CANTOR ISAAC'S YOUNGEST SON

Memoirs and Observations of a young Immigrant about his Home Town and Life in America

by Jacob Hoffman

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By JACOB HOFFMAN

Translation by Irving Heller

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DEDICATED TO THE EVERLASTING MEMORY
OF MY DEAR WIFE AND MOTHER OF OUR
CHILDREN

BELLA

OF BLESSED MEMORY

Part One

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Some Reflections on Modern American-Jewish History

The wonderful older generation of Jewish immigrants to America came here ill-clad and barefoot. But they had tremendous inner strength and with faith and determination developed the mighty entity today called American Jewry. That generation carried within itself a veritable treasurehouse of Jewish history. They had priceless assets: the accumulated experiences of the Jewish masses in their little towns, the acclimatization process they went through in their new home and the lifestyle they established as, brick by brick, they built the gigantic structure of the greatest Jewish community the world had ever seen.

The saga I describe extends from the very beginning of their arrival from the towns and hamlets of Eastern Europe to the change of the guard taking place today, when the immigrants dating from before and immediately after World War I are leaving the stage to make room for the next generation. It is a marvelous chapter in Jewish history, worthy of being inscribed in the annals of our people. It's unfortunate, in my view, that it has been in large measure neglected till now, and I find it hard to understand why that's so. The Jewish masses have a tale to tell later generations — a story of unmatched drama, which, properly set forth, will eternalize them in the pages of our history.

A while back old-timers often used to tell about their first years in America: the "isle of tears" known as Ellis Island, the hard work and low pay, the crowded dwellings and the great difficulty in finding work.

Especially prominent in their memories was the struggle to give their children a fine education and make them "full Americans". Most of those experiences have gone with the wind. Hardly anybody has recorded them for posterity.

That sense of loss has driven me to describe my life-story, a story virtually identical with that of tens and hundreds of thousands of Jews like myself. Since my father, (OBM), had been a cantor, I inherited from him an affinity for the cantor's podium. In that sense, I took upon myself the role of public emissary for the great Jewish community that came to America at the same time I did, went through the same travail and with G-d's help overcame the obstacles they faced.

I don't intend to acclaim anyone, myself included, but just wanted to tell about a young Jewish lad from a small town overseas, his childhood and youthful wanderings, his suffering and sorrow back home, his first steps in the "golden land" after getting off the boat, his meeting with the beautiful girl whom he'd gotten to love in his town and how they struggled to establish their nest, their later tribulations and joy together and the generations they raised.

One of my hopes is that these jottings will serve as bricks and mortar for future historians. Another is that they'll be appreciated as the expression of an earnest and nostalgic young man now grown old, who can't forget his past. Despite the swift passage of too many years, I retain vivid images of events and people that I encountered on the way. The moments of joy and sorrow I experienced are indelible.

With this short introduction I put this book into your hands and thank you from the heart for your ear and your time. Most of all, I appreciate your company on my life's voyage.

Jacob Hoffman

Letter from Rabbi Shmary' Gurary'

To My Dear Friend, Jacob Hoffman —

I have the honor of congratulating you on the publication of your memoirs in book form. The story of your life, wanderings and experiences, both overseas and here in our country, reflects the fate of the generation of Jewish immigrants that laid the foundation for the present great Jewish community in America.

It's especially pleasant for me to greet you as a close personal friend and neighbor and one who has been a most devoted and generous supporter of the Lubavitcher Yeshivahs.

Your love of learning and understanding and appreciation of the importance of Jewish education is the basic characteristic of the spirit that you brought with you from your former homeland and your parents' home. It's the same spirit that you preserved here throughout the years and transplanted to American soil with so much care and devotion.

I offer you my blessings and wishes for continued vigor, so that you can write many more chapters on the creative and productive good works you have performed on behalf of the religious institutions of our people.

Rabbi Shmary' Gurary'
Chairman, Executive Board
Coordinator, Tomchei T'mimim Yeshivahs

Salutation by Rabbi Israel H. Levinthal

Life is full of surprises. The many men and women who, for the past half-century, have been acquainted with the author of this modest volume — Mr. Jacob Hoffman — have known him as a successful businessman and especially as an active communal worker, interested foremost in what he often has termed his "two great loves" — Jewish education, both adult and elementary, and the upbuilding of the Land of Israel. Now, in advanced years, he suddenly appears as a writer, with creditable literary abilities.

These reminiscences of his life originally were published in serial form in the weekly Yiddish paper, *"Der Algemeine Journal."* When the first chapter appeared, all of us who knew him were pleasantly astonished. We marvelled at the fine Yiddish in which it was expressed, the excellent literary style that it revealed, and, above all, the interesting content that it displayed.

To the large number of readers who had lived through the same experiences as the author in the *shtetel* in Eastern European lands and in America during the early years after their arrival in the *goldene medina,* these chapters were revelations of a life which they were happy to recall. They eagerly looked forward to each and every installment which was to appear during the ensuing weeks.

Mr. Hoffman, blessed with a remarkable memory, portrays in detail many interesting phases of Jewish life

which he had encountered and in which he had participated. His description reveals the beauty and idealism of that life despite the poverty and the physical persecution which he, along with many others, frequently had to endure.

One of the most appealing tales narrated is the fascinating love story of Mr. Hoffman and the *sheine* Bella, from the townlet of Rutki, whom he first met by strange chance when they were both very young and to whom he instantly became attached.

The author has a strong feeling that American-Jewish youth should know of that rich idealism which characterized the life of their grandparents and great-grandparents and from which they are so estranged today. That is why he had his Yiddish articles translated into English.

Although Mr. Hoffman does not pretend that this work is a competitor of Irving Howe's *"The World of Our Fathers,"* it is, in a significant way, a contribution to the important field of Jewish literature.

Rabbi Israel H. Levinthal

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Greeting from Rabbi David Haymovitz

Again and again I read the chapters of the life-story of our trustee Jacob Hoffman with great interest and pleasure. His story depicts with feeling and profundity events and incidents that span decades of Jewish history. We ride with him on a journey from Europe to America and then to Israel. His story is a tale of love — the love that Jacob Hoffman bears the Jewish people, Judaism and Israel.

His love of the Jewish people permeates every paragraph he writes. He molds together the rich tradition of our past with today's events in America. It's an unforgettable story of courage and devotion — two pillars that are central to Hoffman's life.

Beginning with the first chapters of his book, we are enveloped by the warmth of the atmosphere of his old village, where he takes us on the journey of his life being set down for our edification. We admire the young lad from Poland who became a big businessman and philanthropist, helping great Torah institutions all over the world.

The great Tanna Rabbi Eliezer says in the Ethics of the Fathers, (Chapter 2, Mishnah 10), that the way for a man to attain a good life is through a "a good eye". He likes people and people like him.

When we read his life-story we feel that the people in Hoffman's life are friendlier and better than those we know, and all those he describes become close and familiar to us. It's a reflection of Hoffman's outlook on

life. He really does look at people with bright colors and it's reflected in his readers; they empathize with his admiration for Judaism and the Jewish people.

I would recommend this book to everyone wishing to relive Jewish cultural and spiritual life in the last half-century, especially young people who haven't themselves lived through and experienced it.

David Haymovitz

A Foreword by Dr. Judah J. Shapiro

Historians rely on documents and artifacts to reconstruct what happened in the past. What we know about the events of the past is due to the records which the historians have at their disposal, so that the writing of history, with all due respect to the professionals, results from the records left behind by those who lived, worked, aspired and considered their condition.

The history of the Jews in the twentieth century, if there is to be a long-term world history, will be of great and dramatic significance in the years to come. This Jewish people with a recorded history of some 2,000 years before the beginning of this century was subjected to shattering changes even before the period of the Holocaust. Then, following the still-difficult-to-accept destruction of six million Jews, the emergence and establishment of the State of Israel, Jewish history was given yet another thrust into new directions.

The preoccupation with the new and revolutionary changes in Jewish affairs has the inherent danger that it pushes the past still further into remoteness. In this 20th century, so much has been burned and destroyed that records and recollections have acquired a new preciousness. This is especially true for places which in a matter of a few decades disappeared from the map of Jewish history.

Mr. Jacob Hoffman, at the time of the publication of his book, led a life that coincided with the whole of the 20th century and it was consistently lived within a

Jewish context. What he has to say is of interest to the contemporary reader, but his writing must also be regarded as historic source material. What is unique about Mr. Hoffman's record is its span. He has known Jewish life in Eastern Europe, the United States and Israel; he has lived within the context of Jewish tradition and secularity; he has absorbed Jewishness through the linguistic sieve of Yiddish, Hebrew, and English.

Mr. Hoffman's present book is a contribution to the understanding of our present situation and even more a contribution to the near-eternal record of the history of the Jewish people.

Greeting by Rabbi William Berkowitz

Jacob Hoffman inhabits two worlds, the real world of the present as a successful businessman, community leader and philanthropist, and also a world that is no more. Although a resident of New York for many years, his being is not to be found there. For whatever Jacob Hoffman does, wherever Jacob Hoffman goes, he is preceded by an invisible entourage of characters and images from a very faroff place, that now live in dreams and words and memories alone. For decades, this inner landscape was a private zone shared perhaps in an occasional speech or story. However, he has now seen fit to provide a brief aperture upon it and to offer to others a glimpse into it. This slim volume of reminiscences is that glimpse.

Born and raised in Ostrove, Poland, Jacob Hoffman has never left it. Within these covers he tells us why. Simply and without adornment or literary pretensions he tells of one town, his town, which can serve as symbol for thousands of other towns and communities that disappeared in the nocturnal flames which scorched Europe one generation ago.

One will not find in these pages philosophic speculation or poetic reflection. All one will find are folk-like memories snatched from the fire. And therein lies the value of these autobiographical vignettes. For they are one man's attempt to salvage vanished people and sparks of a lost civilization from the claws of obscurity. And yet, by the very publication of this work,

the author has already conceded the tragic reality that this era must now dwell at best, only in words and hopefully, in our hearts, lest it be forgotten.

One reads this childlike ode to Ostrove and its environs and is amazed to see how more than half a century later, Jacob Hoffman still remains under its spell. Even more remarkable is our own fascination with this era and its communities. Undoubtedly, it's something more than ethnicity that raises the fundamental question: How does one judge a culture? What is the standard used to evaluate it? For some it's the products its people create; for others it's the people who are its products. The latter definition is the one to which the Jewish mind and spirit attaches itself. Our Tradition would indicate that a people should not be judged by its culture: rather a culture should be judged by its people. If there is no linkage between the book and behavior, between learning and life — then all is worthless. And if we have seen anything from the Holocaust, it is that the most cultured of all nations could behave in the most debased and depraved fashion. Hence what truly counts, in our world-view, are the values which emerge from life and which form the fabric of daily existence.

As one reads this book, many of the institutions and ideas which formed the daily values of the Eastern European Jew are made manifest in snapshot fashion. In his childhood, it was the *cheder* which yielded the greatest, most enduring impact on Jacob Hoffman. The teachers may not have had advanced degrees in education, yet that did not stop them from placing their imprint upon each student. Oftentimes that method could be rough and gruff, perhaps even stinging for a moment — yet it endured for a lifetime. Mr. Hoffman makes evident the surprising truth that despite any negative aspects of the *cheder,* something of that atmosphere and its lasting values forever remained with those who experienced it.

In fact, what emerges from these poignant scenes is that more important than what was taught was what was transmitted — something all Jewish educators and parents can learn from.

As he grew into a young man, Jacob Hoffman earned wealth but as he indicates, he wasn't happy. Striving for meaning in life, he found it by embracing Zionism. It was this idea and movement which seized him, as it seized so many other Eastern European young men and women. What is interesting to note is that despite a lifelong involvement with Israel and Zionism, at no time does Mr. Hoffman view it as a substitute faith for Judaism. He realizes that Zionism emerges from Judaism and that at the center of the People's camp must stand the Ark of the Covenant. Hence, he has remained thoroughly devoted to the Synagogue, both as institution and idea, throughout his lifetime. As he relates in one passage, "I took it for granted that when the Histadrut builds a housing development they would install a fine dining room but I'm not sure they would have extended the necessary tens of thousands of dollars for a synagogue." At a time when the continued viability of many synagogues hangs in the balance, and when the Synagogue must struggle to gain the allegiance of so many Jews, Jacob Hoffman illustrates in his own life that the State is not a substitute for the Synagogue — nor should it be.

Indeed, it is Jacob Hoffman and his relationship to Israel that proves to be one of the most moving and tender aspects of these recollections. For the question remains: how do Jacob Hoffman and his silent entourage of so long ago respond to the State of Israel? How does he, how do they, relate to a dream during the waking hours?

One listens to a Shabbat talk given in a Tel Aviv suburb about Ostrove and you can feel and hear Jacob

Hoffman's unease and doubt when he says: "I'm not entirely certain even today whether the sabras to whom I spoke that Saturday morning comprehended what I had to say." While Mr. Hoffman knows there is a link between the shtetl and the sabra, what that link is remains uncertain and strained. Ultimately, this remains the tragedy for Hoffman and for so many others: that what they knew, what they saw, what they heard, what they felt, will never be known or seen or heard or felt by others — especially those most close to them. History and the executioner erected a cruel Wall, a gaping chasm, that will forever divide them from their nostalgia and cause tragic pain. And yet, despite it all, we read that Jacob Hoffman prays in Jerusalem that his children and their children will never forget Ostrove, even if they will never know it.

Perhaps you too will read this book and hope that his prayer will be their prayer, even as it may be ours.

Rabbi William Berkowitz
September 1978

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Cantor Isaac's Youngest Son

For twenty five consecutive weeks the readers of the Algemeiner Journal followed Jacob Hoffman's experiences with interest and suspense. His memoirs were printed weekly, from Friday, the eve of Rosh Hashanah, September 24, 1976, till Friday, March 11, 1977.

Reader reaction was so positive that many wrote and phoned, requesting that the series be continued.

Those of us in the editorship who worked along with Mr. Hoffman in preparing the articles enjoyed themselves thoroughly. Even more pleasurable was the opportunity to become acquainted with the author and savor what is perhaps his most unique characteristic — a Jewish small-town folksiness in combination with big-city scope.

As professionals we appreciated the high quality of the literary treasure he was bequeathing future generations. Beyond that, we cherished the treasurehouse of the Jewish spirit, heart and soul embodied in it. So for us it's a special pleasure to congratulate Mr. Hoffman on the publication of his experiences in book form in Yiddish and English. More importantly, his work will give future generations an idea of the heroic stuff the mass of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe was made of.

Along with our congratulations, dear Mr. Hoffman, we wish you undiminished strength to carry on with your important work.

Nissan Gordon

Cantor Isaac's Youngest Son

The life story of a once-poor Jewish immigrant boy from Ostrove who is today a prominent businessman and philanthropist in America

Jacob Hoffman

portrayed in his own words in a graceful and folksy style, rich with interesting and dramatic reminiscences from the Old Country and fifty five years in the American melting pot. Included are all the hardships he experienced as a greenhorn as well as later business and real estate successes, and encounters with important personalities here and in Israel, which he visits twice a year.

Now being Published in the

"Algemeiner Journal"

A Message from Rebbetzin Jungreis

"Ask thy father and he shall tell thee, thy grandfather and he shall relate it to thee."
(Deuteronomy, 32)

Throughout the millenia of Jewish history, these immortal words kept our nation alive. In sanctity and prayer, each father would assume the awesome challenge of teaching G-d's Word to his child. And when young people questioned the meaning and purpose of their lives, it was to their fathers and grandfathers that they turned for guidance, wisdom, and counsel.

Yes, our sons and daughters were equipped to walk the road of life in strength and dignity because they were ever aware that their fathers were there to show them the way.

But ours is a generation that flounders in darkness, for the voices of the fathers and grandfathers are no longer available.

Ours is a generation that has been given every material advantage, but it has been denied its spiritual heritage: the fathers and grandfathers are absentees, and our youth has been denied its legacy.

And so, this is a generation that is searching for fathers and grandfathers who can tell a tale, who can relate the past, who can reveal that timeless heritage.

Jacob Hoffman belongs to that generation that could spin a tale, that has memories to transmit, that

can bestow the legacy of a time that was and is no more. His writings are a testimony to a rich Jewish past that was snuffed out in the flames of Auschwitz. His stories of real and genuine people epitomize the quintessence of the shtetl, and will certainly be welcomed by all of our people who have embarked upon a voyage of discovery of their roots.

Our Hineni organization congratulates Mr. Jacob Hoffman on his outstanding achievements on behalf of Yiddishkeit, synagogues, yeshivas, and all endeavors of Jewish concern.

May the Almighty grant him long years of good health so that he may continue his noble work on behalf of the Jewish people.

Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis
President

Part Two

CANTOR ISAAC'S YOUNGEST SON

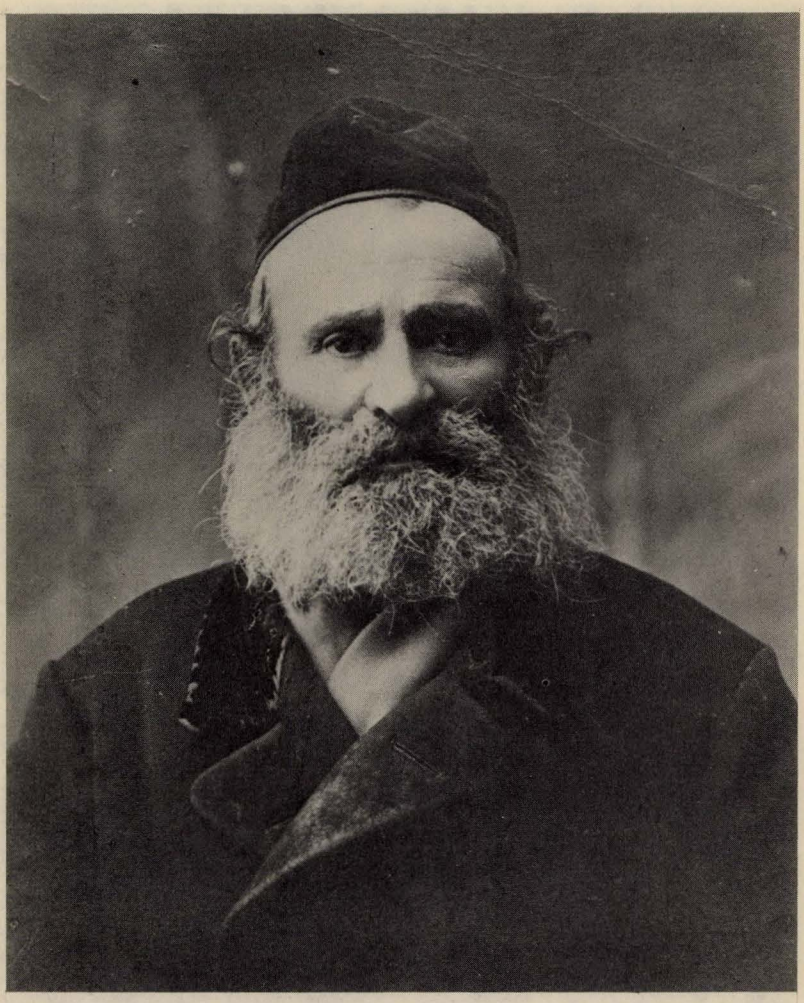
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Jacob Hoffman as a Young Man



Reb Yitzchak Hoffman OBM
known in Ostrove as Cantor Isaac, father of Jacob Hoffman

1

Cantor Isaac's Youngest Son

I first saw the light of day in a warm, comfortable Jewish house on Poltosker Street in Ostrove, where three brothers and three sisters joyfully greeted their newly-born sibling. As for my parents, they were both happy and grateful to the Creator of All for the safe conclusion of the seventh confinement in our family.

Seventy-six years have swiftly flown by since that day in Ostrove, a city of about ten thousand Jewish souls, fifty some odd miles from Warsaw and about twenty from Lomzhe, the capital city where Jewish young men had to report for military duty. Some people call my birthplace Ostrov-Mazavietsk, in order to distinguish it from another city with a similiar-sounding name. But it really makes no practical difference what it was called, be it Ostrove or Ostrov-Mazavietsk; there no longer remains such a city on the Jewish map. It was totally destroyed by the bloody Hitler hordes, as were its institutions of learning and Jewish homes. It can be said without exaggeration that Ostrove's Jewish houses were as holy as its schools, because in every one of them Jewish children were steeped in the Torah. Ostrove's parents brought up generations who followed the traditions practiced by their forefathers from time immemorial.

Fifty years have passed since they arrested me for

not reporting to the Polish military and took me under police escort from Rutke to Ostrove to bid farewell to my parents before bringing me to the army. At that time, the Polish policeman who was guarding me — "the criminal" — roughly pushed my mother aside when she embraced me with great tenderness and sobbed: "My child . . . my youngest child."

Every one of us treasures certain images and experiences that never fade. They are stored up, ever fresh in your memory and at the slightest stimulus begin to flow and well up like ocean waves. You let yourself be carried away far into the past and get violently tossed up and down as though the events were taking place right before your eyes. Here you are, back in Ostrove and all the surrounding towns like Tshizheve, Ostrolenke, Poltosk, Zembrove, Komorove, Brok, Rutke, Malkin and . . . Tremblinke, a name that has entered the pages of recent history as a symbol of stark terror and the mindless destruction of innocent human beings.

The earliest and most vivid of my recollections are those of my beloved mother Gittel, (OBM), and my dear father, (OBM), whom everyone in town called endearingly Cantor Isaac.

He made his living as a butcher, but his great talent was really that of being an excellent cantor. He used to officiate so beautifully and with such deep feeling in the synagogue and sang with such splendor at Jewish festive occasions and in his own home on Saturdays and holy days! A spark of my father's great talent as a cantor remained with me, to the point where cognoscenti of synagogue music say that American lost a lot artistically when I became a business man instead of a cantor.

My mother was quite tall and slender and blessed with a personality of pure, shimmering gold. She raised seven children and so had a large family to serve and take care of. At the same time, she helped my father in

the butcher shop, a job that demanded a great deal of hard work. If that weren't enough, she would accompany him to the abbatoir, if need be, and on the way whisper a silent prayer that the ritual slaughterer would do a proper job so that the animal he worked on could be used as kosher meat.

On Saturday my mother was privileged to sit on the first bench in the women's section of the synagogue and the beautiful, three-cornered shawl on her head could easily be distinguished from that of all the other women. As a child, I loved to glance in her direction and my young heart would swell with great joy because G-d had blessed me with such a marvelous mother.

My pride was even more intense when father officiated as the cantor and I saw my mother's face light up with dazzling radiance. She absolutely gloried in her husband's cantorial skill and the way the people in the main part of the synagogue below winked to each other in knowing appreciation of Cantor Isaac's voice and artistic style. Mother's cup of joy ran over when she saw her youngest son standing by the cantor and assisting him as though he were a one-man choir.

But her happiness was not unalloyed, as later events were to prove. Was it maternal intuition that intimated to her that her children would scatter all over the world and that her older daughter Anna, together with her husband Zelig and five of their children would die violently in Zembrove, for the sanctification of G-d's name. Only one of Anna's sons survived the war and emigrated to Israel from Russia. Another of her sons was just about to succeed in getting to America, thanks to the very strenuous efforts we made here to secure a visa for him. But through a tragic happenstance the war broke out in 1939, the very next day after he had received his visa from the American consul in Warsaw and he was engulfed in the flames of the conflict.

Perhaps too my mother's heart told her that the first victim of the Nazis to fall in Ostrove would be one of her grandchildren, my brother Yusske's son, may G-d avenge his innocent soul!

Mother toiled ceaselessly all week to help father with the responsibility of making a living for the household. Disregarding personal comfort, she would herself deliver the meat to the rich wives in the town. And if a customer wasn't completely satisfied with what was brought, mother wasn't too lazy to go back to the butcher shop and bring the complainant other meat.

Since I was the youngest, I used to trail after her and, I must confess, made her life utterly miserable. As any youngster would, I screamed at the top of my voice: "Ma, food . . . I want to eat!"

I mentioned earlier that my mother helped father in his work. She was, of course, motivated by her good nature but another reason was that father was not too well disposed to being a butcher. Many a time when he didn't feel right and mother went to the abattoir in his stead, I accompanied her and did the work that my father normally did. I remember that one time I was dragging eight sheep tied together on a long leash and my mother kept encouraging me by saying: "Soon, soon, Yankele, soon we'll be at the slaughterhouse. Just a little ways more."

When I look back at the days of my youth in Ostrove, the first thing that strikes me is a picture of my concerned, warmhearted mother who cried her eyes out praying for her children's good fortune. But I remember too that this same woman could be hard and very strict, perhaps even more so than my father.

