area of Jewish education Jews can get along, and the Talmud Torah could manage somehow, for awhile. A rabbi, however, was a must. The High Holy Days were approaching, and how could a congregation manage without a rabbi on the Days of Awe?

The word went out into the country. "San Antonio seeks a new rabbi." The word was heard, and candidates arrived, one after the other. It was much easier for a congregation to secure a rabbi, than for a rabbi to secure a congregation.

There came a young man, a rabbi ordained by the Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary. He had been the rabbi in a temple, in another Texas city. But he had been a yeshiva bochur in Europe, and he was extremely well educated, not only in Talmud but in general Jewish subjects such as history, Hebrew language, literature. He was also an excellent preacher. He was met with widespread approval, and was elected to serve as Agidas Achim Rabbi and--until a successor to the Principalship could be found--Acting Principal of the Talmud Torah.

I thus found myself with a new Principal and, I believed, I would soon work with yet another, who would replace Rabbi Phillips (the new AA Rabbi).

Sadly, this was not to be.

I was compelled to leave my post at the Talmud Torah, for that same old reason: because the presidents of our institutions were dictators. They governed with unquestioned control. They did as they wished, whether their judgment was good or bad. The Talmud Torah president, in relation to the staff there, was precisely ~~that~~ the same as the Congregation president in relation to the rabbi. And so the faculty of the Talmud Torah was totally dependent upon the good will or the whim of the president.

CHAPTER SIXTY SIX

"And A New King Arose Who Did Not Know" Education!

(Note: The author resorts to a quotation from the Bible, "And a new king arose who knew not Joseph", referring to the Pharaoh in the Moses narrative.)

The new Talmud Torah president was a Jew who had studied in the old country, and was far from ignorant. But he had the peculiar fixation that Jewish children need not learn Yiddish. In other words, he was adamantly opposed to our teaching our Jewish subjects in Yiddish. Everything must be translated into English, was his idea, because this was the tongue of the land. This meant, of course, that the teachers must

be expert in English

He resolved, therefore, to bring down several modern, English speaking Hebrew teachers. Henceforth, was his idea, no more Yiddish in the Talmud Torah! This decision also meant that I must leave the Talmud Torah, for I was not at all adept in English. I am certain he did not mean to hurt me. He had no personal motive in mind. He was genuinely persuaded that in this way he would enhance the Jewish education of our children.

Unfortunately, experience has proved that even where the intent is not motivated by personal hatred, it can be no less devastating. Satan's lack of dislike for Job did not spare him terrible trials. So the new president's noble intent did not spare me the loss of my post.

Well, after all, a Talmud Torah is not established for its faculty but for its students, so that they shall learn. Although I was the senior instructor in that Hebrew School, having taught there more than ten years, and although all the parents and the children were happy with me, if the president judged that I was not qualified to teach in the modernized Talmud Torah, of course I had to leave. Rabbi Phillips left at the same time.

The president himself travelled to New York, in quest of properly qualified, modern, English speaking teachers.

He brought back two teachers. One had a diploma in philosophy. (Nu, what more can one want in a Hebrew teacher?) The second was also very modern, clean shaved as befits a sophisticated Hebrew teacher, although his English was not quite perfect. The president was in seventh heaven. He was overjoyed with the prospect that the San Antonio Talmud Torah would soon become the model for the country.

The modern teachers went to work. Several months went by. Peculiarly, not a word of satisfaction was heard, either from the parents nor even from the president. No one was recounting the wonders of the new educational system. On the contrary, complaints began to be heard against those modern teachers and their methods. Not only was our Talmud Torah not thriving and growing, it was losing students daily. It developed that the philosophical teacher was an eccentric, and the children constantly mocked him. The other teacher hit the children, just like his European predecessors, even if he was modern. And the students liked the punishment no more for its being administered by a modern teacher. They refused to attend Hebrew school.

Some time later I met the president in the street, and I asked him how the changes he had wrought were coming along. He confessed his error. The philosopher was discharged, but paid out the balance of his one year contract. The other left when none of his students would return. The Talmud Torah was closed until after the Holy Days!