Father too could be rather severe but only when he was chanting the prayers on Saturdays and holy days. If someone, G-d forbid, uttered a single word during the course of the prayers, father quickly spun around and

with one withering glance silenced the disturbance. If that didn't help, (a rare occurrence indeed!), he would stop and refuse to go on with the service. When he stood on the cantor's podium and poured forth his heart to our Creator, the synagogue had to be absolutely still.

Mother's strictness was of another kind and she demonstrated that she could apply it in connection with her own child, when that child did something wrong. A case in point is what happened to my brother Yusske. My parents opened a butcher shop for him in the same area where about twenty other butcher stores were located. About half of the butchers in Ostrove were from our family, so it really didn't matter if one more joined the ranks. It's worth noting that one of the group of butchers was my father's brother Ephraim, a member of the Gerer sect of chassidim in town.

Once it happened that a customer who shopped at my father's store every week bought some meat from Yusske. I'd like to give my brother the benefit of the doubt and say that he didn't deliberately try to steal a patron from his father. But my mother wasn't restrained by such amenities; she rushed over to Yusske's and handed him a smack that resounded throughout the whole market.

It's obvious that the world was much different then. A mother could slap a married son and he would bite his lips in repressed rage but suffer in silence.

Father, however, was more cantor than butcher.

He was a handsome individual, with a beard that grew more in the width than in the length. He had a smooth, resplendent tenor and his artful vocal renditions made him welcome at all joyous occasions in town.

Even though he might have preferred another line of work, father was nevertheless an expert butcher. In particular, he knew a great deal about lung adhesions, a possible reason for rejecting an animal as being non-

kosher. When there was doubt about an animal's kashruth, father had no hesitation whatsoever in telling the rabbi that a particular adhesion was too far gone or that it wasn't so serious that the animal couldn't be salvaged.

With the long breath that served him so fulsomely when he took a high note in the course of the synagogue service, he was able to inflate an animal's lung (a technique for detecting imperfections), while in the slaughterhouse, at the same time that the rabbi poked about with his finger, debating with himself whether to pronounce the animal kosher or not.

In Ostrove, every butcher trembled in dread while the rabbi made a meticulous inspection of an animal's lungs. If, G-d forbid, he adjudged an animal non-kosher, you were without a livelihood for a whole week because you would have to sell the non-kosher meat for one third the price to the Christians who came to the market on Thursdays. Failing that, you might sell it to the Russian military camps in Kamorove, where the butchers quite frequently engaged in furious struggles with the drunken soldiers who brutally attacked them.

The kind of butcher my father was and the type of butchers that once served the Jewish people is best illustrated by the fact that he returned to Ostrove after having lived in America for a while. What happened?

"It's a country where kashruth is not properly observed," he wrote my mother in one of his letters. He had worked here for a butcher, a kosher butcher, it goes without saying, but what he saw in the America of those times displeased him greatly.

"And how can I bring children to a land where Jewish traditions are totally disregarded?" he wrote mother on another occasion.

My mother, so personable and understanding, replied that she wouldn't attempt to advise him from

such a distance and that it was obviously up to him to decide what to do, since he was on the spot.

So the day arrived when father came back to Ostrove and re-assumed the position of Cantor Isaac. He told us stories that could be compared to the Thousand and One Nights for rapturous interest. Among them was one that caused him deep anguish and no doubt constituted an important reason for his flight from America. It shook him to the very depths of his being and in a manner of speaking was the straw that broke the camel's back.

He was visiting with a fellow townsman whose wife was frying whole udders together with other kinds of meat. Father knew this friend especially well from the old country, which is why he said nothing. But in Ostrove he wouldn't have stood for such goings-on. A lot of laws govern the Jewish way of preparing udders for consumption in order to avoid the injunction against eating meat and dairy foods together. And here he saw how a Jewish home in America had become non-kosher. How could he remain in such a land? Moreover, how could he bring children here in the face of what he had witnessed?

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The Tarbut School in Ostrove. *Students from the Tarbut School in Ostrove march in the town in honor of the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1925. The inscription on the picture reads: "Celebration of the Opening of the University in Jerusalem, Ostrove, 7th of Nissan."*



Women's Chapter, Ostrove-Mazavietzk, 1932. *In commemoration of our Deborah Kahn's departure for Palestine." In Ostrove there was also an Organization of Religious Women of the Hapoel Hamizrachi called 'Bruriah'.*



Organization of Brith Trumpeldor in Ostrove-Mazavietzk on an outing in Brok on the 27th day of Tammuz, 1928. *The pictures of the town are from the Ostrove Book of Remembrance which appeared in Israel in 1960.*

2

Life With Father After His Stay In America

My father was by far not the only Jew who returned to his home town from the prodigiously rich United States where, by popular account, the streets were paved with gold. In Ostrove alone there were a recognizable number of such Jews who either couldn't or wouldn't adjust themselves even marginally to the American life-style of that time. In addition to their own personal adjustment trauma, they faced the difficulty of bringing up children to recognize Jewish values and follow Jewish tradition.

As a child of six, when father came back from America in 1906, I obviously didn't understand what was happening in our house. I remember as through a haze how neighbors and other good friends gathered at our place on Poltosker Street to greet father and see what the "returned American" looked like.

You can imagine how overjoyed I was as a youngster that my father had come home. What a wonderful feeling it was to again have him hold me on his lap and sing to me and with me so many beautiful melodies.

As the youngest child in the house I naturally missed my father more than did my older brothers and sisters. They certainly understood more clearly what America was like at that time and what would have befallen us had father remained in New York and brought all of us over there.

I was extremely happy that our house was once more whole and felt secure with both my parents around me. As a matter of fact, I was so pleased that it no longer bothered me that my Hebrew school teacher began to come around to our house again to listen to me recite and show my father what his youngest son had accomplished and absorbed during the past week. More than that, it didn't upset me when father looked at me crossly when I didn't explain Rashi's commentary to his full satisfaction. What did matter was that father was home again.

Father was beyond doubt very satisfied to be back in Ostrove, after a year of wandering in a strange environment and, as he told us time and again at home, observing how Jews in "Columbus' Country" had become contaminated in terms of religious observance and the maintenance of their own cultural values. He was happy to be back in his butcher shop and even more, to be able to return to his cantorial function in the old synagogue. He would let his sonorous tenor range into melodious flights of fancy. However far removed in time, I can still hear the golden tones of his voice ringing in my ears and feel them coursing through every fiber of my being.

When I grew up and was about ten or eleven years old, there was nothing comparable to the delight I experienced when father took me to join the company of the Rabbi from Omshinov, who came fairly frequently to visit with his chassidic followers in Ostrove. On such occasions the prayers would last till four in the afternoon.

There were a great number of Omshinov chassidim in Ostrove. In my time, the Rabbi's oldest son and later on Reb Yussele, the Omshinov Rabbi's successor served as rabbis in Ostrove. When Rabbi Menachem, the Omshinov Rabbi's father came to spend a Sabbath in our town, it was just like a holiday, so great was the

jubilation. How overjoyed I was when I finally had the privilege of greeting the rabbi and he took my hand in his.

In Ostrove they used to tell marvelous stories about the Omshinov Rabbi, Reb Menachem, particularly about his love for Jews and the strenuous efforts he made when it came to doing a Jew a favor. They say about him that at a rabbinical assembly in Warsaw in 1912, he made bold to respond to a point made in a discussion led by the talmudic genius from Rogatchov. Reb Menachem said that anyone who has the strength to prevent a blow from being inflicted on a Jew is a great man, one before whom we should rise in homage. (According to the Talmud in Tractate Makkoth, Page twenty-two, where there is a discussion on how our sages reduced the forty strokes usually associated with punishment to thirty nine.)

The reason for the service ending so late at the Omshinov Rabbi's minyan was not that the prayers themselves were so interminable but because the preparation before the rabbi actually came out to pray dragged on for hours. When I was older, I heard that the rabbi was once asked why he needed six hours of preparation and then prayed only one hour. Wouldn't it be better if the preparation lasted only one hour and the prayers six? The rabbi answered cleverly: "If we pray only one hour after six hours of preparation, what would the consequences be if the preparation took only one hour?"

After Reb Yussele, Rabbi Meir Dan Plotzki occupied the rabbinic post in Ostrove. Rabbi Meir was quite famous in his day as a leader of the Polish rabbinate and author of the works: "Precious Vessels" and "The Charm of Israel."

Beside the Omshinov sect of chassidim, there were a considerable number of the Ger sect as well but I really

can't recall whether the Ger Rabbi ever came to visit his adherents in Ostrove. Especially well known among the Ger group was a chassid called Ben Zion, about whom the former Ger Rabbi, Reb Avrohom Mordechai is reported to have said that he observed the commandment: "Acquire a friend for yourself", when he made the acquaintance of Reb Ben Zion from Ostrove.

Even though he was advanced in years, Ben Zion would still travel to Kotzk and the discussions conducted by the great Talmudist known as HaReem and those of his colleague called "Sfas Emes" (Speaker of Truth). When Ben Zion passed away in Warsaw in 1926, there was a legal battle between the Jewish communities in Warsaw and Ostrove as to where he should be interred. Warsaw won out but there was a partial compromise in that they had to bring from Ostrove the table in the Ger synagogue at which he had studied, so that it could be fashioned into a coffin for him.

So it's really not extraordinary that my father, a Jew from Ostrove, couldn't adjust to the America of 1905, where the streets were, in a manner of speaking, paved with gold. But what was their true worth, if they were ritually unclean and devoid of Jewish values.

Beside my father, my oldest brother Yusske, who had gone to America before World War I, came back to our town. Later on, in the 1920's, he went to visit a daughter in the States and afterward others of his children who had emigrated to Argentina, where he passed away.

Asher Zelig, the husband of my oldest sister, Anna, was also one of those who had been in America before World War I and returned to Europe. He lived in Zembrove and went back to his horse and wagon, driving passengers for hire between Malkin, Zembrove and Lomzhe.

Not all who returned did so for the same reason that

caused my father to come back to Ostrove. Apparently, not everyone was exercised over the irreligiosity that was rife in America but there were other motives. Some had difficulty finding employment fitting their training and education. Some just became physically ill from the exploitation and near-slavery they suffered night and day in the sweatshops. Others very simply returned for family reasons, being unwilling to completely sever themselves from brothers and sisters and other members of the family who had remained behind. For example, my father had three brothers and two sisters in Ostrove. Also, almost half the butchers in town were from our family. That was possibly an element in his decision to leave America, in addition to his inability to acclimatize himself to the religious permissiveness and divestiture of Jewish values that obtained there.

I've spent countless sleepless nights since the holocaust of the Second World War, simply thinking and wondering to myself: "Why did father come back?" After all, those of our family who were fated to remain among the living eventually left Ostrove anyway and those who remained were unfortunately destroyed by the murderers of our people. No matter how I try to convince myself that man is too insignificant a creature to find an answer to everything, that same horrible thought comes to mind and pursues me remorselessly. Why, why couldn't all seven children, four brothers and three sisters, have come to America to join our father?

Those of us who remained alive went away from Ostrove while we were young, leaving our parents with a prayer on their lips and tears in their eyes.

As I mentioned earlier, Yusske, the older brother, left for America a second time in the 1920's and later went to Argentina to join his daughters. Leizer Ber, the second brother, escaped from Zembrove where he was a leather-worker. That was thanks to the efforts of Moshe

Aaron, a younger brother, who brought him to Bogota, Colombia. Later on I helped get him to America. Five sons that he had with his first wife died in the Holocaust. He too is no longer living. The third brother, Moshe Aaron, who was the handsome one in the family, went to Israel in 1926 with his wife, son and daughter. Two years later they arrived in Bogota, where he opened a pocketbook factory and became a Croesus.

That same brother, Moshe Aaron, served in the Russian army and put on theatrical performances for the Russian soldiers. After his discharge, he ran a leather factory in Bialystok for a little while and later in Warsaw, where he trod the boards as an amateur in the Yiddish theater. He earned his livelihood from supplying leather goods to the Russian officers. When the Poles ascended to power in Warsaw, the officers gave their orders to a Polish man. However, he was unskilled and inept and clandestinely arranged to get the merchandise from my brother.

He was one of the first Jews to arrive in Bogota and a builder of the first synagogue in town. When I was at the unveiling of his stone in Bogota two years ago, there were already four synagogues in existence.

My brother in Bogota was blessed with two talented children, a son Yosef, (Jose), who is now a doctor of medicine practicing in Bogota and a daughter, Gittel, named after my mother, (OBM). She is a pharmacist and at age nineteen my brother sent her to America to find a suitable mate. She was successful in her quest, thank G-d. The doctor too sent his children, three daughters and a son to America for the same purpose. We are grateful to G-d that all found fine Jewish life-partners.

None of my three sisters is still alive. Anna, the eldest, was killed, together with her husband and children — five sons and a daughter — when Zembrov



Leizer Ber Hoffman and His First Wife

An older brother of the author, who was a leather worker in Zembrove. Emigrated to Colombia and later to America.



Moshe Aaron Hoffman

An older brother of the author, in the uniform of a Russian soldier. He emigrated to Bogota, Colombia, where he died.

was destroyed. Rachel Dina, the second sister, came to America to join her husband Henich Spivak and raised three lovely Jewish daughters. The third sister, Judith, came to her husband Meir Rosenthal, with whom I traveled on the same ship from Danzig to New York in 1921. She died about a year ago and left a daughter and three sons. It's interesting that the daughter, Gittel, is active in the "Hinneni" movement led by Rebbetzin Jungreis. Gittel's daughter, Mrs. Trudy Spector is among the top leadership of the orthodox movement, whose purpose it is to inculcate Judaism among alienated Jewish youth.

And what was the fate of my parents in Ostrove after the children went their separate ways?

My father, Cantor Isaac, was beaten so brutally by a savage band of "Hallerites", (followers of a fiercely anti-Semitic Polish general named Haller), that he became ill and died in 1930, two years after mother went to her eternal rest.

On a previous occasion the Hallerites grabbed father and tore out half his beard. (That incident occurred before I left Ostrove in 1921). After that, they became bolder in their anti-Semitic assaults. He never recovered from the second attack.

Now you see why I have gone through endless sleepless nights — especially now in my old age, when I think of the years swiftly flown by and the tragic misfortune that befell our brothers and sisters in Europe.

Again, the old question. Why, why did my father come back from America?

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Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman, (second and third from the left), with some members of their family

From left to right: Rachel Dinah Spivak, a sister; Yusske Hoffman, the oldest of the four Hoffman brothers; Chaim and Fannie Cooper, brother and sister-in-law of Mrs. Beile Hoffman; Louis and Zelda Davidson, sister and brother-in-law of Mrs. Hoffman; Jacob and Beile Hoffman and Judith Rosenthal, Jacob Hoffman's youngest sister.

3

My School Years in Ostrove

During my lifetime I've heard and read a lot of adverse criticism about the one-room school of times past and the old-time teacher brandishing the cat-o'-nine-tails as a means of enforcing discipline. However, I'd like to beg the indulgence of all those distinguished deprecators and make bold to rise in praise of the two teachers with whom I had the privilege of studying in Ostrove. Perhaps they didn't have degrees in pedagogy but they exercised a greater and more beneficent influence over their pupils than present-day professors have on university students.

Next to the direction given me by my parents, I owe the greatest debt to my two teachers, whose ministrations enabled me to withstand so many trying experiences and live to see children and grandchildren appreciative of Jewish values and maintaining our traditions.

It's no exaggeration to say that the school teacher had the child under his influence for longer periods of time than the parents, since classes started at eight o'clock in the morning and didn't end until eight at night. It's no wonder, therefore, that many pedagogues, mine included, at times had to endure the most mischievous kind of deviltries on the part of the students. Children have to let off steam, so when else did they

have the opportunity to play their pranks except during the twelve-hour period they spent in school?

We had no two or three month summer vacation from school. School was open continuously, whether it was summer or winter. And I really can't bring myself to be envious, (G-d forbid!), of American school children who ride home in heated buses after their day is finished. In my own case, I recall trudging along in the hardened snow that gave off a crunchy sound underfoot, on a road lighted only by a hand-held lantern that quite frequently was extinguished by even a moderate gust of wind. Such sweet remembrance of things past radiates sufficient warmth and light to illuminate one's latter years. Many times when I drive along in my new car, its headlights projecting powerful beams of light in front of me, I become nostalgic for that little lantern of my school days that shed barely enough light to enable you to see where to take your next step. That small lantern is now embedded in my consciousness and has become an ineffable part of the whole small-town panorama whose image has not faded from my memory despite the swift passage of many turbulent years.

Sometimes when I tell my grandchildren how we students used to make our way home from school late in the evening, a prayer book, Bible and notebook in one hand and a lantern in the other, they look at me as though I were depicting a scene from Disneyland for them. No matter how frequent or lengthy your explanation, is there any way they can understand that the one-room school house forged generations immutable as iron in their loyalty to Judaism and that the lanterns carried on the way gave them direction in their wanderings over oceans and deserts?

My first teacher, who taught me to read Hebrew and the beginnings of Bible study, was perfectly justified when he administered the famous proportion of

"one blow to the upper portion of the anatomy and seven below", after I and some other mischievous kids brought terror to the rebbetzin's heart when we entered the vestibule. A tub of water for drinking purposes stood in that vestibule, from which a door opened to the stable where the teacher's "farm" was located, said farm consisting of a single goat that supplied the household with milk all week long.

And while he was giving me a going-over with the cat-o'-nine-tails for my first offense, he took the opportunity to punish me because of my childish mania for trapping birds and doves in a cage. "G-d loves all His creatures, and you're committing a heinous sin in catching innocent birds and holding them captive like soldiers who have been taken prisoner," he admonished me as he laid it on.

What the teacher said didn't go to waste entirely. We kept on catching birds and doves after that incident as well but instead of keeping them in the cage, we fed them, gave them some water and let them loose.

The second teacher, with whom I advanced to the study of the Bible with Rashi's commentary, was even stricter than the first. He loved to take a nip of whiskey, followed by a bit of cheese, while we were in the middle of our lessons. When his temper flared and he began chewing out a student, bits of cheese would shower from his mouth. On such a day we youngsters would say that the rebbe had made all of us "dairy" in the ritual sense. He used to come to our house on Poltosker Street every Saturday afternoon to listen to me recite while father looked on. My pleasure on certain of those Sabbaths wasn't anything to write home about, particularly when father looked at me angrily because of some error and the teacher added a little pinch for good measure. "But you just learned that commentary by Rashi! How could you forget it so soon?" the teacher would mutter as he

gave my shoulder a nip that clearly showed his annoyance. He was greatly mortified that Cantor Isaac had to witness how little his youngest child had accomplished in school.

Today I can reveal the truth. I really had no interest in scholarly pursuits. The birds and doves had a greater attraction for me than school. Besides, on Ostrove Street there was a combination bakery and confectionery store where the baker had learned his trade in Warsaw. He made "pirozhenes", (fruit-filled pastries), that were absolutely rapturous and definitely surpassed my teacher's cheese fragments in taste. He never lost the name "Warsaw Baker" because of his origins. In Ostrove he married a cousin of mine, Aunt Beile's daughter. Two of their children escaped the Holocaust and came to America after the war.

Another sinister influence that made it difficult for me to keep from being restive in school was the extensive forest that stretched over a distance of about six miles between Ostrove and Zembrove. In that forest there were large quantities of blackberries and even though stories were bruited about concerning Polish bandits who attacked people in the forest and robbed and beat them, many youngsters took off for the woods and partook ecstatically of the juicy berries whose color blackened their tongues and thus betrayed them to their teacher.

Incidentally, in World War I the Germans laid down some track from the forest to the railroad station not far from Ostrove and carried off about half the trees to Germany for lumber.

The pranksters in school didn't really have to go far afield for snacks. Not far from the school, actually just a few houses away, there was a garden belonging to an elderly woman. A bunch of kids and I used to break into

the garden and pick a few fresh cucumbers that had a divine taste.

"You little bandits, out!" the woman would shout the moment she heard our youthful steps. We scooted out of the garden as though someone were shooting at us but the next day would see us there once again. We would pick a few more cucumbers, from which we made a little snack. (Of course, not before saying the proper blessing for vegetables!).

Later on in life I strongly regretted having caused that lady such distress and from time to time I used to bemuse myself by thinking that if the garden in Ostrove were still in existence, I would make every effort to go back there and make good the damage I had done.

But if one is fated to retrace the steps of his childhood, even a holocaust can't prevent it.

During the frequent visits I have made to Israel, (about twice a year for fifteen years), I always make it a point to meet with fellow-townsmen from Ostrove and exchange reminiscences about the world that disappeared. At one such encounter that took place a few years ago, I engaged in conversation with a woman from Ostove whose name is Freide. She told me that her mother had had a garden near the synagogue where the youngsters from school used to sneak in and quickly make off with a few cucumbers. She merely tossed it off as a reminiscence of the past, saying that her mother would eat her heart out after every one of our forays in the garden. Freide continued: "Those youngsters were small but indefatigable and certainly had an insatiable appetite for freshly-ripened cucumbers."

She spoke longingly of her experiences, her mother, the garden and the students and my face got redder and redder with utter embarrassment. One thing led to another and suddenly she asked me whether I wasn't Cantor Isaac's youngest son, who together with his gang



Freida and her Husband, the daughter and son-in-law of the lady who owned the garden in Ostrove, *(third and second in the topmost row), with their children, photographed with Gladys Silber, Mr.Hoffman's daughter, (seated, center), and her son Larry, (seated first right).*

carried on so and wouldn't leave her mother's garden alone.

It goes without saying that I immediately confessed and declared myself guilty of the "crime" and from that moment on there developed an extraordinarily close friendship between our two families, as though we were blood relatives. Every time I travel to Israel I visit them. It's interesting that my children have become very close with Freide's and my grandchildren with hers. In the course of time, Freide's daughter and son-in-law, Mira by name, have grown so close to my children that they correspond frequently and visit each other, as do their respective children.

Mira is a high-ranking officer in the Israeli Navy. Last year he took me to a whole series of Independence Day celebrations and showed me "a few things" about Israel's defense forces that filled my heart and spirit with great pride.

I went with him to Dizengoff Square and afterwards to Kings of Israel Square, where they danced and sang till the gray of dawn. It's strange that all the time I was in his company I imagined hearing his wife's grandmother, (may she rest peacefully in Paradise), screaming at me: "Out, villains!" I like to think that in her heavenly abode she knows that our families have become reconciled and are today the very best of friends.

But let's go back to the school in Ostrove. The teachers didn't experience too much difficulty with me because I gave up my studies shortly after becoming bar-mitzvah and began trading with the Russian soldiers who were stationed in Komorove. Apparently my father came to the realization that he wouldn't succeed in moulding me into a rabbi, so he let me follow the path I set out on. I promised myself that no matter where I wound up I would carry proudly and fully live up

to the appellation they had given me in town: Cantor Isaac's Youngest Son.

You're no doubt wondering what kind of bar-mitzvah celebration my parents arranged for the child of their old age? They called me up to the Torah in the old synagogue and I chanted the blessings and the haftorah like a veteran but there was no banquet prepared for me. I don't even recall whether father brought the customary honey cake and whiskey to services. There was already the smell of gunpowder in the air and the First World War was at our doorstep.

Perhaps that's why the Almighty compensated me and granted me the privilege of celebrating the bar-mitzvah of one of my grandsons not once, but three times in the summer of 1972, when I and my departed wife, (OBM), were in Israel with the family. The celebration was in honor of our daughter's son Ari Yitzchak, (Larry), Silver.

One party took place in the Brooklyn Jewish Center on Eastern Parkway, where I'm a member of long standing.

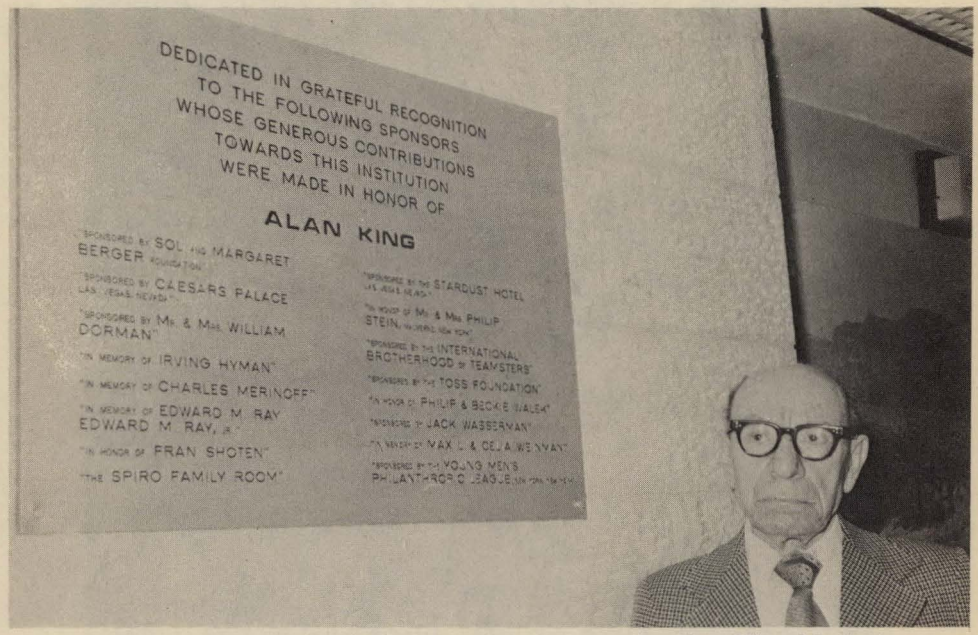
We had another occasion for joy at the Western Wall. Four years have passed since that time and yet I can still see so vividly the bar-mitzvah boy reciting the blessings heard by the venerable stones of the Wall. I like to imagine that the stones transmitted a message to my parents in heaven from their great grandson, who came to put on phylacteries in the holy city of Jerusalem.

We arranged a third function for relatives, fellow-townspeople and other friends when we attended services in the Zichron Kedoshim, (Memorial to the Martyrs), Synagogue which my wife and I helped establish in Maoz Aviv, a suburb of Tel Aviv inhabited by Haganah officer veterans. The bar mitzvah was celebrated on Shabbat Nachamu, (the Sabbath of Consolation), on

the twenty-second of July, two days after the recitation of Eichah, (the Book of Lamentations) and Kinnot, (elegiac poems), at the Western Wall.

The synagogue is called Martyrs' Memorial in reverential remembrance of the six million Jews who perished, (May G-d avenge them!), in the Second World War.

On that Saturday, when we reached the prayer called the Great Kedushah, (the third blessing in the Silent Devotion, which includes the first paragraphs of the Shema), I told the assembled guests about my hometown Ostrove, my parents and my brothers and sisters and how modest and unpretentious my own bar-mitzvah was. I believe that the highlight of my address was a greeting from my former schools and teachers who implanted in their students such an extraordinary love for Jewishness, Jews and Zion.

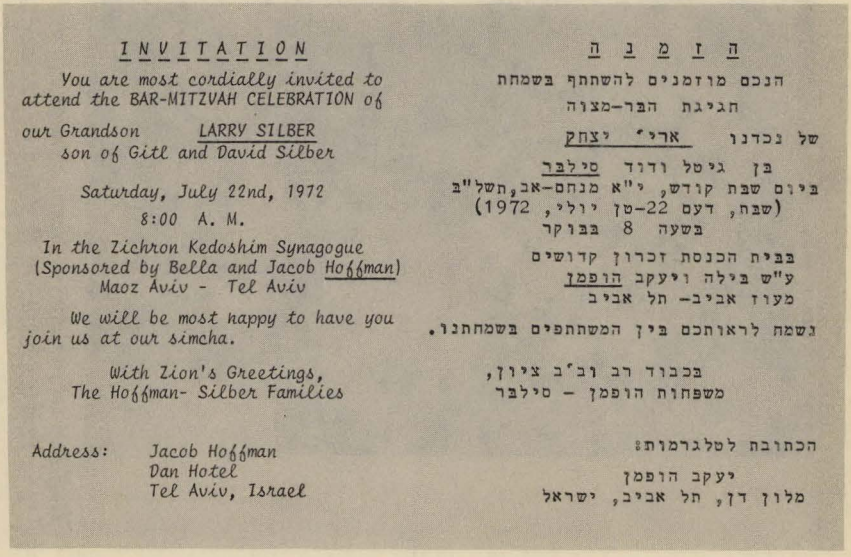


Hoffman at the dedication of the pharmacy at the Alan King Medical Center in memory of Bella, his wife OBM.



The Bar Mitzvah boy places a prayerful note between the Wall's stones.

I'm not entirely certain even today whether the sabras, (native-born Israelis), that I spoke to that Saturday comprehended what I had to say. As for myself, I prayed to the Almighty in Jerusalem and pray today that my children and grandchildren always remember that they bear within themselves some of the cultural baggage that I inherited from my schools and teachers in Ostrove.



INVITATION

You are most cordially invited to attend the BAR-MITZVAH CELEBRATION *of our Grandson* LARRY SILBER *son of Gitl and David Silber*

Saturday, July 22nd, 1972
8:00 A. M.

In the Zichron Kedoshim Synagogue (Sponsored by Bella and Jacob Hoffman) Maoz Aviv - Tel Aviv

We will be most happy to have you join us at our simcha.

With Zion's Greetings,
The Hoffman- Silber Families

Address: Jacob Hoffman
Dan Hotel
Tel Aviv, Israel

ה ז מ נ ה

הנכם מוזמנים להשתתף בשמחת
חגיגת הבר-מצוה
של נכדנו ארי' יצחק
בן גיטל ודוד סילבר
ביום שבת קודש, י"א מנחם-אב, תשל"ב
(שבת, דעם 22-טן יולי, 1972)
בשעה 8 בבוקר
בבית הכנסת זכרון קדושים
ע"ש בילה ויעקב הופמן
מעוז אביב- תל אביב
נשמח לראותכם בין המשתתפים בשמחתנו.

בכבוד רב וב'ב ציון,
משפחות הופמן - סילבר

הכתובת לטלגרמות:
יעקב הופמן
מלון דן, תל אביב, ישראל

The invitation to the Bar Mitzvah of Ary' Yitzchok, (Larry), Silber, grandson of Jacob Hoffman, author of these memoirs. The celebration took place in Israel, first at the Western Wall, and then on Saturday in the Martyrs Memorial Synagogue in Maoz Aviv, founded with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman.



Hoffman in the Kiryat Segal Synagogue at the dedication of the Holy Ark.
Erected by Jacob Hoffman in memory of his wife Beile. Oct. 1978

4

My First Earnings

I wanted very much to earn my own money and be financially independent, so I literally forced myself to leave my parent's house at a very early age. I realize now that the move was premature but you can't turn the clock back.

Father would certainly have been happier if I had continued my studies in the elementary school and then gone on to the next level and become a yeshiva student. But he was very astute and realized that his youngest son had no tolerance for teachers and was strongly drawn to the wide world that beckoned. That being the case, what kind of trade does one teach a lad who had just become bar-mitzvah? You make him a leather worker or a harness maker, one who can make a yoke, reins, a leather wagon-cover, a saddle and a wide assortment of other leather articles needed to operate a horse and wagon.

In those days there were no means of transportation except for the good old horse and wagon, and the leather appurtenances used in that operation were as necessary then as, let's say, a steering wheel for driving a car or brakes to stop it are needed now. Without that pull on the reins, the horse you're driving wouldn't know when to go forward and when to come to a halt.

Leizer Ber, one of my younger brothers, was already a leather worker in Zembrove, so what difference would it make if we had one more in the family. Consider too

that there was a very intimate relationship between leather work and being a butcher, which was my father's line, since the butcher sells the skins of slaughtered animals to leather merchants. After the skins were processed by the tanners in Zablodovke, they would be delivered to the leather working shops.

The first instructor I had was a second cousin of mine in Ostrove proper. It was in his leather works that I became a journeyman. I regret that his name escapes me but after all no fewer than sixty years have passed since then. What I do remember though is that he was a tall, brawny man. We were distantly related because his youngest daughter married my oldest sister's youngest son, then living in Zembrove.

He was a superb craftsman, one of the best in his trade and, as the saying goes, showed me the ropes. The pride he took in his work is reflected in one of his sayings to the effect that a job well done gives the craftsman great satisfaction, aside from the fact that he makes a living from it. He used to delight in his leather creations, which were real masterworks and a byword for excellence in the fairs held in the surrounding villages.

Among the gruesome news that it was my misfortune to learn about from townspeople who had been rescued after the war was the tragic story concerning my first employer. When Hitler's forces wrought their destruction, he fled deep within the heartland of Russia with his youngest daughter, son-in-law and two grandchildren. Since hunger was severe and widespread, he went out to the field to scrounge about for a few potatoes to feed to the little ones. A Christian man caught him in the act and without inquiring about the reason for such a "heinous" crime, killed him on the spot. The daughter and two grandchildren later starved to death.

I was all of thirteen years old during that year of

peregrinations from town to town. It was a veritable odyssey, which took me to places like Brok, Tshizheve, Poltosk, Mlave, Lomzhe and Stutchin, where on Tisha B'Av in 1914 I witnessed the heartbreak and heard the laments of my fellow Jews when the First World War broke out.

I became quite restless and impatient to the point where I couldn't remain at the leather works in Ostrove for too long a time. In my innocence I imagined that there was G-d knows what kind of a wonderful world to be discovered a little ways from Ostrove. So I took off for Brok, about six miles from home and found out that some people lived under much worse conditions than we did in Ostrove.

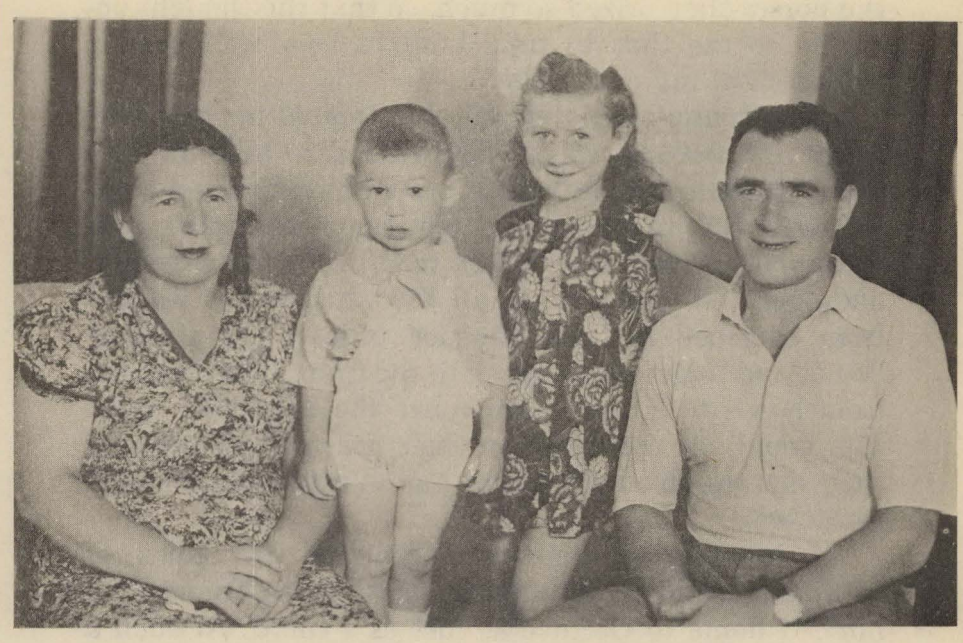
Tshizheve didn't please me either, so I departed for Poltosk, where my new boss took me on a trip to the market in Mlave. In Mlave I stayed for a while with still another employer.

I remember that I came home to my folks from Mlave about Passover time and asked my father the traditional four questions. Mother's countenance glowed with contentment at having her youngest son at home again but father went about in a despondent mood. He sang the Passover holiday service in the old synagogue and I stood at his side and assisted him but his face was overlaid with worry and his eyes frequently stared blankly in front of him. Later on I understood what was bothering him. It was his feeling that in times of such unrest a young boy like myself should be at home instead of wandering about like a vagabond.

It was during the intermediary days of Passover that shop owners used to come to hire "hands" for an entire year or a season that lasted until the New Year. I hired on to work in Stutchin, not so much for the money to be earned but for the kind of society and people I hoped to find. I'd heard it said that there was a fine



Jacob Hoffman, *(center), at age 18, in a picture taken in Lomzhe with two friends. On the left is Meyer Eastman, who emigrated to America with Hoffman in the early twenties and settled in St. Louis, Mo.*



The surviving daughter and son-in-law of Jacob Hoffman's teacher in leatherwork, who perished in the war, with their children.
Zev, the boy on the left, is today a high-ranking officer who trains soldiers in the Israeli Army.

group of young Jews interested in books and literary and dramatic readings who ran a little theater in which they themselves played as amateurs.

To tell the truth, on the way to Stutchin I rode into Lomzhe and got a hankering to remain there. I had almost completed hiring myself out to a leather works there but at the last minute the owner backed out. Later on I found out that he was apprehensive about my possibly becoming a competitor and taking away his customers.

Stutchin was really the beautiful city and its Jewish youth exactly the kind I'd hoped to find. Besides, Cossack officers were stationed there in elegant barracks and they needed an endless supply of leather articles for

the horses they prized so much, so that the thought occurred to me that in time I might very well open a workshop of my own there.

The young people in Stutchin treated me in a very warm and friendly way. They wanted to take me into their dramatic troupe, where I would have had solo singing roles. But all of a sudden pandemonium broke loose in the city — war had broken out! In the state-owned-and-operated liquor stores all the whiskey bottles had been smashed lest the Cossack officers get stinking drunk and forget about going to the front. The Jews ran from house to house to announce the horrifying news. You could see the terror in their hearts from the way their lips trembled when they had to utter that dreaded word: war!

I immediately left my boss and the town of Stutchin, as did my recently-acquired young friends and hurried home to Ostrove as fast as I could. At such a perilous time I felt I wanted to be with my own family. Another reason for my returning was that I didn't want my parents constantly worrying about their youngest son and his whereabouts.

In Ostrove I found a total disaster.

Father's butcher shop was shut because they were afraid of the Russian soldiers from nearby Komorove, who had come into town with their horses and wagons, their rifles on their shoulders.

When a Jew from Ostrove saw a rifle, he became utterly terrified. The fear stemmed not only from the tragedy that war brings in its train for everyone but because of the ever-present possibility that the Russians would attack the Jews, due to the suspicion that some Jews were hoping for a Russian defeat and awaiting the entry of the Germans. When the Germans actually entered our area at a later date, their relations with the Jews were better than those under the Russians. They

behaved in a very friendly way to the Jewish population and didn't attack them or pull out their beards as the Russians had earlier and the Poles afterwards.

There's a distinct possibility that the memories of the German occupation in World War I created an atmosphere that made the Jews easy prey to the growing German net in World War II. Jews remembered or were told that the German forces behaved in a very gentlemanly way when they entered Jewish hamlets in the First World War. Who then would have even remotely imagined that in between both wars the Germans had become so "civilized" that they would surpass the Russians and Poles put together in a mindless spree of murder and bloodthirstiness.

Meanwhile, however, the Russian Poles remained in Komrove, from which point they spread out over all the surrounding towns and hamlets, ready for their encounter with the Germans. Little by little the Jews learned to accomodate themselves to prevailing conditions and resumed working and doing business, making money by supplying provisions to the military camps.

And then, despite the inauspicious and tragic circumstances, I made my debut as an independent businessman, as it's called today. I was altogether fourteen and a half years old but I seized upon a golden opportunity that I felt should not be allowed to slip by.

The Russian soldiers near town slaughtered cattle for food and then simply abandoned the hides in the open field. Young as I was, I girded up my courage, went to the outskirts of town and made a deal with the soldiers. I paid them one ruble, (dollar), per hide. The soldiers received my proposition as though they had found an unexpected treasure and before long I became one of the biggest hide-merchants in Ostrove. Father, who as a butcher had done a lot of business with skin-dealers, taught me how to handle hides. You have to

weigh the hide and ask a price commensurate with its weight. A skin that cost me one dollar I sold for about ten, which is a pretty fair profit at all times, let alone at a juncture when Jews used to painfully save one dollar at a time and turn their eyes to distant lands, especially America.

When the Russian army moved away from Ostrove and went to Zembrove, I took my goods, trailed along with them and opened my leather workshop.

For a few years I earned a very good living and dreamt about the day when I'd be arriving in America, the land from which my father had returned. I did business with the soldiers when the skins were collected and later dealt with leatherworkers and the tanners near Bialystok. By this time I was confident enough to approach them myself, so I no longer needed the mediation of the leatherworkers.

I earned a lot of money but I wasn't happy. I longed for some spiritual satisfaction, something more than mere money. After all, I had learned in school that man doesn't live by bread alone. I yearned for friends with whom I could share the anxieties and tensions of the times, the fear of the morrow and the longing for Zion which at that moment had seized the imagination of a large part of Jewish youth.

On the one hand, the gold of America attracted with its glitter, as did the success stories written home by Jews living in Chicago and New York. On the other hand, even at the time a warm sentiment for the Land of Israel awoke within me, our own Jewish State, about which young men and women sang so longingly.

With those mixed feelings churning within me, I arrived at the last stop among the towns, a Jewish hamlet called Rutke, some ten miles from Zembrove.

In Rutke I saw Trotzky riding a white horse. In Rutke too I earned the opprobrium of the town rabbi

because I organized conferences for youth groups in which we declaimed Hebrew poems and discussed Jewish politics.

During the time I lived in Rutke I had an encounter that played the most important and dramatic role in my life. The consequences of that encounter remained with me in all my later experiences.

5

Life With Jewish Youth in a Small Town

In the course of my youthful wanderings I reached Rutke, a small town about twenty miles from Ostrove. At that time I was a young man of fifteen. I made an excellent living from my leather business, first with the Russian soldiers and later with the Germans.

From the month of Elul, (August), 1915 the Germans occupied the whole area, after the Russians had demonstrated something less than heroic qualities on the battlefield and were driven all the way back from East Prussia, which they had reached in the early stages of the war. Looking for a scapegoat for their embarrassing defeat, the Russians blamed internal spies for the downfall of their armies. Among those they hanged as a spy was their own governor over Warsaw, who had formerly administered Lomzhe, the big city nearest Ostrove.

Rutke was considerably smaller than Ostrove but had more extensive markets that attracted great numbers of non-Jews and merchants. In Rutke I had already ceased working for others and became an independent entrepreneur, with my own leather works and a salaried employee as well. I rented quarters above an ironmonger's shop and there installed a workshop that very quickly acquired an excellent reputation among the local nobility. Frequently they called me to their manors

to repair the leather appurtenances used for horses and wagons and very often they paid me in wheat instead of money, so that in the barter process I became a produce merchant in addition to my dealings in leather.

However, it's interesting that what I remembered most about that period of my life is not the money I earned but the communal life, the close friendships I had established and the cultural milieu that I found in the ranks of "Zeire Zion", the youth division of Poale Zion, (Workers of Zion). During that time in our small towns there was no other circle or channel for Zionist work except the socialist-oriented Poale Zion, the forerunners of Mapai, (right wing Labor Party in Israel), with its multiplicity of splinter groups. While in Zeire Zion I remained faithful to all our Jewish traditions, following my father's injunction when I left Ostrove. I stayed with Zeire Zion because it was the only instrumentality in town for expressing my Zionist leanings and love for the Land of Israel.

We rented a spacious hall so that we could get together for readings, discussions and lectures by guest speakers from other cities like Warsaw and Lomzhe. I remember that among the guests there was our dear chaver Burstyn, (OBM), later the secretary of the Farband, (Labor Zionist Alliance), in New York.

Although I was a leatherworker, an ordinary craftsman, the intelligentsia in Rutke established an extremely close relationship with me and sought my company. I ascribe it not to my scholarship, of which I unfortunately had a minimal amount then and haven't improved perceptibly now, but rather to the musical sense I had inherited from my father, Cantor Isaac. I myself like to sing and helped organize a choir named "Hazomir", (Nightingale), that ultimately built up a substantial repertoire of Hebrew and pioneer songs.



The troupe that played in Goldfaden's "Chashe the Orphan."

From right to left: The two Eastman sisters and their brother, Annie, Jacob Hoffman and Beile.

The organist of the Rutke church sold me an old piano and on one of my trips to Warsaw I acquired a violin, so that I had almost an entire orchestra. I learned to play the piano and the violin by myself and was a prime mover and entertainer at the cultural evenings arranged by the young people.

On one Saturday evening the youth organization assembled in their hall to prepare the tables for a celebration that same night. On the tables they had set up a beautiful collation with cakes, herring, seltzer, polly seeds, et cetera. All of a sudden the Rutke rabbi came rushing in — I remember his second name was Hirshfeld and he had a handsome blonde beard — yelling: "Impudent rascals!" and yanked the tablecloth with such force that the herring and all the other delicacies crashed to the floor. The apparent reason for his behavior was our profanation of the Sabbath, though G-d alone knows that we weren't guilty of that. In any event, we were far less guilty than some of today's "strictly kosher" or "glatt kosher" caterers who begin preparing for Saturday night weddings during the same afternoon. Truth to tell, the rabbi wasn't angry so much at the desecration of the Sabbath as our Zionism, our preoccupation with the Land of Israel and our plans to go there ourselves and help build the Jewish Homeland.

(Rabbi Hirschfeld died young of tuberculosis. A son and a daughter now reside in America and the wife and the other children died in the Holocaust).

Every time I go to Israel and meet fellow townsmen from Rutke, we reminisce about the expression: "Impudent rascals!" and the fact that those "rascals" who left early enough to become pioneers in Israel are still alive and bear the memory of their hometown with both love and dread.

I used to make many business trips to Warsaw. Invariably I would bring home the script of a play then be-

ing presented in that city and our group immediately began rehearsing in preparation for a presentation. We put on the biblical "Sacrifice of Isaac" and "Joseph and His Brothers" but we didn't neglect "Chashe the Orphan" and "Chantshe in America", all big hits and a source of pride to Rutke's Jewish community as well as the surrounding villages.

I remember to this day how in playing the role of Vladimir, the bon-vivant and ne'er-do-well, I found Chashe lying on the floor, quite still. She had taken poison because of the despair and heartbreak she felt at the misdeeds of her no-account husband. I fell down beside her, sobbing out my repentance over the wrongs I had perpetrated and promised faithfully to be upright and religiously observant but alas, it was too late!

I remember too the scene where Chashe the orphan is standing with a hot iron, humming a Russian tune with heartrending dejection: "Mother, mother, don't force me to marry someone I don't love." She married Vladimir in contravention of the wishes of the aunt who raised her after the premature death of her mother, and now pours out her heart in great bitterness for having been so disobedient.

Jews from the villages nearby used to come to buy tickets to our shows and the Hazamir concerts. The money raised by the admission fees would go to the Land of Israel, particularly the Jewish National Fund, which for us at that time was a sacred obligation. We thought of it as the bridge we'd cross one day in order to reach the Jewish Homeland.

Among those who were members of our "actors' union" in Rutke were a brother and sister of the currently well-known Cantor Zev Goldberg, an officer of our local cantors' organization. Recently I worked in tandem with Cantor Goldberg to arrange a concert of his group in the

Brooklyn Jewish Center to honor the memory of my wife, (OBM).

The remarkably photogenic young girl who played Chashe the Orphan, the one who fell in love with Vladimir, is today a grandmother and lives in America. My wife and I used to visit her often and recall those happy days of our youth.

One of my main activities was running a Flower Day on behalf of the Jewish National Fund. On market days the young people used to thread their way among the small shopkeepers and merchants from out of town, shaking the Jewish National Fund boxes and asking for contributions.

To help redeem the soil of the Land of Israel from foreign hands and go there as pioneers was the shining dream we aspired to in our town. We held to that dream under the Russians, the Germans and even more so under the Poles, when in 1918 they seemingly were revived from the dead and the towns around Lomzhe, Rutke among them, became a part of modern Poland.

Then we didn't yet have a "hachsharah" or training camp in the area, but we sent some of our members to work on the farms of local peasants around the countryside. In that way they could see close up how you work the soil, tend a stableful of animals and breed chickens.

Under the Poles the Zeire Zion worked to elect the Zionist lists to the Seim, (Parliament). I remember how the priest from the local church would stand close by the ballot box and become furious with the young leatherworker who brought Jews in an unending stream to swell the number of "Palestine supporters". Under ordinary circumstances I was very friendly with the priest all year long; he used to give me work quite often and never bargained about the price. But on election day he would look at me as though I were his sworn enemy.

When I became older, I never severed the close association with Zeire Zion of my youth in Rutke. I still support the Histadrut, (Labor Federation), in Israel and the campaigns it conducts in America. Moreover, as a religious Jew I focus my help within the Histadrut context on the furtherance of theological causes as, for example, the building of two synagogues in Histadrut housing complexes. Jews pray in those synagogues three times daily and I too had several opportunities to attend services there on my various visits to Israel.

In 1965 I signed a contract with the New York League for Labor Israel, then under the direction of Israel Stolarsky, to build a synagogue in Maoz Aviv, a development that houses Israeli army veterans. Many of those veterans are religious in orientation and regular worshippers at services. The synagogue was founded in memory of the six million Jews and my unforgettable hometowns of Ostrove and Rutke, destroyed by the Nazis. As I recounted in a previous chapter, I celebrated the bar-mitzvah of one of my grandsons, Larry Silver, in that synagogue on the Sabbath of Consolation in 1972.