CHAPTER SIXTY SEVEN

Our Triumvirate Is Torn Asunder

After this disasterous experiment in modernity, I was invited to return to the Talmud Torah, at a higher salary. A new Principal was also brought in. He was a young chalutz (pioneer) from Eretz Yisrael. He had served in the Palestine Jewish Brigade, and had learned a bit of Hebrew. With these qualifications, he became a Hebrew pedagogue in America! Obviously, his idea was that in America one needs scant background, training, or knowledge. Within one year it became evident that he was unsuited to the post, and he was released.

Since this chalutz was also of the modern school, and since the president had once again failed in his quest, he resigned, and to this day he cannot abide the so-called modern pedagogues!

A new president took office, and a new Principal was engaged. He also was a chalutz from Palestine, but what a difference! His name was Harrison, and he was a brilliant scholar in all matters Jewish. His Hebrew was flawless, and he was a gifted teacher. He and I became close friends.

It was at this time that I published my first book, TORAH IN RHYME, a translation of the entire Torah and several chapters of the Prophets and Writings, rhymed in Yiddish. The volumes reached me, from the printer, pre-

cisely on my seventieth birthday! This was in the month of Kislev, 5690.

The directors of the Talmud Torah celebrated my birthday with a splendid banquet in my honor. More than two hundred guests were seated at the tables. Numerous beautiful speeches were delivered, extolling me and honoring me. This was the best, the most pleasureful day in my life, and in the life of my family.

That winter, another radical change overtook my life. Rev. Lubel sold his butcher shop to another butcher. He became the Shamas in Agudas Achim, and as the shochet for the new butcher. Rev. Solomon also departed both his shechitah and his rabbinate; indeed, he departed this world and was laid to rest.

Thus, the triple chord that had been intertwined for so many years was rent asunder, with Rev. Solomon in Heaven, Rev. Lubel on the bimah in the synagogue, and I remaining in the Talmud Torah. Rev. Lubel came out of this better than the other two of us. I left the shechitah and contented myself with my teaching. It was enough for me, especially as my salary was once again increased. Mr. Harrison was our Principal for one year, and he, too, left.

CHAPTER SIXTY EIGHT

My Seventy First Year, 5691

I have lived through the alotted lifespan of our Tradition, seventy years. I say 'lived through', in the sense of 'managed to endure', rather than 'lived', because most of my life could not really be called living in any satisfactory way. The ill fortune that intrudes upon a man's life found me all too often. My way was not strewn with flowers. Many were the obstacles, mostly filled with sharp thorns, which impeded my life's progress. I sustained numerous wounds which even time cannot heal altogether. Only infrequently did the sun shine over my head; most of the time it was hidden behind thick black clouds. A fleeting bit of sunlight, and immediately grey skies again.

And so my seventy years went by.

I do not, God forbid, complain. Indeed, I am content with my lot. I was able, thank the Lord, to conduct my modest little world not worse than those blessed with riches and security and luxury. In any event, those years are past, and I am grateful to God for the now, the present. When I think back on my years, and I realize that I lived them with integrity, that I never took what was not mine, that I was never a burden to anyone--earning my way, all the way--, and

that God blessed me with good, respectable children who have fine Jewish hearts and are loyal to my basic values--isn't that the ultimate striving of every man, to leave a good generation after him?--, and who will never bring shame to their parents, then I am content. For this is what life really should be.

As I reminisce over the years, retrospectively, I find myself filled with gratitude for my sainted wife, her memory for a blessing. It was she, far more than I, who managed to nurture and develop the fine children who are my life's satisfaction; she, with her wonderful way of rearing and guiding children, succeeded in our profound ambition.

It is told of Napoleon that when he expressed concern over the low state of the younger generation, he agreed that the one approach should be to develop good mothers. For from them a fine posterity would be assured.

In our home, during the entire forty four years when she was my life companion, peace and harmony prevailed. Never, not once, was a vicious word spoken. When trouble overtook me, her understanding, compassionate, wise words soothed and encouraged me. She gave me new hope, repeatedly.