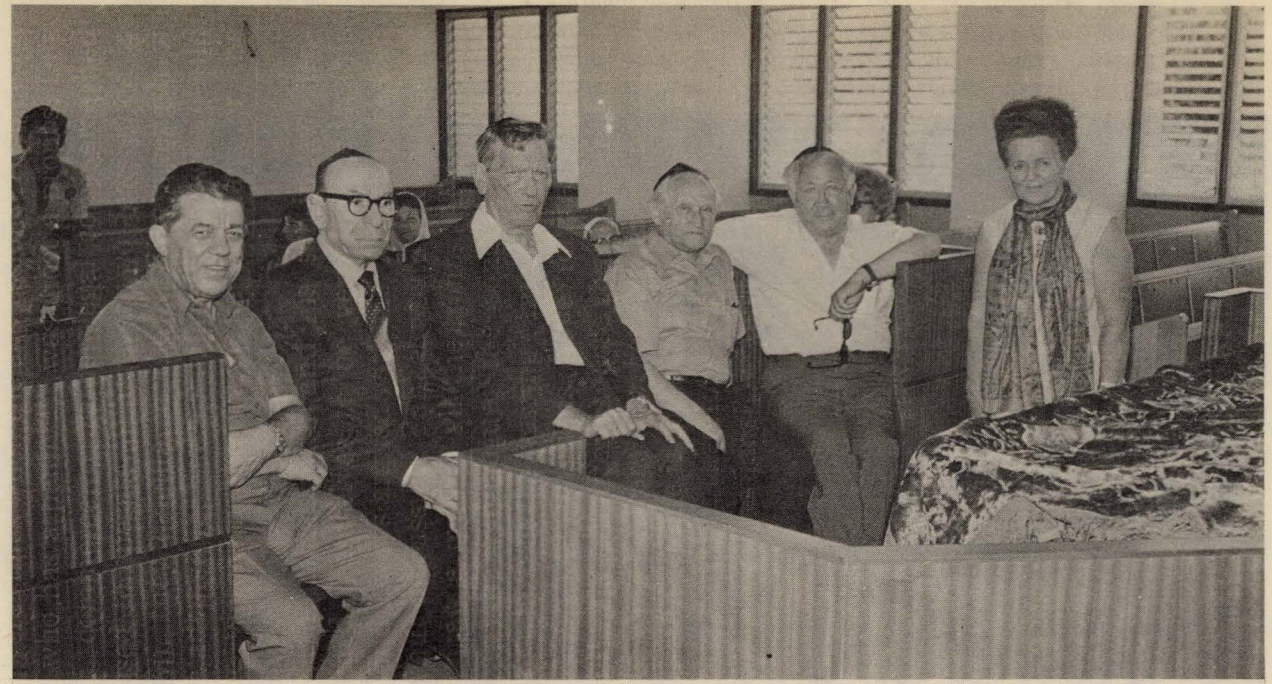
Besides the original contribution of a fairly substantial sum of money for the construction of the synagogue, my wife and I added another ten thousand dollars as a special fund for erecting a Holy Ark and a bimah, the dais used by synagogue functionaries and dignitaries.

In 1970 I made a second agreement with the Histadrut to build a synagogue in Kiryat Segal, a housing development named in memory of Louis Segal, (OBM), the departed Executive Secretary of the Labor Zionist Alliance in New York. Yehoshua Levy was the treasurer of the Histadrut at that time and participated in the impressive dedication ceremony when the structure was completed in 1972.

When the leaders of the local Histadrut campaign



At the dedication of the synagogue in Kiryat Segal. *Israel Stolarsky, on the podium, welcomes Jacob Hoffman, the guest from America and thanks him and his wife for having made possible the construction of a synagogue in the housing development bearing the name of the deceased Louis Segal, OBM, General Secretary of the Farband in America. At Mr. Hoffman's right sits Yehoshua Levy, then Treasurer of the Histadrut, and at his left Zev Weiner, head of Mishan.*



At the dedication of the synagogue in Kiryat Segal, Israel

From right to left: Zev Weiner, Director of Mishan, Jacob Hoffman, Yehoshua Levy, Treasurer of the Histadrut, Israel Stolarsky, Associate Director of the National Committee for Labor Israel, Azriel Livai, Chairman, Nachman Syrkin Club, Israel and Malka Portugali, Directors of the Projects Departments in the Histadrut.

invite me to one of their dinner functions, I am accorded the privilege of opening the program with "Hamotsi", the blessing over bread. Naturally I'm not averse to accepting such honors, and, thank G-d, I attend a fair number of affairs, so I don't lack for recognition. But personal recognition is of no consequence here. I simply think it important that Jews who work on behalf of Histadrut and help in the upbuilding of Israel recognize through "hamotsi" that the Almighty is the one who fructifies the earth so that it can produce bread and that He is the Master of the Universe.

The love for Israel inspired by my school days in Ostrove and my Zionist youth activities in Rutke almost compels me to assist everyone who contributes toward building and strengthening the Jewish community in our homeland.

Standing one day in the lobby of my hotel in Jerusalem, I permitted myself to be "ensnared" by a representative of a yeshiva in an old section of the Holy City. He probably thought that he was dealing with an American Jew who is completely ignorant of educational matters, someone from whom he could extract a contribution merely by taking him to see young boys doing their lessons in the Beth Midrash, (House of Study), of the Yeshiva and other young people of that community studying day and night without interruption.

The yeshiva being discussed is the one called Yeshiva Beis Yosef Tsvi, named after the rabbi of the community, Yosef Tsvi Dushinsky, (OBM). It's known as a citadel of the Neturei Karta, (an ultra-orthodox sect that doesn't recognize the State of Israel because it wasn't established by intervention of the Messiah), and is located on Samuel the Prophet Street, not far from where the Mandelbaum Gate stood.

However, I told my "captor" that I was interested only in seeing the dining room and the kitchen where

their food was prepared. I didn't have to be convinced that their students were devoting themselves to learning the Torah; for that I could unequivocally rely on the school principals.

And my hunch paid off. The kitchen was old-fashioned, the dining room badly neglected. On the spot I donated a new kitchen and dining room for the N'turei Karta Yeshivah. On a later visit I took a picture with the charming Jerusalem students when they affixed a tablet to the wall of the reconstructed dining room.

I took it for granted that when the Histadrut builds



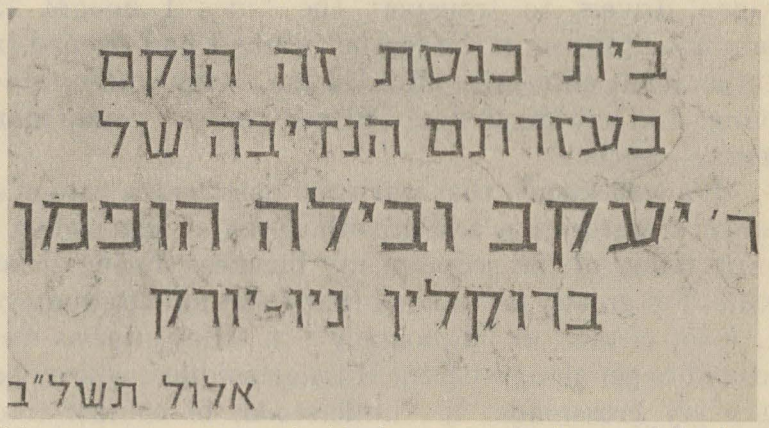
With children from the Old Sector in Jerusalem

Jacob Hoffman in the center of a group of students of the Yeshiva Bet Yosef Tzvi in Jerusalem, where he and Mrs. Hoffman installed a new kitchen and dining room. The legend on the tablet affixed to the wall reads as follows: Yeshiva Bet Yosef Tzvi, an eternal remembrance. This dining room was completed through the contribution of the well-known philanthropist, Mr. Jacob Hoffman, son of Isaac Hoffman, (OBM), and his wife, Beile, daughter of Tzvi Dov. May they both enjoy long life and their beneficence endure forever.

a housing development they would install a fine dining room but I'm not sure they would have expended the necessary tens of thousands of dollars for a synagogue. That's why I helped establish the two splendid houses of worship mentioned earlier. On the other hand, it's almost axiomatic that the Neturei Karta Yeshivah would have a suitable study hall, since learning Torah is their raison d'etre, "our life and the length of our days", as the prayer goes. Material things, though, are irrelevant in their view, of only secondary importance. That's why I helped them set up a modern kitchen and a beautiful dining room. I hope their children get proper nourishment so that they can continue to study for many years to come.

So you see that my love for Israel is an amalgam of the old-fashioned one-room school, my parents' house in Ostrove and my Labor Zionist years in Rutke.

Both kinds of remembrance are dear to me and I can seek them out and find them in our old-new homeland.



This synagogue was erected with the generous assistance of Jacob and Beile Hoffman, Brooklyn, New York. Elul, 5735.

The Martyrs Memorial Synagogue

The tablet affixed to the wall of the Martyrs Memorial Synagogue, built with Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman's help in Maoz Aviv, near Tel Aviv.

6

Chane Bashe's Inn During a Blizzard

Mienzhenin was a town on the road between Ostrove and Bialystok and served as a central point for the Russian soldiers who, at the beginning of 1915, were advancing toward the German front lines. It served the same purpose at a later date, in the spring of that year when they fell back, bloody and battered after an ignominious defeat.

At that time I had just arrived in Rutke, a small town about a mile from Mienzhenin. I often engaged wagon drivers to transport the hides I bought in Zembrove for use in the leather works I had opened in Rutke. That enterprise afforded me a very comfortable living. And how much does a fifteen-year-old young man need altogether?

It's well known that war time hastens the rate of a person's maturation and growth. Even at that, when I think today of the scope of my business during those years, I'm greatly astonished that I was able to manage it. A lot of tact, or "diplomacy", in today's terms was needed to get along with the Russian soldiers, who stood at every crossroads. It's understood, of course, that "gifts" had to be forthcoming in generous measure, for unless they were, things could get kind of grim. In that respect, by the way, there was no significant change when I operated under the Germans and still later under

the Poles at the time the surrounding hamlets were under their control.

I hired Isaac the Coachman to bring some dried skins together with my regular shipment from Zembrove to Mienzhenin, a distance of about ten miles. From Mienzhenin, merchants would hire a peasant wagon to get to the small towns in the area because the regular coachmen used to continue on to the bigger cities like Bialystok, Lomzhe and even Warsaw.

It was a frosty day in January . . . but who took note of the cold then? First of all, the long stockings that we stuffed into our thick boots prevented the cold from ever reaching our feet and secondly my heart was warmed by the handsome profits every trip brought and the friendships I succeeded in forming in Rutke.

Those were times when the expression: "An ox for a penny but who has a penny?", was most a propos. Due to the war, commerce, or rather legal commerce had almost ceased to operate. Wherever two Jews stood in conversation, they calculated the relative strength of each of the adversaries and speculated as to who would emerge the victor in the war, the Russians or the Germans.

Yankel the Blacksmith and his son-in-law Benjamin deemed themselves to be very knowledgeable strategists and always argued with me. At a very heated moment of our discussion, Yankel would take a sheet of paper and draw a map of all the fronts. After prayers were over in the synagogue, the congregants would wrangle over which of the warring camps is the stronger. One said that the Russians have fourteen million soldiers, so they could afford to lose the number of lives necessary to win the war. Another, however, indicated that the Russian regime is rotten to the core with internal corruption and that therefore "Funye", (a humorous appellation for the Russians), wouldn't last too long.

Isaac the Coachman sat next to me. He extended his hand and charted a map of the entire world on his calloused palm. That included the Dardanelles, over whose role self-appointed experts in strategy loved to dispute.

Isaac would suddenly draw the reins taut and shout at his poor horse. When the horse began to run, Isaac roared: "This is exactly how the Russians will begin retreating very soon!"

One word led to another and neither one of us noticed what was happening around us on the road. A fierce wind began to howl and snow mixed with hail fell on our heads with such force that the horse was thrown into a panic that couldn't be controlled, no matter how frequently Isaac belabored him with whiplashes, shouted at the top of his voice and ran through the gamut of tricks used by all experienced coachmen in similar situations. Isaac even tried to get off the wagon, pet the horse and lead him by the hand but the veritable mountains of snow that had been formed by previous storms, together with the newly-fallen hailstones blocked the road in front of us and didn't permit us to move so much as an inch.

The trip took us three times as long as it does normally and we finally dragged ourselves to Mienzhenin at one o'clock in the morning.

"We'll try knocking on Chane Bashe's door — there's still some light shining in her window," Isaac comforted me and helped me get off the wagon. Chane Bashe ran a kind of inn where transient travellers could refresh themselves with a glass of hot tea, a fresh, home-baked roll, a loaf of corn bread and, if one were particularly fortunate he could down a shot of whiskey and a glass of beer on the sly.

"Chane Bashe, Chane Bashe, it's I, Isaac from



Jacob Hoffman's mother-in-law, Chane Bashe Cooper from Mienzhenin, with her youngest daughter Zelda, who came to America in 1936, after her mother's death. Today Zelda's name is Mrs. Davidson. She lives with her family on Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn.

Zembrove," my driver shouted as he knocked vigorously on the door, but there was no answer.

The blizzard got worse and worse. I was filled with pity for the poor horse, still standing harnessed to the wagon and blowing two streams of vapor through his nostrils, obviously having great difficulty in breathing. Isaac had already covered him with a blanket to give him some protection from the frost and snow pervading the village. But the horse's breathing was still labored. He neighed quietly, as though reproaching his master for forcing him to drag a wagon in such terrible weather.

In the midst of all this, with my teeth chattering uncontrollably in the freezing cold, Isaac suddenly remarked "Only G-d in heaven knows whether we'll live through this night . . . Did you hear that the first bomb thrown by the Germans on Ostrove hit the horsemarket and killed three coachmen on the spot? Did you hear? Somehow all the strictures of the "Tochecha", (Chapter of Curses with which Moses threatened the children of Israel should they disobey G-d's laws), have befallen the coachmen around here."

Chane Bashe apparently had it in for my coachman because he always lodged at a different inn on the other side of the muddy road and came knocking on her door in the middle of the night, when it was dark "over there". The other inn belonged to a Jew named Eastman. Later I became friendly with his son Meyer, who came to America in 1921, the same year I did.

But how long can even such a hard-hearted character as Chane Bashe remain indifferent to the plight of two frozen Jewish travellers in the middle of a blizzard? So finally she opened the door and sat us down not far from the stove, where a batch of bread and challeh was baking. She was preparing it for the customers who would come to her the next day, especially the Russian soldiers passing through here on their way to the

front or those on leave or wounded on the way home from the front — all of them mad for Chane Bashe's bread, challeh and rolls.

No sooner did I step over the threshhold than I began to feel a warmth that permeated every member of my body. The kerosene lamp on the table barely gave enough light to illuminate Chane Bashe's house but my eyes lit up and my heart felt warm.

Seeing this darling, cordial Jewish mother, flour dust all over her and dressed in a long apron, standing in the middle of the night and kneading one batch of dough after another was a sight for sore eyes. She was being helped by her beautiful young daughter, with long tresses, who kneaded and intertwined the strands of dough on the twist challehs and ran over to the oven every few minutes to see what state the baked goods were in, since they would have to be taken out fairly soon.

I hadn't felt such warmth since my mother had held me on her lap and sung those beautiful songs to me. I was also reminded of the sensation I felt when my father sang "V'chol Ma-aminim", (And All Believe), and other pieces with me on the eve of the High Holy Days, gave me a paternal pat on the back and said: "Yankele, congratulations, you really do so well."

"Beile, put two glasses of hot tea on the table and then set down something to eat," Chane Bashe said to her little daughter, who followed her mother's instructions to the letter without so much as blinking an eye.

I had finished school only two years previously, so I remembered very vividly the story about the hit Rebecca made with Eliezer, Abraham's servant, when she displayed her generosity in offering water not only to him and his men but also the camels standing outside. Obviously I was too young then to think seriously about a match or getting married. But the thought did occur to me that if there weren't such a terrible blizzard outside,



The proprietor and his helpers in the leatherworks

Jacob Hoffman, (center), at age 18 in his leatherworks in Rutke, with two apprentices: Chaim Cooper, (right), a younger brother of the late Mrs. Hoffman, and Alter Korf. The two young ladies in the white aprons are: Beile, (right), from Mienzhenin and her friend Anna, both waitresses in the Rutke restaurant. Anna is today Mrs. Weissman and lives in Cleveland, Ohio. Her family and the Hoffmans still maintain the close ties that originate in the old days in Rutke.

This photograph is a reproduction of a small picture taken almost sixty years ago.



The Hoffman family at a festive occasion

Seen are Jacob Hoffman's brothers, Aaron and Leizer Ber and their children.

the young girl with the beautiful tresses would certainly go and feed and water that poor horse standing in the cold.

When dawn broke and the time had come to say our goodbyes, I felt saddened that the night had come to an end so quickly. The woman who was to become my mother-in-law six years later wished me success and warned me to be very careful. The twelve year old Beile, with her beautiful locks, managed to say a little shamefacedly: "Have a safe trip."

Before saying goodbye, however, I sat at a table in that inn in Mienzhenin, on that stormy night in an even stormier war milieu and spoke at length with Chane Bashe. I heard her tragic life-story and learned why she hadn't opened the door so quickly on such a frosty night.

●

7

A Fateful Night in Mienzhenin

Sixty one years have passed since that fateful night in Mienzhenin, yet how fresh and vibrant it remains in my memory!

A raging snow storm made it impossible to even stick your nose outside the door. It was a night when it would have been a sin to let a dog out of the house. Isaac the Coachman had taken his horse and wagon into a shed with a roof overhead and something of a door that gave at least some shelter from the biting wind and lashing snow. He carried out some water and filled the horse's feed bag with a substantial amount of oats from the supply he always had with him in the wagon.

Isaac knew that after a night such as we had just experienced, the horse had priority over him when it came to food.

Meanwhile, Beile, Chane Bashe's twelve year old daughter, had set the best of everything on the table. Besides several glasses of hot tea to help you warm up after exposure to that terrible frost, the table overflowed with fresh bread, butter and sour cream, and, it goes without saying, an excellent piece of herring with onions on the side and . . . well, what else could a Jew wish for after emerging alive from a severe storm in war time?

"Beile, my sweet child . . . we have to knead some more dough," Chane Bashe called to her daughter after

she had so competently and generously provided food for the two unexpected guests who had dropped in on such a night. I took a look at my wrist watch and saw it was already two thirty in the morning. I simply couldn't stop admiring the industriousness of this mother and daughter. At the same time I felt a deep sadness at the circumstances forcing two such wonderful and sympathetic human beings to remain in a small town full of non-Jews and literally live in bondage in order to eke out a bare existence.

Chane Bashe was contrite about not having opened her door to us immediately after we knocked the first time. Being a considerate and religious Jewish woman, she sincerely regretted that she had doubted even for a moment whether to allow two Jews frozen from the cold to enter her house when they would certainly have died from exposure had she delayed much longer. She sat down on the wooden bench standing opposite the flaming oven, where the last batch she had baked was about to be taken out. And then a most poignant scene took place: as she cleaned her hands of the sticky clumps of dough, she gave utterance to a touching monologue that flowed as naturally and uninterruptedly as a stream — a monologue that was a prototype and a true reflection of the tragedy that had struck many Jewish houses in those years.

"Please don't hold it against me, dear friends, because I didn't want to open the door for you . . . it's late at night . . . soldiers ride back and forth and I'm alone, a widow with three children . . . my husband died in America and I have a son and a daughter in Philadelphia."

"Your husband died in Philadelphia?" I asked her in a very sympathetic tone. My voice was without affectation and expressed true concern for her welfare and that of her daughter.

Chane Bashe apparently didn't want to reveal the full extent of the bitterness she felt in the presence of her daughter, who had just finished taking out the last batch of baked goods from the oven. At such a tender age, why should she be exposed to the despair her mother carried in her heart? "My little Beile," said her mother, "you're so completely exhausted . . . go to bed . . . good night, darling."

Beile looked at the two guests as though entreating them to intercede with her mother to allow her to stay and listen to the developing conversation. It seemed to me that she directed her pleading look to me . . . but in those years the world was entirely different and fifteen year old youngsters didn't have the audacity they arrogate to themselves today. I just sat there, blinking and tongue-tied. Beile murmured: "Have a safe trip," said good night and went off to bed.

Chane Bashe accompanied her to the tall closet that separated the bedroom from the rest of the house. I too went along with her with my eyes and said a silent prayer, hoping that this wasn't the last time I would see her.

"Another glass of tea?" Chane Bashe asked as she returned to the wooden bench opposite the oven. With a half-forced smile on her tired, wrinkled face, she suddenly put the the question: "Now at what point were we in our saga?"

"As you can observe, the house we're living in now is quite spacious, with a yard where fruit trees grow. We made an excellent living here, thank G-d, so we decided to buy it from the peasant from whom we were renting it. Well . . . my husband Hersh Ber took off for America with the hope of earning enough money to pay off the debt on the house and then returning to us. But for some reason G-d punished me and Hersh Ber departed this world quite young in that distant land.

"Added to that, my husband and I were concerned about the fact that we had two growing daughters whom we'd one day have to marry off. You've seen little Beile yourself and know what a precious child she is . . . she doesn't leave me for a moment . . . do you suppose she doesn't understand what's going on when I don't speak in her presence? . . . Oh, yes, she understands . . . she understands too well! . . . Rivke, the older daughter and Shlomo, the older son are in Philadelphia and I've remained here with three children — Beile, Chaim and Zelda . . . Chaim is eight years old and Zelda only six - . . . lovely children but orphans in G-d's great world."

"I hope you've understood and appreciated what I've told you . . . How can a widow with three children, living in a hamlet populated mostly by Christians, let strange people into her house in the middle of the night?"

"But aren't you afraid to live here alone in this sm-all town with your children?" I asked her.

Chane Bashe replied that the Christians in town who came into her house sympathized sincerely with her in her plight and were saddened at the fact that she had become a widow. "We have been living here for many years and thank G-d for our safety and hope He'll protect us in the future."

Unfortunately, Chane Bashe was fated to experience yet another tragedy. Rivke, her oldest daughter, died in a flu epidemic in Philadelphia in 1918. She was still a blossoming young woman at the time and left two small children, a boy and a girl. The girl's name is Leona, is today herself a grandmother and a millionairess living in Miami Beach, where she expresses herself Jewishly by being active in Temple Emanu-l.

But fortune willed that Chane Bashe and her children were not to remain in Mienzhenin for too much longer.



Chane Bashe with her orphans.
Chane Bashe took this picture after her husband had gone to America in 1912 and sent it to him in Philadelphia. The children are from right to left: Chaim, Zelda and Beile, who later became Mrs. Hoffman. At the time Beile was twelve years old.

The military picture at the front had turned in favor of the Germans and the Russians began to fall back in retreat. Whatever place their retreat took them to they left in total destruction. They were without a shred of mercy and brought endless pain and sorrow to Jews and Jewish towns, whom they suspected of sympathy with the Germans. The closer the front came to our towns, the more perilous became the condition of the Jewish community. Every day saw a new decree ordering the Jews to leave some area or other. Ostrove and Bialystok then turned into way-stations for those Jews who were expelled from places that had been their home for so long.

In those days there lived a rabbi who exercised considerable influence in our milieu. His name was Rabbi Yehudah Leib Gordon and he had served as rabbi in Ostrove between 1897 and 1904, at which time he left for Smargan and later — in 1913 — for Lomzhe. Rabbi Gordon himself was a "Misnagged", (an ideological opponent of the Chassidim), and close to the "Chofetz Chaim", the greatest rabbinical authority of the age in Poland and Lithuania. Even though Rabbi Gordon opposed the Chassidic sect, he was very knowledgeable about it and even wrote a book in Russian entitled: "What is Chassidism". The purpose of the book was to refute the denunciations hurled by the proponents of the Enlightenment, (a movement that urged Jews not to confine themselves to their own culture but to acquire other knowledge like foreign languages, science and mathematics), at Chassidic rabbis. Rabbi Gordon got on so well with people that none other than the extremely clever Gerer Chassid, Rabbi Ben Zion Ostrover and Rabbi Berish Shapiro, the son of the Slonim talmudic genius Rabbi Eisel, came to Agostov, where Rabbi Gordon had his pulpit, to bring him to Ostrove. (You can learn more about Rabbi Yehudah Leib Gordon in



Beile Hoffman with her two brothers, Shlomo, (right), and Chaim Cooper, not long after her marriage to Jacob Hoffman in America. Both brothers died young. Beile died barely a year ago, on the 26th day of Shevat, 5736, January 28, 1976.

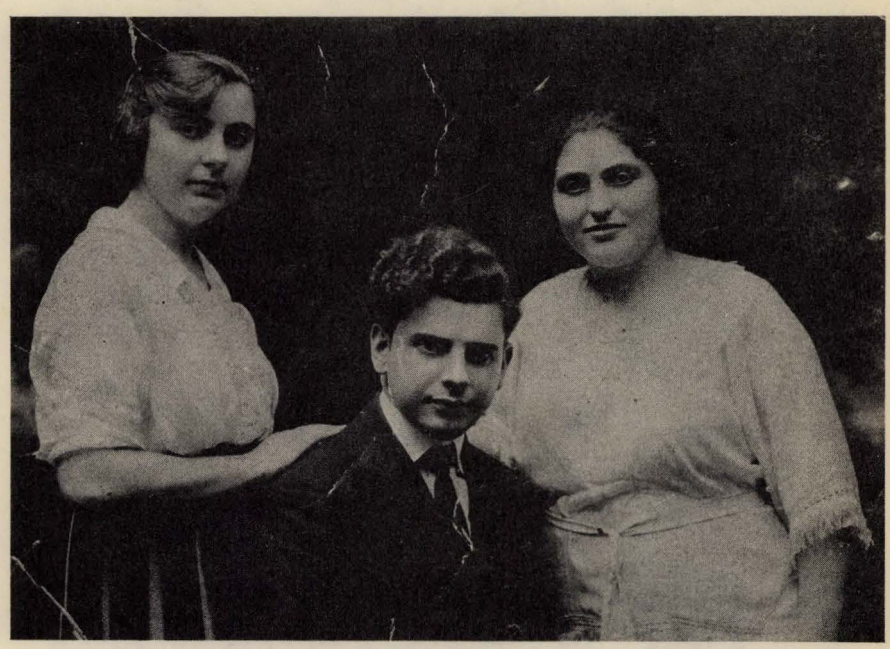
the monograph concerning the inhabitants of Ostrove written by Rabbi Moshe Meir Yoshor in the Memorial Book of the Ostrove Mazovietzk Congregation).

Rabbi Gordon was very fluent in Russian and well-versed in its literature. He corresponded with Leo Tolstoy, the world-famous Russian author, concerning the Talmud and Jewish culture in general, after he had published a work in Russian called: "What is the Talmud". His books were extrememly useful to Attorney Greenberg in the well-known Beilis trial in Kiev in 1913. (In that trial Mendel Beilis, a Russian Jew, had been accused of using the blood of a Christian child for ritual purposes). Thanks to Rabbi Gordon's efforts, decrees expelling Jews from many small towns were rescinded.

Mienzhenin, however was one of the less fortunate settlements. When the Russians retreated, the few Jewish houses in town, Bashe's inn among them, were burned to the ground.

Chane Bashe and her three orphans took up the wanderer's staff and left the village with whatever possessions they could carry. They simply roved about at random. Those of my American readers who have seen "Fiddler on the Roof" and how Tevye takes leave of Anatevka, pushing a wagon piled to overflowing with pillows and quilts, can picture for themselves how Chane Bashe and thousands of other Jewish families were uprooted from their homes and went seeking any secure spot they could find to rest their weary heads.

When I heard the tragic news about the destruction of Mienzhenin, I was griefstricken over the fate of Chane Bashe, who had been severely buffeted by fortune. Where did she go with her children? Will I ever find out where they finally wound up? And will it ever be my good luck to meet Beile again, that beauty with the long tresses and demure and charming countenance?



Beile with her brother and their aunt

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Beile from Mienzhenin, later to become Mrs. Hoffman, with her brother Shlomo Cooper shortly after she came to America in 1921. They are at the grave of their sister Rivke, who died at an early age in a flu epidemic in Philadelphia. The date on the monument is the 8th of Cheshvan, 5679, that is exactly 58 years ago this month.

8

The Russians Leave and the Germans Arrive

The news from the front all during the summer of 1915 was not encouraging for the Russians. The Germans rained blow after blow on the Russian Army and every few days you could see in Rutke and other nearby towns long caravans of wounded Russian soldiers. Some of them, no matter how serious their wounds, spewed forth venomous anti-Semitic remarks, as though the Jews were to blame for their defeat.

In a very large measure the Russians were incited by our old "buddies", the Poles, who were destined to come to power in 1918, when their country became independent. At that particular moment the Poles limited themselves to egging on the Russians against the Jews, spreading rumors and informing the Russian generals about the Jewish "spies".

All of a sudden the Russians issued an order for everyone to leave the city because the Germans were coming closer and closer to Rutke. We were in doubt as to whether the Russians were simply being good to us and attempting to save us from the oncoming German forces or whether they were making preparations to raze the city so as to leave it to the enemy a heap of ashes, as they had actually done in a lot of other instances. An order is an order, especially in war, so panic spread like lightning and people rushed to pack some scattered belongings and fled as fast as they could.

I still remember from my childhood days how people rushed into the middle of the street even at odd hours of the night whenever a fire broke out in our hamlet. The conflagration could have occurred all the way at the other end of town, but every last one of the inhabitants packed his possessions, dashed out of his house and stood outside, eyes raised toward the smoke billowing up to the sky. Now there was no smoke to choke off the breath but the flames of the world had finally engulfed Rutke and Jews struggled along the road leading to Bialystok, some with a horse and wagon, some with a cart that you had to push or pull yourself, and still others with a sack on their shoulders and carrying a valise to boot.

The ordinary Russian soldiers proceeded along the highway on foot. Officers rode horseback, but all were thoroughly beaten and downcast and kept on asking the same question over and over again: 'Where's the road to Mienzhenin?" because from Mienzhenin the roads fanned out to Lomzhe, Bialystok and Warsaw. They held maps in their hands but didn't know the way. Some soldiers kept looking for their regiment and others tried to run away from it. The overall impression you got from observing the Russian soldiers was that they were like sheep without a shepherd. They ran aimlessly first to Bialystok and then to Brest Litovsk, (Brisk), where their defeat was irrevocably sealed.

That night, about a week or two before the beginning of the month of Elul, (August), the Jews of Rutke slept in fields, under the open sky. Of course there are all kinds of sleep, but who could so much as close an eye on such a world-shaking night? People spread out their goods and put their children on them, praying that they would get at least some rest. And as for the parents, they set about reciting the Psalms, hoping in that way they would survive the night. Or else they sat huddled

together, attempting to figure out how things would shape up when the Germans arrive. Most of the Jews in the field weren't apprehensive about the Germans. One Jew said: "They'll understand our German and we'll understand their Yiddish." Another opinion: "The Germans can't possibly be worse than the Russians."

Here I'd like to acknowledge my own failing . . . I confess that one thought kept bothering me: would it be possible to make deals with the Germans as we did with the Russians? Will they "live and let live?" or will they be sticklers for the letter of the law and not allow the least deviation.

The news that a German detachment had already arrived in Rutke raced through the field like wildfire early in the morning. The little ones were joyfully awakened with the expectation that we'd be able to make our way home and start our lives all over again under the new regime. There were many who weren't quite that confident about the tolerance of their new masters, so they sought safety by continuing on to Bialystok. I, however, decided to take my chances and opted to return to Rutke. I thought it inevitable that the Germans would reach Bialystok as well, so what was to be gained by this ceaseless flight? Again, I had a workshop in Rutke and ran an enterprise that I didn't want to go to pot.

If you're seeking additional motivation for my decision, I wouldn't discard the possibility that if I had been psychoanalyzed at that moment, the doctor might have discovered that in my subconscious there was a desire to remain near Mienzhenin, where Chane Bashe and her children had lived. No doubt too that Beile and my feelings towards her would have been a most important element in the psychoanalytic process. And even though Chane Bashe's house had gone up in smoke and she and her children had left the village, the psychoanalyst

would probably have revealed a hope smouldering within me that they would perhaps return to reconstruct their lives there.

Coming back to Rutke, we found tens of wagons filled with wounded German soldiers. Their agonized cries of pain filled the air and terrified us and the German commander conscripted us to carry the injured into the synagogue and — to make a distinction — the church. For several days on end we heard those cries resound through the town. Later on they removed those who survived to hospitals and then ordered us to bury a sizable number of dead in a mass grave. I still shudder at the memory of that scene when the Germans commanded us to throw their dead comrades into that hole in the ground as though they were animal carcasses.

Little by little life under the Germans settled down. A lot of those who had gone to Bialystok out of fear of what would happen to them with a new regime in power returned and re-opened their shops. The Germans didn't interfere with the conduct of business, except for certain merchandise that was in short supply. You can understand, therefore, that commerce in those very items was the most profitable. Being very well acquainted with the highways and byways of the area, I established friendly relations with the commander of the German patrol in Mienzhenin, which under German control remained a hub whence roads fanned out to many other smaller and larger towns. The German patrol worked along with me and there was, thank G-d, no lack of prosperity for all concerned.

My personal contact and commercial relations with the Germans benefited not only me but all the Jews of Rutke. When there was a Jewish festive occasion in town, I would invite my German "buddies" to share in the fun and have a few drinks. Knowing that I wasn't an impecunious lad, the Germans and their Polish friends

asked me to play cards with them. For obvious reasons I frequently lost deliberately, though there were evenings when I could have taken all of them for their last cent.

One evening, just after a card game where I had "put on a performance", I looked across at the house of the seamstress, Chaye Soreh the blacksmith's daughter. Through the window I saw a familiar face that startled and then immobilized me. After recovering somewhat, I began walking back and forth in front of the dressmaker's home, talking to myself about what I had seen. Suddenly the thought struck me that the person my eyes had caught was none other than the little girl I came upon in Mienzhenin the night of the blizzard. I determined then and there not to lose her again.

I looked through the window several times and, sure enough, it was that same Beile from Mienzhenin who had helped her mother Chane Bashe knead and bake bread and challeh late into the night. Since that time a year had passed and she, of course, was a year older and even prettier than before. I listened to the voice within me and was completely overwhelmed by the thoughts racing through my mind.

That evening I found out that Chane Bashe had come back from Bialystok with her children. She moved into Rutke, where she supported herself by going with another woman to buy eggs, butter and other products in the nearby hamlets and then selling them at a profit. Chane Bashe was a very proud woman and refused to accept the relief that might ordinarily be due her as a widow with three children to provide for. She hustled and bustled, wandering over all the towns and then offering her wares to the local housewives. In that way she fed her family with the best food she could manage and provided them with the kind of love which only a Jewish mother like her was able to.

I had to resort to all kinds of subterfuges in order to



Jacob Hoffman and Beile Cooper in a picture taken in Rutke in 1919, when he was 19 and she 16.

bring a little extra food and clothing into Chane Bashe's house. Many times she couldn't be told that I was providing the stuff, even though I noticed that she began to look at me as a woman does when she sees a certain young man as a prospective son-in-law. She would often ask me how things were going in the workshop and business in general, tacking on a sort of maternal warning to be careful. "Remember Yankel . . . we're living in terrible times and you can't trust anyone," she advised me in a very apt and practical way.

In order to help Bashe indirectly, I took Chaim, her youngest son into my shop as an apprentice. In compensation for his services, he was given the opportunity as time went on to learn the leatherworker's trade.

Beile herself worked as a waitress in a restaurant and thus contributed to the support of the house.

"Chane Bashe, do you remember the night when you refused to allow me and my coachman to come into your inn?" I asked her once in a good-natured way after all of us had finished dinner in her house.

In her modest, somewhat shamefaced way, Beile lowered her head, a smile crossing her lips.

And Chane Bashe, clearing the dishes from the table, favored me with a maternal glance. Looking at me as one of her own, she answered: "That's why you're such a welcome guest now . . ."

9

Matches and Matchmakers Under the Germans

The situation of the Jews in town under the German occupation during the First World War was by far not the worst that had been experienced there. Of course, that statement would have to be modified by saying that such was the case till the last war, which completely destroyed everything and everyone. Those same Germans in World War II burned Jews in the gas ovens and slaughtered more than half a million Jewish children, some of them still nursing at their mother's breast, others of school age and all of them innocent of any wrongdoing. Yet it must be repeated that they were quite decent in World War I and reasonably easy to get along with.

That very thought often conjures up within me the specter of a great and terrible fear for the viability of our future in the so-called free and democratic world. "Don't advise the Devil as to where his opportunities lie", goes the saying, but in what way are our good friends among the nations better than the Germans of the pre-Hitler era? It takes only one maniac to agitate and stir up a whole people with the notion that the Jew is responsible for all the world's ills, that he has taken possession of Wall Street, is too influential in the communications media and other such shibboleths as old as the Jewish nation itself.

As I reflect on the Germans with whom I dealt during those years, I can't in any way imagine that they or their sons and daughters were capable, twenty years later, of murdering six million Jews for no reason other than that they were Jews.

Then too there were Germans with murderous propensities. My fellow townsman, Cantor Jacob Goldberg, reminds me of a scene that he lived through in Rutke, when a German officer wanted to kill me on the spot because I had taken his bicycle without permission and rode on it through the market place. He attacked me with venomous fury and true Germanic rage. If I hadn't been so agile and strong enough to stretch him out on the ground and take away his rifle, I would have become another anonymous statistic among the great number of war victims.

There was another German who would lord it over the village and separate the peasants from the products they had brought for sale. The markets in Rutke were always immense and during the German occupation they took on the dimensions of a fair. Jewish merchants, myself among them, waited a whole week for the market days, when there were under-the-table dealings in illegal merchandise, dealings which were supposed to be kept from the Germans. Those among them who were on to what was happening were handsomely rewarded to look the other way. The tanners from Grodne and Zabludovke came to Rutke to buy hides, a commodity the Germans had requisitioned for their own use. At that time I dealt with those skin merchants and with the Bialystok butchers, who would come on occasion to purchase cows for kosher meat. I used to buy young calves and place them to be fed for two years on one of the peasant farms in the countryside. I paid a modest fee, in addition to the manure, which was of prime importance to the peasant. After the cow had delivered a

calf, I sold the fattened animals and calves to the butchers in the market.

Heinrich Wilhelm, as we called that wild German, had put all Jewish business in jeopardy by instilling fear in the hearts of the peasants who came to the market. Because of his antics, the Christians were simply afraid to come to trade. Well, the day finally came when I grabbed this character from behind and gave him a dose of his own medicine with the very same walkingstick that he always carried with him in the style of the nobility. After my chastening encounter with Heinrich, the peasants saw that he wasn't quite the hero he made himself out to be and stopped being afraid of him.

I remember that on the evening of "l'affaire Heinrich", he revenged himself on the two little Jewish restaurants in Rutke. He went to the one run by Shiyeh Ziskind, Moshe Aaron's son, and also to Hinde's establishment and broke everything he could get his hands on. Fortunately for the two restaurateurs, the Jewish young people in town, especially the group that put on dramatic productions with me and sang in the Hazomir choir, came the next day and restored order in both locales, which served as meeting places for the youth and offered merchants an opportunity to grab a bite and relax on market days.

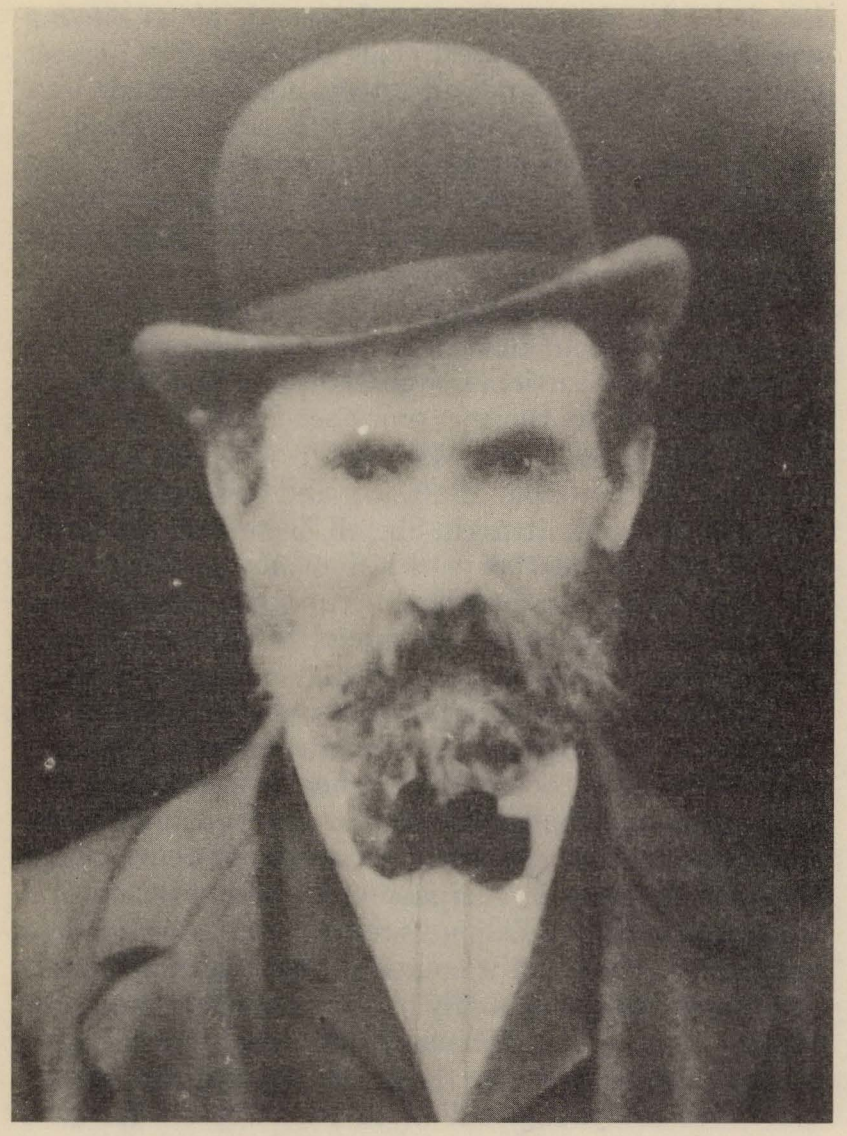
I wasn't more than eighteen years old when the Germans departed and left Poland in control. However, since I gave the appearance of being five years older, I found that at age sixteen and seventeen people began making me marriage propositions. Fathers sent professional matchmakers or just plain friends or acquaintances to speak to me about getting to know their daughters.

I remember that once they proposed "a rich girl from Lomzhe who is a talented piano player." So there were two considerations here: first of all, being rich

implied a handsome dowry and second, piano playing was then considered a prestigious attribute. The highest claim to distinction and self-esteem could be made by a young lady who was able to play the piano. "You don't have to lead her down the aisle immediately but at least take her for a walk," the matchmaker whispered in my ear, as though he were hiding the "find" from public view and reserving it for me alone.

Since I wasn't an impoverished young man by any means and I could tickle the ivories a bit myself, the proposal didn't particularly enchant me. Somewhere in the recesses of my thought processes I carried an image of that young Beile fromMienzhenin who had returned with her mother from Bialystok and now worked two days a week as a waitress in Shiyeh Ziskind's restaurant, not far from my leather works. Somehow or other I had taken her into our theatrical group and, reserved and withdrawn as she was, she agreed to take a role in a scene where several people were playing cards on stage.

Beile was a poor girl, but ever since the night of the blizzard in her mother's inn in Mienzhenin, when she stayed up till all hours helping her mother knead and bake bread and challeh for the next day's customers, she impressed me not only with her beauty but above all her fineness of character, compassion and industriousness. I used to go to Shiyeh Ziskind's restaurant quite often and see Beile at work. In the course of time I became almost like a member of the family in her mother's house. Once when I mentioned to Chane Bashe that I would like to become friendly with her daughter, she told me that the child was too young and could wait a while for such things. "I'm young too and can wait," a kind of impudent voice emanated from me, almost as though I stood in opposition to Chane Bashe's hope to be able to go to America, where she already had a married daughter, Rivke, and her oldest son, Shlomo.



Hersh Ber Cooper, Jacob Hoffman's father-in-law

This picture of Hersh Ber was taken after he came to America in 1912, while ill with the sickness from which he died in Philadelphia when a little past forty. The date was the 21st of Elul, 1913. He left a widow and three children in Mienzhenin.



Chane Bashe Cooper, Jacob Hoffman's mother-in-law

This picture of Chane Bashe was taken in 1918 for a passport while she was preparing to go to America, where she had a daughter and a son. Rivke, the daughter, died young. Chane Bashe died in Rutke on the 28th of Cheshvan, 1932.

I didn't stay in Rutke all the time; my business deals took me to a lot of outlying hamlets, among them nearby Zembrove, where I used to stay at an inn owned by a fine family called Zaromilsky. When there was no room in Zaromilsky's hotel, I rode on to that of Reb Boruch Kahan, who had a lodge with a lot of rooms. Reb Boruch had four beautiful daughters, the middle one of whom is married, (I pray for many years to come), to Cantor Zev Goldberg, the fellow townsman I mentioned earlier.

Most often, though, I would go to a more formal hotel belonging to the Zaromilskys, where there was an elegant restaurant and you could come into contact with Jewish merchants from the whole surrounding area.

Incidentally, when Poland became an independent state, Zaromilsky's hotel had as one of its guests none other than Henry Morgenthau Sr., then the American ambassador to Turkey, who had been sent by President Wilson to investigate the Jewish situation in Free Poland. The Poles celebrated their renewed state of independence by conducting vicious pogroms against their Jewish population. In Pinsk thirteen Jews died. The Poles, known for the unbridled fury of their attacks, displayed their deviltry in a few Galician towns. Thereupon the Jewish Board of Deputies in London protested in outrage to President Wilson. Also, Dr. Thon, Yitzchok Grinbaum and Noach Prilotzky, the then Zionist leaders in Poland, remonstrated strongly against anti-Semitism in their country.

As a result of the protests, President Wilson delegated the Jew, Henry Morgenthau Sr., (father of the later Secretary of the Treasury in President Roosevelt's cabinet and grandfather of the present District Attorney, Robert Morgenthau), to visit Poland and become acquainted with the situation there.

I remember as though it were today how the street

in Zembrove was black with people who wanted to catch a glimpse of the American ambassador and his party, stopping there on their way to Bialystok. No doubt President Wilson's intentions were good but if you ask what the trip accomplished on a practical level, all you have to do is examine the cooperation of the Poles with Hitler's hordes in destroying the thousand-year existence of the Jews in Poland. There was one positive result: Zaromilsky the hotelier had enough to talk about for months.

That same Zaromilsky had a lovely daughter about seventeen or eighteen years old, an extremely ardent Zionist and member of a Mizrachi, (religiously oriented), youth organization. She dressed very elegantly and was in the front rank of participants in the annual Flag Day for the Jewish National Fund.

Every time I stopped at Zaromilsky's hotel, that girl made a point of staying up late into the evening when I came back from my business transactions and entering into a lengthy discussion that lasted till the gray of dawn. Her father was a religious man and the boys in the house were brought up in the orthodox tradition. I thought at the time that the father apparently was encouraging her to be friendly to the young man from Rutke, as he called me. She was a pretty and interesting girl and I think that she liked me. But I had eyes only for Chane Bashe's daughter, who had begun to display a little friendship to me on a more overt level.

If, as Chane Bashe said to me, Beile was too young and had to wait . . . well, I too had a ways to go before reaching old age, so I was prepared to wait as long as need be.

The race to get me paired off in one instance put me in an embarrassing position. That happened when an uncle of Anna's, Beile's best girl friend in Rutke, began to nag me, saying he had a great match for me and the

other party was none other than Anna. Her father was a lessee at a nobleman's estate. He made various kinds of cheese which he brought, along with all sorts of fruit, to the Rutke market for sale.

I had the notion that the uncle didn't propose the match to me on his own, but on instruction from Anna's father, who probably held the view that in seeking a mate for one's daughter it's perfectly legitimate to go behind the back even of the daughter's best friend.

Later on, Anna came to a brother in Cleveland and was very happily married. She raised four sons who are important figures in the furniture industry. She attended all our family festivities and until the moment my wife Beile passed away, corresponded with her on a regular basis.

I smile now when I recall one particular occasion when Anna's uncle was especially importunate about the match with her. In an amused tone I asked him whether her friend Beile knew about his proposal. He understood perfectly well what I meant and from then on I heard nothing further from him.

When Anna and Beile found out later about the proposed match, (they happened to be working at the restaurant when they were told), they both thought it so funny and burst into such loud guffaws that all the customers eating there at the time couldn't control themselves and laughed along with them.

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Beile, (left), and her friend Anna, whom they tried to match with Hoffman.
Anna now lives in Florida.

10

"A German? — No, It's Yankel the Leatherworker"

It's impossible to describe the fright and the perils that Jewish merchants underwent during the German occupation when they had to transport a little merchandise from one town to another. People like myself, who had struck up an acquaintanceship with the German patrols and kept them quiet by bribes, were able to manage somehow but most of the Jewish businessmen went through utter hell. Their goods were confiscated and they themselves suffered beatings and even jail.