Now I have reached the jubilee of my lifespan. I am able, thank God, to make my own way, not to have to be a burden on the children. And none of them is in dire circumstance, so that they need no help from me. What more have I

the moral right to ask? We were happy with each other, my beloved wife and I, and on the whole we had no complaints against our destiny. We lived together contentedly all through the long summer. Now the days of the fall, the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur days, have come. We have both prayed that this coming year, 5691--my seventy first--, should be no worse than the past.

To my everlasting sorrow, this prayer was not answered affirmatively by God. This year has blackened my life. Two days after Yom Kippur, my wife was suddenly taken ill. After but two days of that terrible illness, erev Sukkoth, her sacred soul ascended to Heaven.

This tragedy was as a thunderbolt for me. I was shattered. The essence of my life had been wrenched from me, without preparation or warning. I knew that from this blow I could never recover. For I had lost my deeply loyal friend, my companion through all that was important, my life partner. And our children had lost their cherished, devoted mother who had offered up her very life for them.

Our friends, indeed all who knew her, mourned her, for she was not only a wonderful wife and a dedicated mother, but also a beloved human being of fine character, who cared deeply about other people. She had assisted me constantly with my TORAH IN RHYME, and she also took an active role in the early chapters of the present book. It is her name

that I inscribe and memorialize in this volume.

Since my wife's mortal departure, I am only a shadow of the person I was. The sun has set, for me, and it can never rise again. My home is devastated; its walls weep for the heart of the house.

Dear reader, perhaps it is not pleasant, or very interesting, for an outsider to read of the woes that befall a man; to be drawn into the mood of sadness of a stranger. I ask you, do not take this ill. For it is something I am compelled to do. I must give expression to the sorrow and the bitterness that fill my heart; that oppress me so, inside, that I cannot but reveal them to the world. I cannot suppress these thoughts, for they demand to be freed from the confines of my inner self. Were I to remain silent, it would be as the water, held captive by the lid on the pot which, when it boils, must explode. If I cannot scream this terrible loss out loud, then I can--as I must--wail with my pen.

I left our house, in which we had lived for twenty years. Many were the simchas, the happy occasions, we had enjoyed in that house. Now, however, the memories and the associations made it unbearable for me to continue to live within its walls. And so I went to live with my children, Harry and Eda Hessel. They treat me with utmost respect, and they do everything possible to please me. I lack nothing

in my new home. I surely have nothing about which to complain. Many, especially in my years and circumstance, would judge me very fortunate. And surely, insofar as the love and care of my children are concerned, that is so.

I confess, however, that I cannot find genuine comfort. My other, true home and life are destroyed...

That winter I stayed with my teaching at the Talmud Torah. But I realized that I was growing weaker, both physically and spiritually. I knew that the time had come for me to leave the profession. And so I resigned. I went to New York, to visit my sister and her husband, whom I had not seen for too many years, and to see many relatives whom I had never seen. I was there for more than a month.

The affection they offered me, and the miraculous wonders of that great city, lifted my spirits. The sharp edge of my tragedy was somewhat dulled. My despair was no longer quite as deep as it had been, although bitter, still. Upon return home, however, the temporary respite induced by my trip disappeared, and I became depressed once more. I realized that I must get myself involved in some distraction that would fill my empty hours, preclude my brooding. I therefore began another literary work: the translation into Yiddish, in rhyme, of the epigrammatic wisdom of our Talmudic sages. I sent the manuscript to the world renowned Yiddish and Hebrew poet, Bialik, and I received from him

a letter expressing his gratitude for my work, and for my effort to bring the wisdom of our heritage to the people of our time. (This letter lies as a cherished jewel among my most safely kept possessions.) This encouraged me to the point of taking that draft manuscript and polishing it for publication. It also gave me strength to go on with this book of my memoirs. I pray to God that He give me the time and the clarity of mind, as well as the strength, to see this volume published. I hope that it will find the favor, in my readers' eyes, found by my TORAH IN RHYME.