I remember how I unwittingly frightened the Jews in Tiktin when I rode into town for the first time on my bicycle, carrying a pretty heavy load of cigarettes that I had picked up in Bialystok. Since I was dressed in an outfit with jodphurs and rode on a bicycle to boot, a report flashed through the Jewish stores in the market, warning the owners that "a German is coming." As a result, they began closing their businesses at the height of the shopping day because of fear that the illegal merchandise some of them were carrying would be discovered.

I couldn't understand what was going on till one of the merchants to whom I was to deliver the cigarettes smilingly revealed the secret that had terrified the whole town. "Yankel, when you come to us, don't dress in jodphurs like a German and ride a bicycle," he

entreated me. Of course I understood his reasoning and acceded to his request on all my later trips to Tiktin.

An unusual event occurred about that time. I was riding my bicycle from Rutke to a nobleman named Grodzki to repair some harnesses on his estate. I rode at a leisurely pace past the forest, thinking about a new theater piece that I had just brought back from Warsaw. I used to go there often to visit my brother Moshe Aharon, who lived on Marshal Kovski Street and was a frequent visitor to 13 Telomatzke Street, Warsaw's literary center. In the distance I saw three figures moving quickly, leaving the road and entering the forest.

"Who knows who they are. Germans, maybe, or Polish bandits?" the thought ran through my head. "Should I continue my journey or do an about face and go back?"

Suddenly I heard a familiar voice in Yiddish: "Chane Bashe, Chane Bashe, it's not a German, it's Yankel the leatherworker."

The three figures who by now were standing close to me were no Germans, nor were they Poles. They were Chane Bashe from Mienzhenin, whose pretty daughter, Beile, I was seeking to marry, and her partner Matl the dairywoman, who was in Rutke a sort of feminine counterpart of Tevye the dairyman. Matl had taken Bashe in as a partner, so now both of them would visit the local hamlets, buying eggs and other dairy products. Little Zelde, Chane Bashe's youngest daughter, who later became my sister-in-law and is today Mrs. Davidson from Brooklyn, the only one remaining, (to one hundred and twenty years, I pray), of Chane Bashe's children went with them. They took Zelde along on their wanderings over the small towns because they felt that if they came across a German patrol, there was a possibility that the soldiers, in consideration for the child,

wouldn't molest them and let them continue on their way.

(Matl the dairywoman has a daughter in Los Angeles. Her name is Mrs. Rosenzweig, with whom my family maintains the friendship we formed long ago. She has a son who is a well-known lawyer. When he comes to New York on business, he gets together with my son, Hersh Ber, (Herbert), who was named after Chane Bashe's husband after he died in America while still quite young, leaving her a widow in Mienzhenin, with three children).

From the distance they thought it was a German riding on the bicycle, so they began running away to hide in the forest. When the incident was over, they thanked G-d that the man on the bicycle was none other than yours truly. For my part, I was equally grateful to the Almighty that the "three figures", who originally seemed so ominous, were such close and dear friends. I accompanied them to Mienzhenin and there hired a coach that took all three of them back to Rutke.

Yes, I did a favor that day for Chane Bashe when we were living under the Germans. But she more than repaid it a little later, when the Poles took over the reins of power.

The Hallerites were becoming more and more savage, beating up Jews and cutting off their beards. Those dyed-in-the-wool, anti-Semitic Polish patriots tore out half my father's beard in Ostrove in 1921, the same year I came to America but before I actually left. In 1930 they caught him again and beat him so savagely that he became ill and, never really recovering from the beating, passed away.

But I was a young fool and wanted to display my heroic qualities, thinking in my bravado that they wouldn't dare start up with me. Chane Bashe warned me that day not to go out into the street. "The Poles are

in a highly volatile mood . . . listen to me, Yankel . . . stay in the house," she cautioned me in a motherly manner. "No, me they won't bother," I answered and went outside on the road to my workshop, where I had a lot of jobs waiting for me.

Out of the blue two Poles on horseback appeared at my side and began driving me in the direction of the Rutke forest. No matter how I tried to maneuver myself out of their clutches, I couldn't escape. Their mouths spewed forth a flood of the most violent anti-Semitic invectives, interspersed with warnings that in the new Free Poland they would treat the "kikes" like manure.

I had no choice, so I went where they told me to, all the while reciting in a whisper as many of the Psalms as I knew by heart. "People won't even know where my bones are buried," I grieved silently. As sometimes happens in moments of great danger, a kaleidoscope of images passed before my eyes, recollections of my parents and brothers and sisters as well as more recent memories of my newly-found friends in Rutke . . . Chane Bashe's family and her daughter Beile.

My wallet was stuffed full of money. I knew they were about to kill me, but, I thought, why should I reward them for their effort? Just at that moment I noticed that we were passing by the thickly-wooded yard where the mayor of Rutke, with whom I was friendly, had his home. His name was Grodzhinski and he was somewhat distantly "related" because his wife was a Christian girl who formerly lived in Mienzhenin, and a daughter of Karl, a nobleman from that town. When Karl fought against the match, the later mayor used to sneak into Chane Bashe's inn and tryst with his sweetheart.

In the flash of an eye I took my wallet out of my pocket and heaved it in the direction of the mayor's yard. Luckily, the Hallerites, perched on their saddles,

didn't notice what I had done, possibly because they were so busy pouring forth an unending spate of curses on me and all Jews.

If I can tell the story today and feel happy about it, it's obvious that they didn't kill me, as I feared they would at the time. But it's still a miracle that I was alive when I finally got away from them. When they didn't find any money on me, they took my watch and a gold ring, along with some pieces of flesh from my finger. Even after so many years of living in America I can still feel the effects of their blows deep inside my bones. After they had mauled me without mercy, they took off some of the articles of clothing I was wearing — my jacket, trousers and shirt — and left me in the forest half-naked, bloodied and half-dead.

For understandable reasons, I was quite embarrassed as I made my way back to town. Somehow or other I managed to crawl up to the highway. I waited in misery for someone to pass by.

G-d was good to me. A Jew came along and I asked him to go to Chane Bashe in Mienzhenin or to my workshop and inform them of what had happened to me.

No more than three quarters of an hour passed by when Beile, her younger brother Chaim and the youngest sister Zelde arrived and brought me something to put on. Then all of us went back together to Chane Bashe's house, where I recovered from my beating.

On the way, I stopped by the mayor's yard and found my wallet intact, with none of the money missing. My friend the Polish mayor never knew what a fortune lay right under his nose.

Young as she was, Zelde took me by the hand and with the innocent sincerity you find only in children reminded me that not too long ago I helped her mother by introducing her to Matl the dairywoman. She also remembered I helped her personally on the same road



Two dashing cousins from the Hoffman family
Chaim Hoffman, (right), and Joseph Hoffman from Ostrove, first cousins of Jacob Hoffman and close friends of his youth. They were both considered the handsomest in town and were a source of family pride. Chaim came to America after World War I; Joseph went to France.

near the forest, when the Germans were still with us. "Now we're helping you, Yankel, under the Poles," she looked up to me like an experienced adult who fully understands the kind of upheavals taking place under our very eyes.

Under the Poles, something happened that made Chane Bashe unexpectedly hopeful after the great tragedy that befell her with the premature death of her older daughter Rivke, who passed away in a flu epidemic in Philadelphia in 1918, leaving a husband and two babes-in-arms. The son-in-law and widower, Harry Slutzky by name, wrote from Philadelphia that he was sending the sum of eight hundred dollars with an emissary on his way to Europe, so that she could buy steamer tickets for the whole family — meaning Chane Bashe and the three children, to come to America.

Chane Bashe began hoping that she'd be delivered from her difficult life in Rutke, and that when she arrived in America the whole family would be re-united. She also anticipated shedding a tear over the grave of her husband, Hersh Ber, who died at an early age in 1913 and that of her young daughter, Rivke. She also yearned to see the two grandchildren that Rivke had left orphaned. And, as I found out later, she was quietly toying with a notion that would have foiled all my hopes and plans for Beile and me.

The emissary from America actually arrived but instead of giving her the whole eight hundred dollars sent by her son-in-law, he put three hundred in her hand and disappeared. I still remember the name of that emissary but since he's long gone, I don't want to disturb his eternal rest.

Chane Bashe was again put into a difficult position and had to remain in Rutke. I as yet wasn't preparing to go abroad. However, I had to be on the alert and keep a watchful eye on the new developments in Free Poland.

Also, I had to keep abreast of Chane Bashe's future plans for her older daughter, Beile, who by now was far from indifferent to me as a friend. Still, we were both too young at the time to think seriously about the future.

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11

The Russians Return — But Painted Red

What is it that Rashi says at the beginning of the story about the selling of Joseph, a story that we once learned in school? "In his old age Jacob wanted some peace and quiet but instead he had to go through the anguish of that episode with Joseph."

The Jews in Rutke went through plenty of hardships in World War I, first under the Russians and then the Germans. The situation was a little more settled under the Poles, but of course that's a relative statement, because I don't know whether it can be said that things were ever stable when the Poles held power. Anyhow, a new catastrophe popped up.

A struggle developed between the Russians, already under the influence of the communists Lenin and Trotzky and the newly-awakened Polish nationalists, who challenged the Red Bear and wanted to annex parts of Lithuania and the border area up to Brest-Litovsk, which had belonged — as we see it does today — to the Russians.

It's not at all difficult to understand how the Poles had the audacity to start a war against the Russians, who obviously outnumbered them many fold. First of all, the Russians were severely mauled in the recently-ended war with the Germans and had just been through a revolution. Secondly, the Poles received a lot more

than mere encouragement from America and France, as was confirmed in later developments.

"Vayehi," a Hebrew word bearing the connotation of trouble in our long history, was again evident in the new calamity that befell the Jews. The Bolsheviks went to war against the Poles and set out for Warsaw. Since Rutke is approximately seventy-five miles from Warsaw, we were again caught between two fires and Jews were thrown into a panic. This time fear mounted even higher, because no matter how bitter life was under the Tsarist Russians, no one was under any illusions as to what awaited the Jews under a Bolshevist regime.

To our misfortune, the Russians defeated the Poles so completely that we could envisage the total destruction of Poland as a national entity, so that willy-nilly we saw our fate as sealed inevitably.

The Russians routed the Poles, and one black and tragic night we were all awakened with the alarm — the Reds are here! We had to evacuate our houses and yield to the Red armies, who kept on proclaiming: "Lenin and Trotzky are our gods."

The first thing the Russians did when they came into Rutke was to create a special committee from among the residents to help maintain order in the city. They wanted to know who the youth leaders were. Since I was fearful that they would find out that I'm a "capitalist", I took the bull by the horns and volunteered immediately, stating that I had long sympathized with the Bolsheviks and so became a member of the committee that was supposed to cooperate with the Soviet command. I hope all enemies of the Jews have as much desire to live as I to be part of a committee which, among other things, had as one of its missions the liquidation of private businesses. Included, of course, was my workshop, which had to be dissolved and its merchandise given away to "the people". The

Russians nominally paid for the goods but their currency was then worth no more than the Tsarist rubles. As a loyal citizen of communist Rutke I had to requisition my own possessions and give away my hard-earned workshop and untold numbers of harnesses.

I remember how the Catholic priest of Rutke stood on his knees before the Red "guests", begging them to spare his life. Finally they permitted him to go on condition that he keep the peasants in check and not permit them to carry on any kind of agitation.

But the greatest honor I had as one of the three members of the local committee came to pass when none other than Leon Trotzky himself came to Rutke on a white horse. He was on the way to the front, which was getting closer and closer to the Wisla River. As a committee member, I stood in the front rank at the approaches to Rutke and doffed my hat to the former Leibl Bronstein, who as Leon Trotzky organized the Red Army and together with Lenin was at the head of the revolution.

I'll wager that never in his wildest dreams did he imagine that the barbaric Georgian with the elongated moustache would push him out of the leadership and finally have him assassinated in far-away Mexico twenty years later.

In light of later anti-Semitic developments in Soviet Russia, it's not too far-fetched to speculate on the possibility that Trotzky was the first Jewish victim on whom Stalin loosed his anti-Semitic wrath, thus bringing into question the loyalty of all his Jewish supporters, even though everyone knew how slavishly some Jews followed him.

Early that morning in Rutke Trotzky thundered forth his adulation for the heroic Red Army. From his mounted horse he encouraged them to march from victory to victory till they crossed the Wisla. The Red

Army saluted him and, surrounded by high-ranking Soviet officers, he rode off to Warsaw.

But it didn't take too long, not more than a few weeks, when the wheel of fortune turned full cycle. The "Miracle by the Wisla" had infused the Poles with heroism and the Red Army began to retreat, driven by Polish soldiers equipped and armed with the help of America and France. The same thing that happened in the war with the Germans repeated itself. The Russians tumbled down from the heights of a tremendous victory to the sloughs of a shameful defeat.

The Russian army was hungry and battle-weary; most of them didn't even know for whom they were fighting.

Near Rutke there were some great forests and a railroad that ran in the direction of Warsaw. The Poles and the Russians fought bitterly one whole day and half a night and finally the Red Army began to fall back. At that time I went into the forest with two friends and we were almost hit by flying bullets from all sides. Russian soldiers were dragging along without shoes, their feet horribly swollen. We helped a lot of the wounded. We buried a few of the dead.

And now — another alarm in town.

The Russians suffered a death-blow by the Polish Army.

Shortly after that defeat, my troubles with the Hallerites and the Polish authorities in Lomzhe began. It was apparently a life and death matter to the Poles that Jacob Hoffman put on one of their army uniforms.

The Poles began a relentless hunt to catch Jews and arrest them for not serving in the army. They lurked at every road and path, meticulously checking the goods Jews were transporting in their wagons and the age of the drivers as well. It's as though they were revenging themselves on the Jews for their cooperation during the



Jacob and Beile Hoffman after they came to America

German occupation and earlier for their collaboration with the Russians. I myself was guilty of a third sin in addition to the first two. Nominally I had worked with the Bolsheviks and been a member of the committee of three who met Trotzky on his white horse and welcomed him. They also accused me of looking on with indifference when the Bolsheviks harassed the Catholic priest till he went down on his knees and wept like a child to have his life spared.

My first confrontation with the Poles after their victory was on the road, while I was transporting a wagon of furs and one of their patrols ordered me to stop to be investigated.

"Stop, kike!" the soldier with the rifle in his hand shouted to me. Of course I had no choice, so I stopped and waited, my heart pounding, to see what my fate would be.

A PERSONAL STATEMENT

I'd like to thank all my friends and fellow townspeople who have written and telephoned me about this series of memoirs. I really appreciate their expression of interest and hope to answer all of them personally.

I feel it necessary, however, not to postpone the correction of some regrettable expressions that appeared in the article of October 22nd about the Rutke rabbi, Rabbi Yitzchok Aryeh Hirschfeld, (OBM), that can be interpreted as being offensive to his good name. After a time-span of sixty years since the days of my youth in Rutke, it's not unlikely that lapses of memory would occur.

G-d forbid that I, of all people, be guilty of intentionally demeaning a scholar. Those who know me will vouch for the care I take in respecting the dignity of all who labor in the vineyards of Jewish scholarship.

I therefore wish to express my deepest regret to the children of the Rutke rabbi, (OBM), and assure them that I meant no discourtesy.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to correct a mistake when I said that the Rutke rabbi left two children, a son and a daughter, in America. The fact is that he left five children, four of whom are in America and one, a daughter, in Israel. Of those in America, one son is a ritual slaughterer in Montreal, a second a rabbi in Chicago and a third who lives in New York. The latter was a student of the principal of the Lomzhe Yeshiva, Rabbi Yechiel Mordechai Gordon, (OBM), and also studied with Rabbi Shimon Shkop, (OBM), from Grodne. Before he retired, he was an instructor in Talmud in the Yeshiva of Flatbush. The daughter living in America, Mrs. Batya Byali, is an intelligent and well-educated lady and I thank her warmly for having brought to my attention the unwitting errors I made.

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12

A Sad Friday Evening in Ostrove

"Dirty, lousy Jew! . . . why the hell aren't you serving your country in the army?" That was the most worrisome and the most frequent question I had to be prepared to answer every time a Polish military policeman stopped me in his brutish way. It was of no real consequence if I replied that I wasn't of military age and therefore too young to be a soldier because the Pole didn't really want to hear what I had to say; he merely sought a pretext to bully and harass a Jew, the eternal scapegoat.

On that particular occasion they caught me driving a wagon-load of skins from Brok, a little hamlet approximately ten viorsts, (six miles), from my birthplace Ostrove. And no matter how strongly I hinted that it would not be to their disadvantage if they stopped badgering me, they continued to insist that I was trying to avoid military service and evade a patriotic duty and besides, that I shouldn't be riding about free as a bird and making all that money. In addition to the blows they showered on me with typical Polish generosity, they took away the horse and wagon and the goods as well, thus dealing my business a severe blow.

You can understand that I was extremely miserable. They took from me what amounted to a

fortune, even by the standards of those times. Today, as I reflect back on that incident near Ostrove, I discover that it was then precisely that the thought first occurred to me that there was absolutely no point in my remaining in Poland. However, it was still not clear to me in which direction I should turn, the Land of Israel or America. If later I finally settled on America it was possibly not a matter of conscious selection on my part but rather a reactive consequence of events initiated by others.

I made my way on foot to Ostrove, bemoaning the bitter lot that dogs us as Jews, no matter the nature of the regime under which we happen to live. Russians, Germans, Poles, all hate the Jew with consummate bitterness and want to hurt and even destroy him. So why not go to the Land of Israel, our very own land, on our own soil and under our own skies?

When I arrived in Ostrove, my parents were very frightened at my forlorn appearance. The extreme fright I had experienced turned me white as chalk and I was depressed at the loss of the horse and wagon and the merchandise I was transporting to my workshop in Rutke, where I had many orders to fill. The butchers on Yatkever Street embraced me like a brother, because in fact most of them were relatives to whom I had sold cattle in the markets of Rutke.

Mother was very protective and comforted me with the kind of soothing, maternal words she would use in talking to a babe in the cradle. "May they all suffer the fires of hell a thousand times over for what they did to you . . . don't take it to heart, my child," she reasoned gently with me. I looked at her with great tenderness. It's as though I had some prescience that before long I would fly off, far away from my parents, Ostrove, Rutke and the hated, anti-Semitic Poles. Coming back to Rutke, I quickly found out that any day now the Poles

might come into my workshop and peremptorily haul me off to begin my army service. Polish gendarmes would frequently rove the town, grab some youngsters at random and ship them off to Lomzhe.

Since I was on a friendly basis, (for a consideration, of course), with a highly placed police official in the town, he always informed me as to when the gendarmes were coming so that I would have time to hide in an attic and avoid seizure by covering myself with straw.

When I got fed up with the attic-climbing routine and had had my fill of straw, I was helped by a friend who was a discharged veteran and seven years older than myself. He lent me his indentification pass, to which the kindly police officer affixed my photograph. With that pass I was in a much less precarious position and able to travel to fairs and display my leather goods. The last fair I traded at in Poland was in Isakale. But instead of doing business, I got into a fracas with some Polish bullies who had begun to beat up Jews in the marketplace and tear out their beards, an indignity as painful as it is humiliating. I couldn't remain indifferent when a non-Jew hit a Jew, because in every such incident I saw before my mind's eye the image of my revered father, Cantor Isaac, half of whose beard had been torn out by ruffians.

My borrowed pass was good for a while but it didn't last too long. One dismal morning the policeman came in and told me regretfully that he could no longer be of help. He had received a direct, no-nonsense order from the military in Lomzhe to deliver Yankel Hoffman from Rutke for duty and that he was personally responsible to see to it that said Yankel didn't disappear. It was no secret in town as to who the informer was that betrayed me. There was a rich miller living on the outskirts of town who looked with the jaundiced eyes of an anti-Semite at every Jewish young man that he saw living

freely and he constantly informed on them to the police authorities in Lomzhe, giving names and addresses. At that point, the Polish policeman made me solemnly swear that I would no longer show anyone the pass to which he had attached my photograph. He warned me that if I used it again we'd both rot in jail, together with the good friend who had lent it to me.

I gave the police official an additional "present" and asked him for a favor. "I realize," I said, "that it's your personal responsibility to deliver me to the army post in Lomzhe. But why can't I bid my parents farewell before being shipped to G-d knows where?" After lengthy negotiations and still another "gift", (money was surely the key to this man's heart), he agreed not to send me along with all the other young men but with a special policeman who would accompany me to my folks' home. Afterwards he would leave me in the Ostrove barracks, from which point they would deliver me to Lomzhe.

The fact that I had fallen into the hands of the Poles deeply affected someone else in Rutke. Beile Cooper, Chane Bashe's daughter, went about weeping copiously and couldn't find the words to bolster my sagging spirits. Though we had never really discussed our future relationship seriously, everyone in town considered us man and wife to be. That's the way we thought of ourselves as well since that fateful and solemn night in Mienzhenin and, more especially, since the time Chane Bashe had come with her three orphans to live in Rutke, where I had already established my workshop. We behaved like we belonged to each other, even though there was no formal, verbal agreement nor any public plighting of our troth.

Neither Beile nor I was even remotely aware of the conspiracy that Chane Bashe had conjured up to separate us, as I'll relate in greater detail in a

subsequent chapter. Beile told me of her desire to go to Ostrove in the same coach with me. She said she wanted to accompany me to the furthest point possible. The police official accomodated her and gave her permission to travel along with us.

Bitter and psychically despondent though I was, Beile's presence was of enormous comfort to me. First of all, it provided evidence that my friendship with her was not one-sided. I also interpreted it as a favorable omen that she wanted to go to my parents' house so that they could see each other and make a mutual assessment.

As I was riding on the wagon under the eagle eyes of a policeman who had taken me away under escort on Friday, a brainstorm hit me. What about the idea that Beile and I should go to a rabbi by ourselves and get married there on the spot? I surmised from the look in Beile's eye that she was receptive to my proposal and ready to listen to me recite "Harei Aht", the words uttered by Jewish grooms consecrating their brides to them, before I get sent off by the Poles. Who knows whether we would be fortunate enough to see each other again? At that moment a second thought struck me. If there is a possiblity of not meeting again, why bring that kind of misfortune on the head of such a comely Jewish girl?

When the policeman led Beile and me into my folks' house, the Sabbath candles on the table were already giving off their cheerful glow. Mother in her white apron almost fell into a dead faint from fright. "What's going on? Huh? What happened here, Yankel?" was about all she could say, as if her tongue had become paralyzed as a result of the sudden and unexpected visit by her youngest son, a young girl and a policeman.

When my father came home from synagogue, mother stationed herself at the threshhold and waited for him. Before he had a chance to become as



Jacob Hoffman as a young man with his only daughter Gittl, (Gladys), named after his mother, OBM, from Ostrove. *Today her name is Mrs. David Silber. She is the mother of a son studying at the Flatbush Yeshivah and a daughter at the Midwood Day School.*



Beile as a young wife with her son Hersh Ber,
named after her father, OBM.

overwrought as she, mother told him that some unexpected guests had arrived.

"Sabbath greetings, Sabbath greetings to all!" sang out father as he embraced me in his strong, wide-open arms.

"What can I sing for your pleasure, Yankel? Well, we'll chant Shalom Alechem," (Peace Be With You), said father as he burst happily into song. Of course, I helped along and it was as though I were reliving the good old days at the cantor's podium or the Omshinov Rabbi's table.

Meanwhile, my mother entered into an animated conversation with Beile, who had caught a nasty cold on the trip home. Mother offered her guest an efficacious remedy for a multiplicity of ailments, to wit — goat's milk. "Before you go to bed I'll give you a glass of goat's milk and, G-d willing, you'll get up tomorrow completely cured," I heard my mother saying to Beile as she felt her forehead to see whether she had temperature. From the manner in which she looked at Beile I could easily surmise that mother found no fault with her daughter-in-law to be. From her side, Beile felt very much encouraged by the pleasantness and sincere friendship she had encountered in my house. I'm sure that a significant part of her satisfaction stemmed from the resplendent Sabbath table that had been set and the singing of my father and his youngest son, her friend Yankel.

"Give the 'uncircumcised one' something to eat," said father to his wife as he recited "Eshes Chayil", (Woman of Valor), the Friday night prayer that sings the praises of the woman of the household. So, like a true woman of valor, my mother obeyed and invited the policeman to be seated at a table that stood near the entrance and on which father used to set down his daily income from the butcher shop. Mother served the guest

a hefty piece of challe and an even heftier piece of fish stuffed with roe. I wish all Jewish invalids could have that man's appetite! He felt so at ease with us that he set his gun aside and had no hesitancy in asking for another glass of whiskey.

We sang the *Kiddush,* (Prayer over the Wine), and ate a sumptuous Friday-night meal. Then we sang Sabbath songs and recited the Grace after Meals but we couldn't shake our feeling of anxiety. Even the "additional soul" that takes possession of a Jew when he celebrates the Sabbath was troubled.

Nobody would verbalize it, but the words hung ominously in the air — who knows when we'll see each other again . . .



The Hoffmans on a visit to Israel.

13

Reporting to the Military Authorities in Lomzhe

Under the watchful eyes of a Polish policeman, none of us slept a wink all through that Friday night. Father and mother hovered over me continually, as one hovers over an invalid whom the doctors have despaired of. At such times you can't say what's on the tip of your tongue, though the look in your eyes tells everything.

It was a night of grief and uncertainty for all of us. But more than everyone else, the one who had the most difficulty controlling herself was my friend Beile Cooper from Mienzhenin. She was given permission to travel in the same wagon that the high police official from Rutke had ordered me, under arrest, to take to Lomzhe. He allowed me to stop at Ostrove en route to say farewell to my parents and family before being sent by the Poles to serve in the army and be punished for having evaded them till then.

Beile coughed and sobbed like a child all night. The goat's milk that Mother had given her as "medicine" for her cough did hardly any good. We sat on the sofa and reminisced about our friendship, the youthful encounters in Rutke along with other members of our club of young Zionists and the plays in which Beile had by now begun to participate, although she remained as withdrawn and bashful as before. We also spoke about our first meeting on that snowy night in Mienzhenin,

when I was only fifteen years old and she was twelve, that fateful night when I was introduced to Chane Bashe and her three orphans.

The armed policeman sat by the door all night and, (heaven forfend!), guarded against the escape of the prisoner. Should Jacob Hoffman not appear before the military authorities in Lomzhe, the whole Polish regime would be in danger. And even if the whole government were not involved, then at least the fate of the high police official from Rutke would be in jeopardy. It was vital that he show his loyalty, and more than that, his innocence of the rumors that he was taking bribes.

Father lay down to rest a while, but before daybreak he had already awakened and reviewed the weekly portion of the Torah together with its cantillation. How beautifully his voice and his chanting sounded in my ears that Saturday morning in Ostrove, my last Saturday in my parents' home. I myself couldn't believe that this would be the last time I would hear father's magnificent chanting of the portion of the week and his special style of rendering the Haftorah.

And while father sat at the table with the open Chumash before him, singing aloud, mother entered and brought hot tea from a glazed pot which had been standing in the oven all night next to the cholent. She then went back to the kitchen and brought out a sliced "babke" that she used to sprinkle with cinnamon as she kneaded it, making it really delicious.

But my dear mother Gittel, (may she rest serenely in Paradise!), didn't talk much that pre-dawn because whenever she began to say something, a flood of tears burst from her eyes. "Eat, children," she said as she glanced at me and Beile, and her voice broke with the heavy burden pressing on her heart.

When morning finally came, the policeman appeared at the table and said it was time to go. He had

an order to present me at the Ostrove barracks Saturday morning. From there I was to be sent to Lomzhe.

The atmosphere in the house became like that in a house of mourning, (G-d forbid!). Mother broke down. Beile now wanted to show how strong she was. She embraced my mother and tried to calm her by speaking softly. "Don't lose hope . . . we'll see each other yet on joyous occasions," Beile comforted her. But those words brought mother to a fresh outburst of tears that overcame Beile too. Both of them began to sob and look at me as though I were a condemned man about to start his last journey.

Father controlled himself, put on his tallith and on top of that his overcoat. He gave me his hand to say goodbye before going to synagogue to join the early minyan that recited all of the Psalms before the regular service on Saturday morning. He looked me straight in the eye and without the least outward emotion said to me: "Be well, Yankel, may G-d be with you wherever you go." He went to synagogue and I was taken under police escort to the Ostrove barracks, where by chance I met my brother-in-law, Meyer Rosenthal. (Fate later brought us together on the same ship to America). He was in similar trouble. A Polish uniform awaited him too in Lomzhe.

The policeman handed me over to the Ostrove gendarmerie, together with a sheaf of documents in which there was undoubtedly an account of my offense against the newly independent Poland. He saluted the Ostrove chief of police and went back on the way to Rutke, the second home town in which I had spent so many pleasant years.

But Beile didn't listen to me. As long as I remained in the Ostrove barracks, she came every day with one of my sisters and shouted up to me, tears flowing: "Yankel, how long will they hold you?" About dawn on Tuesday



Jacob Hoffman, *(center), surrounded by the trustees, among them three Haganah officers, of the Martyrs Synagogue, which he and his wife helped build in Maoz Aviv, north of Tel Aviv. The second person on the right is the famous Hebrew writer and former editor of the Davar, David Zakkai, OBM, a friend of Ben Zvi and Ben Gurion. Recently he lived at Maoz Aviv, where he was a synagogue trustee.*

they told us to expect that we'd leave for Lomzhe. Outside, my whole family waited to look at me and my brother-in-law before they sent us to the doctors in Lomzhe.

When my mother embraced me tearfully, a Polish policeman threw her aside furiously and added a few choice cursewords that were unfortunately too well-known. "My poor mother," I thought, "did you do anything to deserve being pushed away from your youngest child before he's taken from you?" but I was helpless. I looked on with clenched lips and was silent. "Mother, be well, don't worry." I managed to say that before the wagon with the prisoners began to move. "Yankel, write, remember," my ears caught Beile's last words when the team of horses, as though newly awoken from slumber, strained forward on the road to Lomzhe.

As my heart prophesied, the doctors in Lomzhe found me in excellent physical condition and recommended my placement in the heavy artillery. Before I had even one minute to recount for them a few of the ailments I complained about, they took me away, together with all the other recruits, to a barracks surrounded by a high fence.

What can we say? I looked at my new lodgings . . . a shudder passed through my body and a pain through my heart. How can I remain here when I have in Rutke a whole warehouse full of goods and my own tannery with orders that must be filled? Everything that I achieved would go to pot here!

And what would happen to my friendship with Beile? That was another thought that gave me no rest. Is this really the end of both our dreams?

The world says that a human being is stronger than iron; and so it is with a person's will. I decided that I couldn't stay here, no matter what the Polish government wanted. I crawled on all fours until I

reached the high fence. It must be that G-d Himself watched over me and gave me the strength and courage to climb over the fence and jump into the potato patch on the other side. Soldiers paced back and forth and I lay there, hidden in the patch, till it got dark. I was able to reach the city and knock on the door of a leathermaker with whom I had done some business. Don't ask me how I managed it and how the patrol didn't catch me, because I can't answer. Perhaps my mother's tears sustained me. Perhaps it was Beile's broken heart. And maybe it was my father's recitation of the Psalms.

At the leathermaker's house in Lomzhe I rested a while and came to myself. At night I rented a wagon and made my way to Rutke. My first stop was at Chane Bashe's house.

Chane Bashe and certainly Beile couldn't believe their eyes when they saw me. "How, Yankel, how did you pull it off?" I didn't know how to answer them, except: "My mother's tears and my father's Psalms and your good wishes."

The first one to pay a visit to the workshop was the high police official from Rutke who only a week ago had sent me under police escort to Lomzhe by way of Ostrove.

He greeted me like an old friend and informed me that henceforth he would get from me no less than 600 zlotys a week.

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Beile with her brother Shlomo



Jacob Hoffman is presented with a citation by the Histadrut Campaign
From right to left: Isaac Faigenbaum, Jacob Nebrasky, Rabbi David Haymovitz, Jacob Hoffman, I.K. Goldstein, President of the Labor Zionist Alliance, and Bernard Jacobson, Executive Director of the Histadrut Campaign.

14

Chane Bashe Wants to Spoil My Happiness

The order of the Rutke police chief that I pay him 600 zlotys a week in hush money was by far not the worst thing that awaited me when I came back to town, after I had run away from the Lomzhe barracks.

My leather workshop and the tannery brought in enough money to pay the Pole and afford me a living as well.

Disaster struck me from a totally different direction. None other than Chane Bashe, Beile's mother, had resolved to tear her daughter away from me and send her to America. There she would marry the husband of her deceased older daughter, Rivka. She had passed away in 1918, while still a budding young woman of twenty-eight, leaving behind two small orphans.

At first Chane Bashe had herself hoped to go to America with her three children, thanks to the emigration papers that the young widower, Harry Slutsky of Philadelphia sent her along with 800 dollars for steamship tickets, through an "agent" who had come from America. Slutsky apparently had thought from the very beginning of bringing Chane Bashe with the children, so that he could marry his wife's younger sister. He would thus have a beautiful wife and the children a mother, instead of a step-mother.

When Hersh Ber, Chane's husband, came to America in 1912, he couldn't find suitable employment.

His compatriots brought him to Philadelphia, and the Slutzky family, which ran a bakery there, helped him tremendously. But Hersh Ber became quite sick from the difficulties and heartaches he had experienced in America. His fellow townsmen wrote to Chane Bashe in Mienzhenin, where she had an inn, informing her that her husband was critically ill. She immediately sent Rivka, her oldest daughter, to America to take care of her sick father. However, Hersh Ber became more emaciated by the day and he died, still in his youth, a few months after Rivka's arrival in 1913.

Young Harry Slutsky then got married to the newly-arrived Rivka, who was no less beautiful than her younger sister Beile. Shortly after her marriage, Rivka brought her brother Shlomo to America. He was later fated to play an important role in my reunion with Beile when she came to the States and stayed with her brother in Philadelphia.

Chane Bashe's plan to go to America with her three orphans, Beile, Chaim and Zelde, came to nought, because the "agent" from the States disappeared with the remaining 500 dollars. But she didn't let that faze her and decided that Beile should go by herself and become a mother to Rivka's orphans and a wife to Rivka's husband, Harry Slutsky.

Chane reasoned that I was a young man whom the Polish gendarmes were chasing after, so why shouldn't Beile place her own happiness above what people call "romantic love"? She could go to Philadelphia and not be concerned about Germans and Russians and establish there a fine home for herself and Rivka's husband and children. True, she was very taken with me, a young man who was a go-getter, earned a good salary, and, most important, came from a fine Jewish home in Ostrove. But in those turbulent, war-torn years, when there were unprovoked attacks on Jews, a visa and

a steamship ticket to America were the greatest good fortune that could befall a Jewish girl.

Beile was then almost eighteen, but above all she was an obedient child. So when her mother said: "It's light," there was no arguing even though it was pitch black outside. Her mother also influenced her strongly with the idea that Rivka's orphans needed a mother, not, G-d forbid, a step-mother.

To say that I was then in a confused state of mind would be an understatement. Life had simply ended for me. I had said nothing about the matter to Beile. Officially we were not bride and groom, so what was there to discuss or make demands about? And why eat her heart out? Deep inside me I felt that she was suffering a great deal of anguish in doing what she did and enduring enough pain, so why pour salt on her wounds?

I stopped coming to Chane Bashe's home, where I had been a virtual member of the household. I even avoided going to Shiye Ziskind's restaurant, where Beile was a waitress.

About that time the word "America" had begun to jiggle about in my mind. Why should I remain here in Rutke, trembling at the thought of the Polish gendarmes coming? No matter how dear the town was to me, was there any point in a young man almost twenty-one years of age endlessly paying the Polish policeman 600 zlotys a week in hush money?

I fooled myself into believing that I didn't know the real reason why America suddenly began churning about in my mind. On the one hand, my pride as a youth said to "be a man" and not plunge into despair because my girl was leaving for America. On the other hand, I could find no peace. Then there came to mind one of my mother's sayings that you must accept the inevitable and not allow it to plague you forever.



A picture that was found of Beile Hoffman's sister and brother-in-law, Rivke and Harry Slutzky, with their children in Philadelphia, shortly before the sister died.

When I learned that Beile had to travel to Lomzhe to arrange for a pass, I volunteered to accompany her and help take care of the necessary documents. The previous pass that Chane Bashe had had issued for herself and the three children was no longer valid, and Beile needed her own pass. Travelling at that time was extremely dangerous for me, especially in the direction of Lomzhe, from whose military barracks I had deserted. But an inner unease drove me to make the journey. To this day I can't account clearly to myself for that illogical act, because if I had been caught, Beile too would have become enmeshed in the calamity. Unless . . . unless some evil spirit impelled me to prevent Beile's departure for America.

We left Rutke in the morning and returned at twilight but all day long we were almost completely silent, except for what was necessary to arrange for the pass. Several times my tongue began to move, as if to ask her: "Beilinke, how can the two of us permit such a thing? Have our hearts turned to stone?" But I remained silent. I suffered and said nothing.

And apparently she too had the same thoughts. Several times I noticed her glancing at me as if to open a conversation but she too suffered in silence.

After that trip to Lomzhe, I remained in my workshop as though in a daze, cogitating and agonizing over a solution. How does one escape from this quagmire? "Perhaps," thought I, "my mother would have acted no better than Chane Bashe and defrayed my expenses to America if only I had gotten the proper papers from someone."

Suddenly I got a bright idea. Avrohom Moishe Davis, the ritual slaughterer's son, is now in town on a visit to see his wife Neshke. Everyone is marveling at the handsome American with the shiny yellow shoes and hat decorated with a tinder-red band not seen even in

Warsaw. Why not approach Avrohom Moishe to provide me with emigration papers to America? I'm very friendly with his whole family and he certainly wouldn't deny me this favor.

It turned out I was right. Avrohom Moishe, already interspersing some English words as he spoke, said: "Sure, sure I'll give you papers . . . why not?"

The question was, however, what use Avrohom Moishe's papers would be to me if the Poles wouldn't give me a pass. A tall young man almost twenty-one years old should be wearing a Polish uniform and not go around dreaming about leaving for America.

And without a pass it was useless to talk about a visa, which was a difficult matter in and of itself at the American consul's office in Warsaw. That consul had caused a lot of needless difficulty and denied visas to thousands of Jews, thus denying them life.

There is a saying somewhere that goes: "More recent difficulties make you forget earlier ones." Alter Krup, my employee in the workshop, rushed breathlessly into my room, shouting: "Yankel, the gendarmes are coming!"

That's all I needed to hear. I jumped through the window into the priest's garden and lay there in terror till it got dark outside. It was then that I began wandering over the long road that in half a year brought me to America.

I abandoned everything and ran along the road to Mienzhenin, hoping to reach Bialystok.

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The Hoffmans on a trip to Israel

15

Waiting on Line for a Visa to America

After I deserted from the military camp in Lomzhe, the Poles sent teams of gendarmes to Rutke to look for me. Fear of the consequences of being caught finally drove me away, never to return, from my home town, workshop and dear and irreplaceable friends. So I began running in the dead of night towards Mienzhenin. Half-dead with fatigue and fright, I managed to make my way to the home of the Eastman family, who had returned to their inn after the war.

The Eastman inn, which as you learned earlier was for many years in competition with Bashe's, was supposed to have been my hideout at this juncture. I thought of concealing myself there till the next morning, when I would leave for my brother Moishe Aharon's house in Bialystok.

However, things were not destined to go smoothly for me. I'd hardly had time to catch my breath after my perilous journey when the innkeeper's two daughters ran in with the ominous news that a carriage driven by two gendarmes had been seen in the distance. Whom else could they have been searching for if not Yankel Hoffman from Rutke and Ostrove? Without too much deliberation, the girls advised me to jump through the open window and hide myself in a pit used for storing potatoes. Of course I followed their advice. Did I have

any choice? I had irrevocably resolved, come what may and no matter what devious path I had to follow that I would get to America, even if the Poles looked for me forever.

Luckily the carriage drove right by Mienzhenin, so I didn't have to spend what would surely have been one of the most miserable nights in my life in the potato pit. Despite my tribulations, I couldn't help but be reminded of the story in the Bible that tells of the selling of Joseph, when he was thrown into a pit on the way to his fateful mission in Egypt, the America of those times.

I negotiated the thirty five miles from Mienzhenin to Bialystok not by travelling the regular highway but through fields and woods, in order to avoid the dreaded Polish soldiers who constantly patrolled the roads. It was autumn and the earth was soaked with rain. The trees kept on shedding their summer leaves as though they were preparing themselves for that well-known icy Polish winter, with its heavy snows and blustering blizzards. And what were my prospects that winter? Where would my young but nevertheless tired bones find shelter and rest? How many blizzards would I yet have to endure till I succeeded in getting to a safe haven?

My brother Moishe Aharon, the third of the brothers in my family, had a big leather business on Bialystok Road. Previously he had had an extensive leather factory and business in Warsaw under the Russians and the Poles. But the Poles gave him such a hard time, organizing a tight boycott against his products, that he moved to Bialystok. In 1926 this same brother emigrated to Israel and two years later went to Bogota, Colombia where he died three years ago.

When my brother first caught sight of me, he was extremely disturbed at my appearance. I was dripping wet, miserable and seedy-looking because of my life on

the run. My face was badly scratched from twigs in the forest on which I had gotten caught and stumbled over. The sole of one shoe was flapping about, half-torn away and trailing behind like a peasant.

The very first thing my brother did was to close the store and bring me to his house on Vashlikover Street. To remain in a place of business located on a fairly well-traversed street, exposed to the comings and goings of the public and thus the possibility of being seen and identified, was too dangerous for me. We passed by the city clock, which I paid more attention to this time than ever before. It's as though I were taking my farewell of that clock and all the beautiful Jewish homes and communal institutions situated on Vashlikover Street.

But there was no time to bid adieu to my beloved Bialystok; I could feel the Polish soil literally smoldering under my feet and I had to find a life boat that would take me away from the turmoil of that country and bring me to America, where life had its difficulties as well but you were afforded a measure of personal safety.

My brother Moishe Aharon had a broad acquaintanceship in Bialystok because he was the only one able to manufacture the fine leather articles demanded by the fastidious Polish officers and noblemen. He took me to a high official in the Bialystok fire department and arranged for a pass bearing my name, but dated so that I was few years older and indicating that I had been born in Amdur, near Grodne. Why Amdur, you might ask? Because Amdur was a city that the Poles had captured from the Lithuanians. Since, therefore, Amdur was essentially an occupied city, the Poles would obviously have invited breaches of security, if not actual desertion, had they attempted to recruit the former residents of that city for their armed forces. From Bialystok I immediately sent a message to the "new American", Avrohom Moishe Weiss, the son of

the Rutke ritual slaughterer, to meet me in Warsaw. We would then go together to a lawyer expert in making out emigration papers indicating that someone in America was requesting me and vouchsafing against my becoming a public charge.

From Bialystok to Warsaw I rode in a coach and — thank G-d for small favors — in the open and completely without fear. In my pocket I had a pass that met all the legal requirements and Moishe Aharon gave me a few zlotys so that I could have some pocket money for my needs. All that remained from the considerable fortune I had amassed in Rutke was a big, fat zero.

This time when I got to Warsaw I didn't go to the hotel on Nalevke Street that I usually frequented and where I met with the young men and women from the surrounding provinces who were as active as I on behalf of Zeire Zion and the Jewish National Fund. Instead of Nalevke Street, my brother gave me the address of his father-in-law, a member of the Ger chassidic sect, whose name was Reb Moishe Shmuel Guberstein, living on 8 Genshe Street. Reb Moishe Shmuel was the proprietor of a grocery store but he spent much more of his time in the Ger shtibl, (an appellation given to a small chassidic synagogue), than in his store. Reb Moishe was most displeased when his daughter married my brother, who was an intellectual, loved to take part in dramatic presentations and a frequent visitor at 13 Telematzke Street, where he mixed intimately with a great many Jewish writers and artists. Later on, when my brother had become successful in business and helped his father-in-law most generously in financial terms, Reb Moishe deigned to "agree" to the match and even took a measure of pride in his daughter's husband.

Due to my brother's good offices, I enjoyed Reb Moishe Shmuel's congenial hospitality. I remember that the whole household, and especially his son Joseph, were

extraordinarily friendly to me. In honor of the Sabbath, Reb Moishe put on his silk garments and took me along to services. Since there were many Ger chassidim in Ostrove, (they had as their rabbi Reb Ben Zion Ostrove), at table I was able to help out with the singing of the "Zmiros", (Sabbath songs), and participate like a real veteran. The regulars at those gatherings looked at each other with utter astonishment, as if to say: "How come this fellow knows all our special melodies?" Reb Moishe Shmuel took me to the Sabbath afternoon meal in the chassidic synagogue, its table meagerly set out with challeh and herring. In contrast, the music was full of beauty and longing. That music was the very last transfusion of the Jewish spirit that I received just before boarding the ship in Danzig. The Sabbath afternoon meal lasted much longer than that in all the other synagogues in the area and after evening services all the people present wished me success in America and urged me most seriously "to remain faithful to our Jewish heritage."

The son of the ritual slaughterer in Rutke kept his word and met me in Warsaw. As luck would have it, the lawyer to whom we went to fill out the documents needed for emigration to America was the legislator Yitzchok Grinbaum, who was fated to play an important role in Polish Jewry and Zionism. Grinbaum impressed me as though he were one of our own, a relative. He handled my affairs not like an American laywer who deals with a run-of-the-mill client but like a brother. I don't even remember whether we paid him his professional fee.

But now, precisely now that I had overcome all the bureaucratic obstacles like identity papers and a whole sheaf of other documents, how does one get to the American consul? The line around the consulate was so long that people stood for weeks on end, braving the



Beile Cooper, (left), the later Mrs. Hoffman, with Feigl Zelewitz, a girl friend from Rutke, taken at the end of 1921 in Warsaw after Beile had received her visa for America. Jacob Hoffman was in Warsaw at the time as well and met Beile by chance at the Zelewitz' home on Navalifye Street.

discomfort of rain and cold, until their turn came. And when their turn did come — you guessed it — the consul turned them down.

In Warsaw they said that the consul was a cantankerous person. He used to ask questions that hadn't the faintest connection with the actual procedure, looking for excuses to deny the visa. He tested the intelligence of the visa applicant by giving him or her pieces of a puzzle to put together. If the puzzle wasn't assembled within a certain time limit, it was sufficient cause to refuse, or at least put off the granting of the visa. Oh, the oceans of tears that flowed from the eyes of Polish Jews at the threshhold of the American consul in Warsaw!

I walked endlessly up and down the sidewalk in front of the American consulate in Warsaw till I was fortunate enough to get a visa, enabling me to set out for the port of Danzig and finally reach the golden land of my dreams.

But before leaving for Danzig I was to experience yet another surprise. Of all people, whom do you suppose I met in Warsaw? Yes, Beile! That exquisite girl from Mienzhenin with whom I'd become so friendly. Her mother Chane Bashe had decided to have Beile go to America and marry a widower at least ten years her senior. He was the husband of her deceased daughter Rivke, who had left him with two tiny children that now needed a mother.

We met quite unexpectedly at the home of Feige Zelowitz, a neighbor of ours from Rutke. She lived on Gavalifye Street and had a son who was a doctor. He had gotten Beile an American visa by some devious means that remained a mystery to me, and without having to wait in line as much as two minutes.

We looked at each other like two soul mates who had been separated by bitter, tragic circumstances. But

He Who Sits on High and rules the world steered us both in the same direction at exactly the same time.

"You're actually going to America?" I asked her, even though I knew quite well she was doing just that. What I really meant to ask was whether she was going to Philadelphia to marry Harry Slutzky, her sister's husband.

"And you too, Yankel," she looked at me with penetrating eyes. I thought I saw in them a prayer to G-d that our separate ways in the new world wouldn't diverge too far.

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Beile as she appeared at age 14
on the passport picture she took.

16

From Danzig to Ellis Island

After the negotiations with the American consul had been completed, my next stop on the way to America was the port of Danzig, or Gdansk in Polish.

All emigrants were stationed there in a camp not far from the city proper, where they were subjected to a long, enervating procedure until they were considered fit enough to board ship and start the trip they had struggled for and dreamt about for such a long time. First of all, you had to undergo a fairly extensive physical examination. There were some whom the doctors found to be not in the best of health and therefore had to wait around in the camp, sometimes for months, until the condition causing the delay cleared up sufficiently to permit a re-examination and, hopefully, the granting of permission to leave for America. Among the medical procedures was the cutting off of all your hair from head to toe, a cautionary measure against lice which were all too prevalent because of insufficient bathing facilities. Then you were taken to a steam bath to cleanse you of "European" germs. Every stitch of clothing you wore was given what we call in America a "dry cleaning". Naturally they came back not quite in the height of fashion in terms of appearance. As a matter of fact, they were all rumpled and creased. Those who enjoyed the luxury of an iron pressed and straightened them out a bit but most people simply had to accept the situation and walk about in their messy

clothing. Women strolled back and forth with their shaved heads much as religious brides do before putting on a wig.

If I had to characterize that camp in the modern American idiom, no term other than "dump" would be adequate. It was literally a garbage heap, but . . . what's done is done. While in retrospect I'd still be justified in expressing resentment at the indignities heaped upon us there, today the feeling is more of relief at the passing of a trying episode. They held us in a sort of quarantine and prepared us for America. In the camp you got a bed for nothing but had to buy your own food for Polish zlotys or German marks, which were the accepted currencies in the free port of Danzig.