CHAPTER SIXTY NINE

Synagogue Jews, Jews Without a Synagogue, German Jews, Half-Jews, Country Jews.

Congregation Agudas Achim, founded decades ago, is today the largest synagogue in San Antonio. In former days it was Orthodox, but now it is Conservative. Women sit with their husbands, although there is a women's gallery. But there only the older previously observant women sit. They cannot bring themselves to sit alongside men in a sacred place. In the cantor's choir women also sing--although they are all Jewish. It would appear, thus, that Agudas Achim is a completely Conservative congregation. And yet, all of the Services, on the Holy Days and on Sabbaths, are recited precisely in the Orthodox fashion. Nothing is deleted.

Friday evenings the traditional Kabbalat Shabbat (sunset Service) is conducted, but several hours later, a large gathering, people who had already recited the Kiddush and eaten their Sabbath Eve meal, come to the synagogue, for the"Late Service". The cantor sings, with the choir accompanying him, and the rabbi delivers his sermon in English. Every morning there is a Minyan, during the weekdays, and every evening as well. Most of those who attend these are mourners, who are reciting the memorial Kaddish for beloved deceased. Sometimes, practically the only ones there are the "Kaddish sayers", and there is virtually no one present to respond with the "Amen". Nevertheless, the fact is that there is a Service daily--something we did not have when there were three Orthodox synagogues.

On the High Holy Days, spacious as is the synagogue, it is not large enough. This is, of course, because when the Days of Awe come around, even those who never step into the synagogue all year feel compelled to attend. Also, the Jews from nearby communities ("country Jews") who cannot very well come in all year, do so for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. There is another, curious group that helps overfill the synagogue. These are the Jews who, having made a little money, want to "go up in the world", and become members of the Reform Temple, be among the German"Yahudim", social climbers. During the year, they may stop in at the Temple

occasionally. But on the High Holy Days they cannot bear to face God without head covering, or a tallith, and listen to a goy sounding the shofar--actually, a trumpet! This is still too unJewish, even for these "fifty-fifty", half-German Jews.

There are even synagogue Jews who become German Yahudim after their death! What happens is that their children, Temple members, inter their parents in the Temple cemetery, both so that the children shall not have to go visit the graves in the Traditional cemetery, and to insure their parents being eternally in the German-Jewish Garden of Eden.

There is another category of Jews, Jews without a synagogue. These are the Socialist Yiddishists, the secular Jews. They needed no synagogue for themselves, nor a Religious School for their children, since the religious core of Judaism was not for them. They were nationalist Jews, and cultural Jews, but not religious Jews. Most of these were affiliated with the Poale Zion (Workers of Zion, the Socialist Zionist Party), or the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen's Circle). These were the radicals, far removed from true Judaism, one would say. And yet, if you were to drop in on one of their gatherings, one of their simchas, what would you hear? Why, you would hear--among these secularists who hold prayer in disdain--such songs being sung as "Avinu Malkenu" (Our Father, Our King), or "Baruch Elohenu"

(Blessed is Our God), right straight out of our Prayer Book! And they sang these sacred tunes with no less fervor than the most pious chassidim. If you did not know who they were, and you heard their singing, you would have sworn that these were blindly devoted chassidim, sitting at their Rebbe's table, waiting for the shirayim.

Well, that is not too surprising. After all, these are men and women who, as children, were nurtured in religious, proper Jewish homes. Who knows? Some of them probably studied in European yeshivahs. Despite themselves, the spark of true Judaism did not go out entirely; it was not as completetely quenched as they had thought. Somehow, there is a nostalgic remembrance, an unconscious yearning to return to their roots, to the source from which they came.

These "radicals" were passionate devotees of Zionism. They collected, and gave, much money for the cause of Zion Rebuilt. They also took leading roles in the attempts to rescue our poor Jewish brothers and sisters trapped in the post-World War European trap. In fact, they took active leading roles in all of our Jewish institutions--except the synagogues, of course--with commendable zeal and generosity. Their wives took part in every communal charity endeavor, be it Jewish or general.

Noble, fine, you would say. And I would agree. But their children, I am certain, will never sing an "Avinu Malkenu";

they will not even know its meaning. They will have no concept ofbasic Judaism. For not only no synagogue, but no Jewish education are they being given. They do not learn their Jewish history. They grow up not knowing the feeling of Jewish Holy Days, or the sense of the sanctified Sabbath. All of the time honored Jewish folkways and customs are not being transmitted to them. How can one expect them to be loyal to that which they have never been taught or shown?

There is a wide, terrible chasm between the Socialist secular Jews (who themselves are yet imbued with their European Jewish background) and their children. Let us pray that the children will find their way back to us!

CHAPTER SEVENTY

The "Country Jews"

In the small towns further out from San Antonio, there are small numbers of Jews. Nevertheless, in each of these country towns, the Jews are divided as they are in our city: Traditional Jews and German Jews. Since they cannot afford to have two synagogues, and two rabbis, most of them have one synagogue, in partnership, with one Rabbi serving both ideological groups. In order not to discriminate, the Rabbi stands at the Ark, but the worshippers are seated at each side of the synagogue. The Rabbi addresses each side, in

turn, and delivers his sermons accordingly.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, however, the Rabbi has his work cut out for him. For the German Jews he conducts the Service without a hat, and he faces them during the entire Service. Then he puts on his yarmulke, turns to the others side, faces the Ark, and conducts the Orthodox Service. After this, he turns to the center, so that he is addressing both sides, and he delivers his sermon to both sides simultaneously!

There are other country towns, however, where even this is not done. They manage to get along without any kind of rabbi, or Services, all year. While in Europe any community of their size would engage a full time shochet, teacher, ba'al tefillah, they do not exert themselves. But come the High Holy Days, the German Jews engage an "erev Rav"("almost rabbi"; from the HUC. The East European Jews secure a ba'al Tefillah who is also a shochet. He manages the "kapparoth shloggen" for them, as well as the kashruth for the Days of Awe, and the Traditional Services.

A Hebrew School, a Hebrew teacher, however, are not there. They satisfy themselves with a weekly spoonful of Judaism, called Sunday School, the rest of the year. This might well be called "the Torah on one foot"!

CHAPTER SEVENTY ONE

The Year 1932.

It was in the year 1932 that I ended my teaching career forever. During the eighteen years when I taught in the Talmud Torah, I naturally instructed hundreds of students. Among them, now, are numerous professionals, businessmen, people expert in many phases of our community life. But not one rabbi grew out of the period. While that is surely no fault of mine, I rather regret this. (Although there is one young man who indicates he might become a rabbi.)

It is almost four years since I took my leave of the Talmud Torah, and only one Hebrew teacher is at his post there. Is this adequate for a community like San Antonio? I doubt it. The president, Mr. Levin, works with energetic zeal, and he gives up much of his time to see to it that the Talmud Torah should improve. Until now, so to say, his efforts are unavailing. There is new hope, however. For the president of Agudas Achim and the Trustees have pledged their help toward the building of a "Jewish Community Center", in conjunction with the Talmud Torah. About fifteen thousand dollars have already been collected for this purpose. With the addition of such recreational facilities, there is very real hope that the Jewish upbringing of our children may prosper and thrive.

When Rabbi Phillips left, another rabbi came to fill his post. He was a student in Rabbi Wise's Institute of Religion, and his name was Rabbi Dubin. Scarcely two years later, he left. This constant change of rabbis was characteristic of both Traditional congregations. Whose fault this was, I do not know. Perhaps it was the synagogues, perhaps the rabbis. In any event, this is the American way of life. It is so with cars, with household objects; why not with rabbis?

Now that both congregations have engaged qualified rabbis both at one time, there is hope that that there will be stability for some years ahead.

Congregation Agudas Achim now has a rabbi ordained by the Hebrew Theological College, of Chicago, a fine, learned, pious and very talented as well as dedicated spiritual leader, Rabbi David Tamarkin. He is an excellent speaker, both in English and in Yiddish. He is much involved in communal concerns and well liked throughout the community.

Congregation Rodfei Sholom now has an outstanding rabbi, who combines numerous talents--shochet, baal tefillah, scholar, preacher--Rabbi Abraham Rabinowitz. Due to his labors, his congregation has made heartwarming progress.

Temple Beth El has a renowned leader, Rabbi Ephraim Frisch, son of pious Orthodox Jews, grandson of a rabbi, son-in-law of the famous Rabbi Cohen of Cabeston. He joins

with the Orthodox rabbis, and with the entire Jewish community, in community endeavor. It is to be hoped that all three rabbis will occupy their posts, in good health and good fortune, for many years.

CHAPTER SEVENTY TWO

We Are What We Are,
But Jews We Are!

The Torah tells us that once all of the people were as one. They thought identical thoughts, did the same things, spoke the same language. After awhile, mischief came into their minds and hearts. And so God separated them, in custom, practice, thought, and language. And he scattered them over the face of the earth. Wherever they settled, each group developed its own customs and ways of life. To this day this separation prevails, among nations, ethnic, and religious groups.

So it was also with our Jewish people, and so it is to this day. We are also divided into different groups, ideologically, religiously, politically. And not one group has the right to insist that any other group should yield up its convictions. Each person is entitled to think as he pleases, as his understanding and his conscience dictate. We dare not stand in the way of any Jew who, with integrity, pursues his own way in life.

This is especially so among us Jews, because no matter our individual and separate doorways, we all enter the same room. We are all concerned with, and dedicated to, the same goal: the strengthening and the preservation of our people and its ideals. As all the roots of a tree may grow outward, in all directions, but are firmly fixed in their one point of origin--the tree itself--, so are we.

All branches of the tree are equally precious. So all branches of the Jewish family tree are equally to be cherished and respected. Only the dead twigs, the thorny bushes, which give neither life nor sustenance, are to be cast off. For they do damage to the tree. And so it is with us. Only the destructive elements may we disdain as harmful. All others, no matter whether we agree or disagree with them, are to be regarded as integral parts of our family, and held dear.

In truth we differ from each other only externally. Internally, we all strive for identical goals--to build the Jewish homeland, and to bring help and sustenance and dignity to our needy brothers, wherever they be.

Therefore, every Jew, to whatever party or ideology he pays homage, so long as he stands as a soldier together with his people for equality; who carries for Jewish rights, and who feels the pain of Jewish hurt; who takes part in the redemption of the Holy Land, should be regarded as one of us in every way. We are all children of one people. We are, each

of us, what our intelligence, our experience, our outlooks and our consciences dictate that we should be, but Jews we are, all of us, always!

We are "compassionate children of compassionate fathers". No nation, no group in the entire world, has as many charitable institutions as we have. We neither receive, nor do we ask to receive, assistance from others. We help ourselves, with whatever resources and means we have. We have always done this, and today we do even more, on a larger scale, because the need is greater.

The Hitler regime, with its callous and bloodthirsty agents, who spread antiSemitic terror wherever they can reach, American Jews in every city and village have established channels through which to come to the aid of their stricken brothers and sisters. Wherever there are Jewish refugees, there are Jewish organizations to help, to assist the victims to be resettled in Palestine, or rehabilitated wherever they can go.

In our own city of San Antonio, numerous agencies have been founded, to help our needy people. Every element of our community is involved, and all are working in unified fashion, for this is a common cause. The women are working even more than the men, with enthusiasm. The Jews in the country towns are also organized to secure help for their co-religionists. Nothing unites our Jewish people as the need of

other Jews. There is no limit to the generosity. No Jew grows weary, in the service to his brothers. And in this all Jews are equal.

Whatever we are, we are. But Jews we are. Tzedakah, charity, we extend. Justice and mercy we cherish.

And an eternal people are we!

* * *

Thus ends the second volume.

By Rev. Alexander Ziskind Gurwitz

Author of TORAH IN RHYME

San Antonio, Texas, the thirtieth day of Tammuz 5695...
1935