The camp had a most incredible melange of people from all over the world. Among them were Poles, Russians, Rumanians, Germans and of course a goodly proportion of our Jewish brethren, who stayed together for security and mutual comfort and looked forward to the good fortune awaiting them in the "Golden Land". There were men travelling without their wives. Also you could see women with small children going to their husbands who had already arrived in America. Young people were most numerous among the Jews, young men and women who had left their parents to prepare a home for the whole family. I was far from the only one in the group who had set out for America because he didn't see the point of risking his life for a country that had treated his people so cruelly and so became an army deserter. Toward evening I used to take out my violin and sing along as I played old-country tunes. Many of those who were in the vicinity joined me in song and in that way I gradually made many friends.

One week passed and then two and the few zlotys that my brother Moishe Aharon had given me for the road were finally exhausted. There then arose a problem

I had rarely, if ever, faced before. I faced the prospect of having nothing to eat. Since I had no money, how could I buy even the food needed to keep skin and bones together?

I had another problem too. Neither I nor my brother-in-law Meir Rosenthal, who was with me in the camp, had enough money for a steamer ticket.

There is a saying that whenever a catastrophe faced the Jewish people, the Almighty foresaw the calamity and prepared beforehand the appropriate measures for its resolution. Something like that must have happened to me when I met Dr. Sindi of HIAS, who understood my situation and gave me fifty American dollars, two twenties and a ten.

Seeing the green dollars, the instincts of the "business man" that I was in my Rutke days awoke within me and I decided to use the money for commerce instead of just eating them up. Somehow or other I managed to get out of the camp and go to a business establishment in Danzig where they exchanged foreign currency and inquired about prices in the money business. The first transaction I engaged in was the purchase of German marks for the fifty American dollars. Then I went back to the camp and opened my own money exchange. Who were my clients? Why, the emigrants, especially the Jews who knew me from my singing and violin playing. Because of that relationship, they came to me to exchange their money instead of going to the official counter. Having confidence in my integrity, they knew that I wasn't taking advantage of our friendship. As a matter of fact, so many gave me their business that I did quite well. Every few days I used to take a boat to Danzig and exchange the foreign money I had bought for dollars. In only two weeks I had enough money to pay for steamship tickets for me and my brother-in-law.



One side of Jacob Hoffman's passport, which he received in 1920 in Bialystok before he went to the American consul's in Warsaw for a visa. This picture with the Polish stamps is of Jacob Hoffman as he appeared then.

I no longer remember the name of the ship that transported me across the ocean. I think it was of Dutch origin. But I remember well, too well, that my bunk was two decks below the water line. There were no stabilizers in those days to mitigate the rocking of the boat, so when the waves were even of medium size I was tossed about as though in the throes of a fever. As if that weren't enough, they fed us deep-sea fish and not all the passengers could tolerate it. It so happened that my brother-in-law and I were the sickest among the travellers during all the eighteen days that the voyage lasted. Except for a little hot water, I took no food and couldn't even keep that down. The doctor or medical attendant who was aboard said that the only remedy for me was America. It didn't take a genius to figure that one out, but how right he was! As soon as the shores of the United States came into view, I joined the rest of the passengers on deck. I was still green with sea-sickness; nevertheless a joyous song burst forth from within me. All the passengers began to sing, each in his own language, so that it became very much like a Simchas Torah celebration aboard ship. In the circle of young people around me there was a girl, apparently a would-be pioneer longing more for the shores of Palestine than those she viewed before her, who began singing "Kinneret Sheli", ("My Dear Sea of Galilee"). For me too it was as though the ship were about to enter the blue Kinneret instead of approaching New York harbor. Still it must be said that when the Statue of Liberty, torch in hand, hove into view, it was a most impressive sight.

I don't know why, but at that particular moment there came to mind a song that I had heard my mother sing when she sat at the window on Saturday night just before dark, looking out to see whether it was time to say the prayer "G-d of Abraham", recited by women as



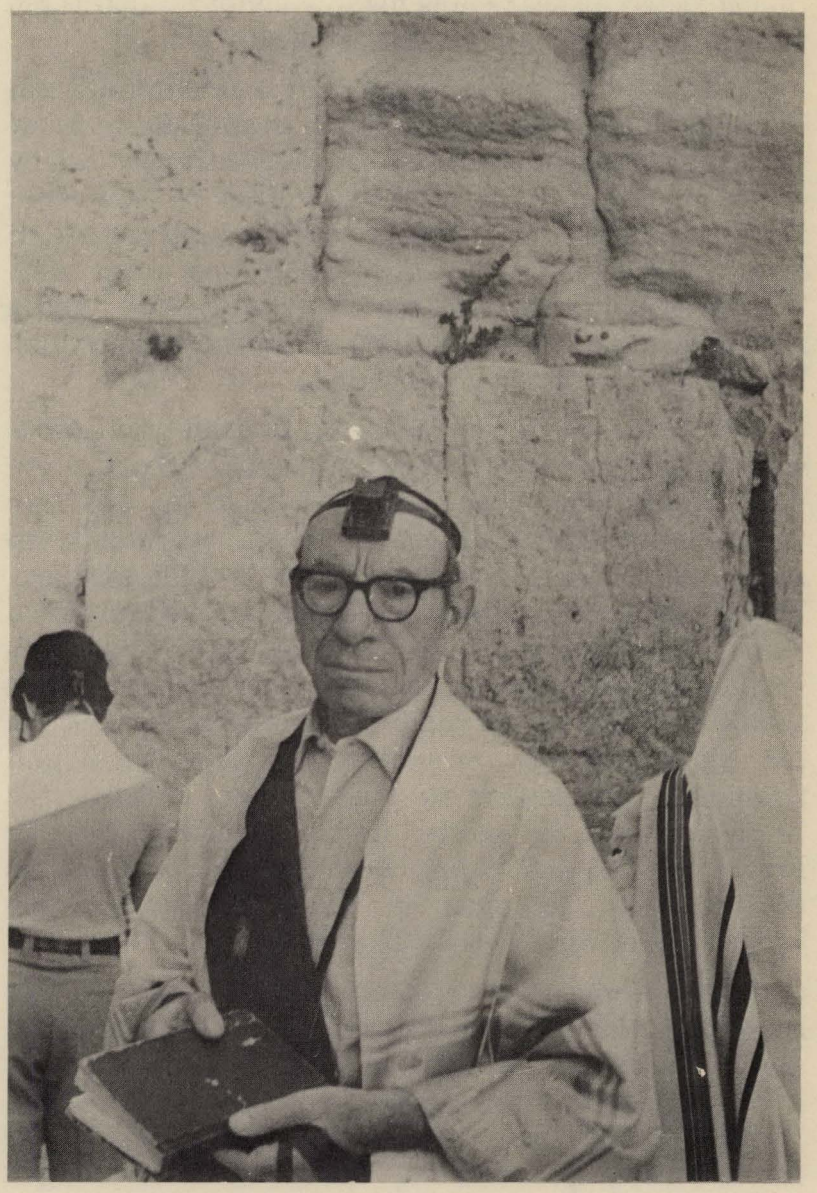
Jacob Hoffman with Beile not long after their wedding.

twilight descended, in which they invoked G-d's protection over their homes. After the prayer, in the dim light of the departing Sabbath, she would sing ever so softly a melodious tune that I remember to this day: "The wagons stand, the wagons stand near my mother's bed; the children lie still when they are young and fly away when they grow up." I longed so strongly for my mother, my father and my family at the very moment when the shores of America were telling me in unmistakable symbolic terms that the gulf between us was all but unbridgeable.

The shores of America provided me with an opportunity to make something of my life but for the short term presented me with a problem. When debarking at Ellis Island, every immigrant had to show that he had twenty-five dollars on him. It might just as well been a million because all I had in my pocket was a few quarters!

When it was my turn to prove financial solvency, the official looked at my Polish passport and my American visa. All seemed to be in order on that score but then he glanced at my downcast countenance. I must assume that this wasn't the first time he had come across such a dolorous situation because instead of asking me the usual question about the twenty-five dollars, he shook his head as though telling me what to answer and said in Yiddish: "You do have twenty-five dollars to show me, don't you?" I nodded my head in the affirmative and he told me to go.

Go where? Here I am in America . . . wonderful! But where do I turn? The masses of people awaiting the incoming immigrants were ecstatic with joy. Everyone embraced the other. Women and children were reunited with husbands and fathers. Brothers and sisters together again after a long and seemingly hopeless separation grasped each other in disbelief, unwilling to



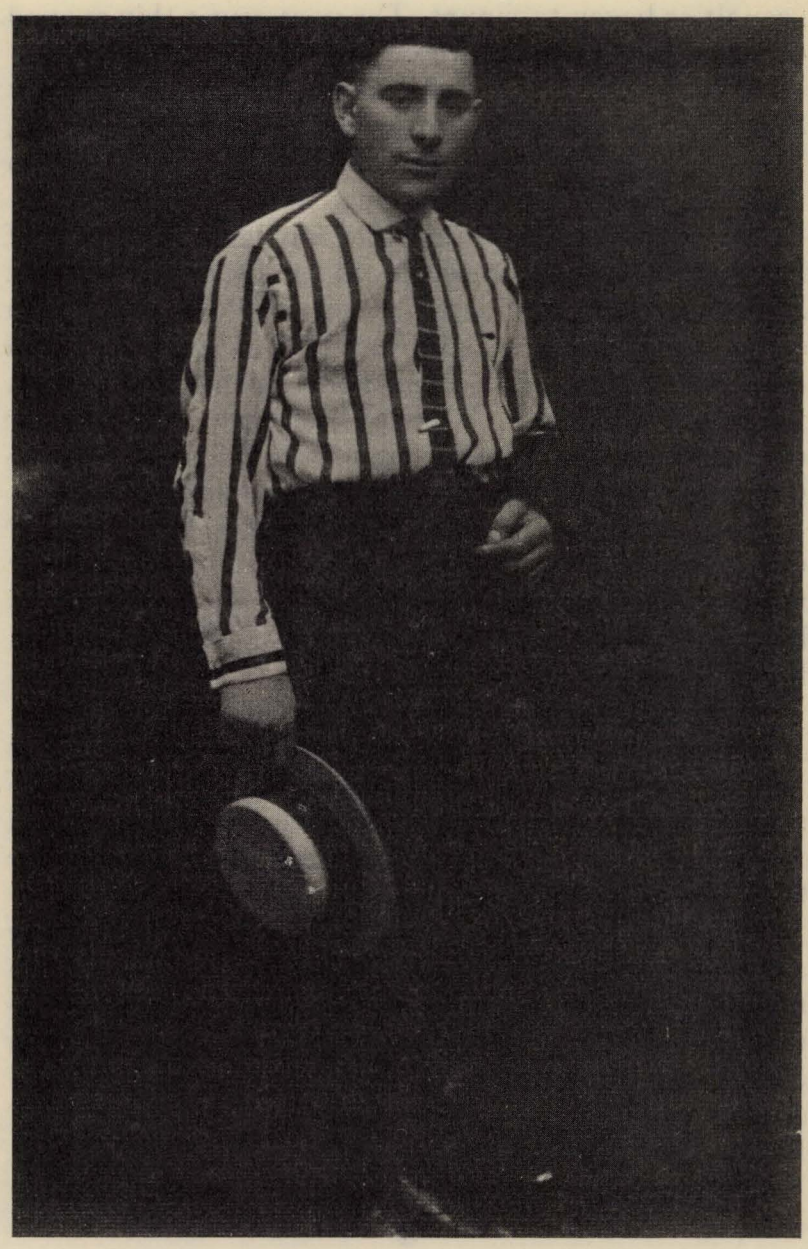
Jacob Hoffman in prayer shawl and phylacteries at the Western Wall on his visit to Israel in the summer of 1976.

let go. And I? Nobody waited for me, no one greeted me that cold and disheartening night of January, 1921 three months before my twenty-first birthday.

I went to the HIAS office, then located in a small building on the East Side in Manhattan. I didn't know the name of the street then, nor do I know it now. In any event, it was heartwarming to see that in New York there was a place for a lonely Jewish young man from Rutke and Ostrove. I was brought to a room with herring, bread, coffee and tea on the table and I had a little snack. Later they provided me with a bed on which I spent my first night in America.

At HIAS they asked the newly-arrived immigrants whether they had any family in America. My brother-in-law, Meyer Rosenthal, answered that he has two brothers, one in Boston with a wife and seven children and a second on Havemeyer Street in Williamsburg. The HIAS people immediately contacted the brother on Havemeyer Street and before long he came and took his brother and me to his house. One would imagine that in such circumstances we would have been the ones to open the conversation by recounting our experiences and tribulations in getting to this country. Instead, the brother told of his service in the American army in France. He had kept a diary during the war and read us excerpts from his opus, in which he depicted the barbarities of the accursed Germans.

(This seems to be an opportune time to tell you that a German who was once a superintendent in one of my apartment houses recounted to me some of the incidents he remembered while a sergeant in the Imperial Army in World War I. He had lots of time to think when he lay in the trenches, guarding his homeland. One thing I remember quite clearly was the use by the Germans of twelve year olds to replace regular troops when the



A greenhorn in America.
Jacob Hoffman with his first straw hat, taken in Philadelphia

casualties began to mount. The poor young things cried in terror, not knowing which end of the rifle was up).

But I didn't stay long as a guest in Havemeyer Street. A second cousin of mine on my mother's side, Philip Melvin by name, got wind of the fact that I was in America. He came and took me to his family on Osborne Street near Blake Avenue in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. Melvin himself lived on beautiful Eastern Parkway, then considered a sort of Park Avenue in terms of elegance. He had a lumber yard where they sold all kinds of materials, bricks and cement. But he took me to his parents on Osborne Street, where the family consisted of the parents and five children — two daughters and three sons, all in four small rooms.

My cousins were very friendly to me. Just imagine! Cantor Isaac's youngest son came to America! They remembered Ostrove very well and recalled my father's beautiful singing, especially when a holiday came and he delighted the whole town.

When it was time to go to sleep, they gave me a bed. You guessed it. They were able to make this magnanimous gesture of hospitality because those who occupied that bed normally slept on the floor, and I needn't remind you that wall-to-wall carpeting was far from prevalent in those days.

They were such gems, the Jews of that period. They shared everything down to the last piece of bread. In addition, they provided spiritual comfort, advising me not to become discouraged should I meet up with obstacles as I made my way in the new country. "You'll see . . . one day you'll have your own car in America," Philip assured me.

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17

My First Jobs in America

Well, if my rich cousin Philip Melvin in his considered opinion believes that I should work in the butcher shops on Pitkin and Howard Avenues in Brownsville, I guess that's the way it has to be. I must say though that grateful as I was for the opportunity to earn some money, the idea didn't especially please me from the very beginning. Back in my home town of Rutke I had been a businessman and manufacturer in my own right, traveling to many fairs and operating on a high commercial level. Now all of a sudden I found myself a mere butcher. But, so be it. I thought to myself: "Let's not rush things and see how the situation turns out," as I went with Melvin to the butcher shop.

When I came to work early Monday morning, the butcher received me cordially and showed me how to help him out. "Here in America we cut meat differently from the way it was done in Europe," he instructed me. I didn't hesitate to display my knowledge of the trade and tell him that good butchers everywhere cut meat pretty much the same way. He was very satisfied with my work and showed every customer who came in who I was. "He's a greenhorn, just arrived from Ostrove and Rutke, if you know where those towns are on the map." And then he would add some details about my lineage. "Do you know who he is? None other than Philip Melvin's cousin!" In that way he made sure that the ladies who were his customers knew that I wasn't just anybody, but a cousin of the rich lumberyard owner from Brownsville.

After finishing the day's work in the butcher shop, I used to visit my cousins on Osborne Street corner Blake Avenue. The lady of the house served me a fine meal and afterwards all of us would while away whole evenings reminiscing about our town, my family, known by everyone present and naturally about a greenhorn in America and the difficulties he has to endure until he establishes a firm footing in his new environment.

The woman of the house was my cousin. Apparently she had a spark of the matchmaker in her. On reflection, it may have been something a bit more substantial than a spark because from the very first week she lost no time in propositioning me about a girl who was really a beauty, though she nowhere near matched Beile from Mienzhenin in pulchritude. She was the daughter of a family that had just arrived here from Poland and lived one flight up, directly above my cousin's apartment. She had a cheerful disposition and was a good conversationalist. Since neither she nor I knew a word of English, we got along splendidly in Yiddish, talking about the home we had left only recently and the new world to which we had come just a short time ago.

There were moments now and then when it occurred to me that if Beile wouldn't seek me out in America or if she had by now married her brother-in-law in Philadelphia that it mightn't be a bad idea to consider a serious relationship with this newly-arrived young lady. But then I had second thoughts and common sense counseled me and held me back from making a precipitous decision. An inner voice advised that first of all one had to have a solid economic base in the new country and then it's absolutely imperative to have a good grasp of the language and the mores of the environment.

The girl's parents, naturally anxious to provide a suitable mate for their daughter, let me know in short

order that they wanted to know whether anything "substantial" would result from my friendship with her. Given my character and the moral values I lived by, I didn't want to raise false hopes in anyone's mind, so I told my cousin to inform them that at the present moment I was in no position to enter into a marital relationship, albeit acknowledging that their daughter was a beauty and would be a real catch for the right person.

Who knows how long I would have remained as an employee at the butcher shop in Brownsville if it hadn't happened that on the Thursday after the Monday I'd been hired they brought into the store some newly-slaughtered chickens for the women to use that coming Sabbath and the boss told me to get started plucking the feathers!

Wouldn't you have died from mortification if you were in my place? Yankel Hoffman, the great entrepreneur from Rutke had come to America to pluck chickens? If that wasn't a comedown, I don't know what is. I was so angry that for a moment I gave some thought to "harnessing the horse to the wagon" and going back to Europe, as my father had done when he couldn't adjust to the new milieu in America. That's what I thought internally, probably as an expression of my injured feelings. But I knew in my heart of hearts that I would remain in America and ultimately, G-d willing, stop plucking chickens for something more rewarding both financially and in terms of ego satisfaction. If I had the ability to become a business man in Rutke at such a tender age and do so well, I could no doubt do the same thing in New York. All I need is patience, time and patience, I said to myself as I sat in that small room plucking the feathers from the still-warm chickens, my fingers full of scratches from the barbs.

But the bitter cup of my first days in America

overflowed with gall and indignation on that same day when a woman, quite well intentioned no doubt, gave me a tip of two cents after I had plucked a chicken for her.

It wasn't so much the amount of the tip, since at that time two cents were the equivalent of a quarter today. But was I some kind of menial beggar, dependent on others' favors for a livelihood? Was this the same Yankel who had been a skilled leather craftsman, regaling all his young friends in Rutke and Ostrove with the finest of everything, spending rubles, marks and zlotys without being concerned about the amount he laid out? And now he would have to rely on and accept in silence two-cent handouts in America?

I guess my boss discerned from my face, (which couldn't have been too arduous a job, since it must have been apparent from the expression of disgust that I made no effort to hide), what I was thinking. He may also have been apprehensive lest I fling the two cent tip together with the chickens still lying about waiting to be plucked at my refined benefactress. So he came over to me and said sotto voce: "Don't be a fool . . . in America, when something is proffered, take it and don't look a gift horse in the mouth."

However, when I came "home" that Thursday evening to Osborne Street and Blake, the family perceived immediately that something very serious was troubling me. I took not a morsel into my mouth and sat morose and lost in melancholy thoughts. Every one of the cousins came over with a smile and comforted me with the notion that after I passed the greenhorn stage I'd be able to look at my experiences dispassionately and even manage to get a good laugh out of them. To cheer me up, they opened the victrola and played Al Jolson's "Mammy, mammy, the sun shines east, the sun shines west."

"Is that the kind of silly song people play in America," I asked my cousins. They all began to laugh at me in amusement. "You'll see that when you acclimatize yourself to our culture you'll join us in singing all the beautiful melodies," they retorted. To sort of prove the point, they proposed that I go to the movies with them to see a film on Pitkin Avenue, where I could hear many other such songs.

That movie house is still standing on Pitkin Avenue, a kind of monument to those bygone years, when the streets were teeming with young men and women and the whole neighborhood consisted of Jewish people, synagogues, yeshivahs and communal institutions. Every time I ride by Pitkin Avenue in its present forlorn state, I see myself sitting in the movie that night. My interest in the show was undoubtedly minimal, because instead of watching the images on the screen I carried on an internal debate on the prospects for my future in this country. Would it perhaps have been better if I had served in the Polish army and returned to my business after having completed my stint?

That theater served the dramatic arts two ways: in addition to the regular film fare, from time to time Jewish actors used to appear and entertain the immigrant audience with nostalgic songs from the old country. Something positive did emerge from my cinematic experience on Pitkin Avenue. While sitting there I came to the conclusion that if I didn't want to work at chicken plucking for the foreseeable future I'd have to pull up stakes and leave Brownsville.

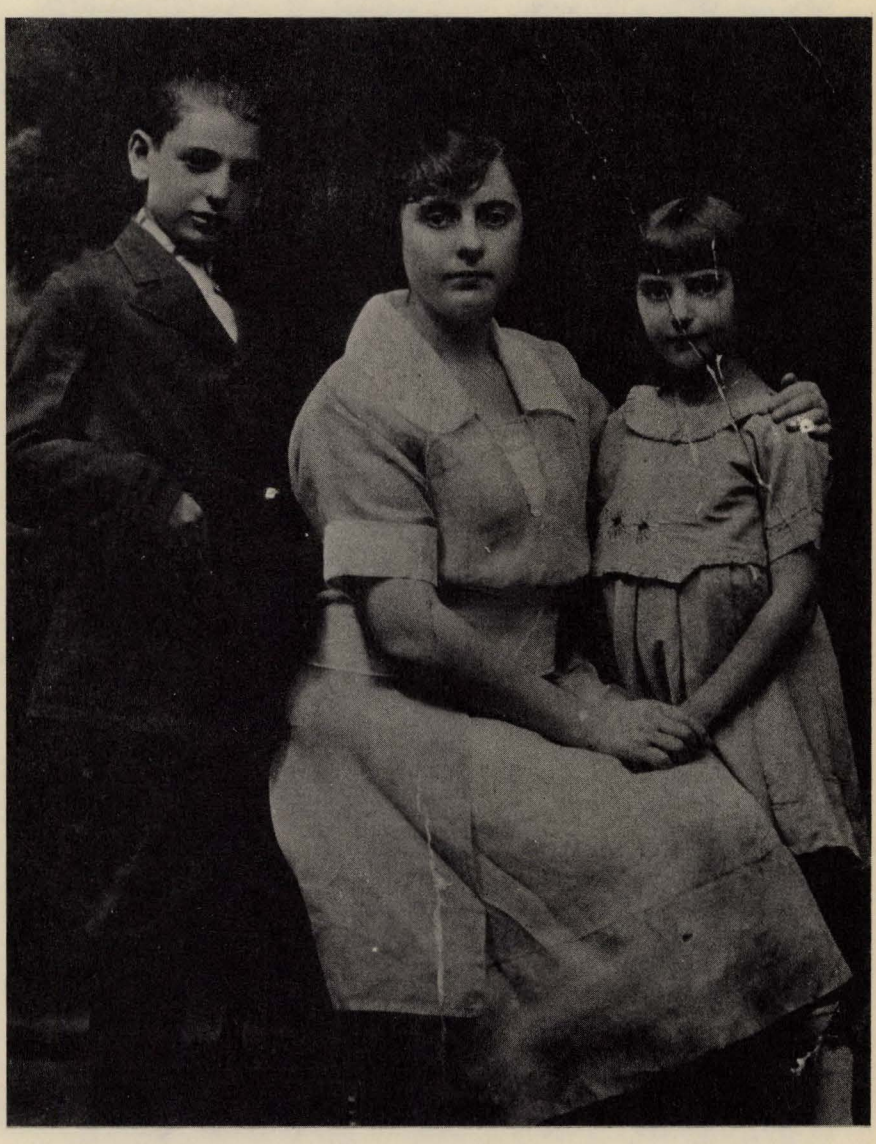
Despite the need to escape Pitkin Avenue for personal reasons, I remained staunchly loyal to it. Until its decline, I bought my suits and coats at Abe Stark's, the very same Abe Stark who later became the borough president of Brooklyn. I remember that on the occasion

when Young Judea gave me a dinner at the Brooklyn Jewish Center and I was invited to be photographed with Stark in his office in Borough Hall, I whispered to him that I was still wearing one of his summer coats.

My cousin Philip Melvin had already registered me in a public night school holding sessions in the elementary school building on Osborne Street, so that I could learn English. But I decided to leave my cousin in Brownsville and relocate with one of her sisters, Anna Vlatkofsky, living on the East Side at 25 Cherry Street, near the East River. The cousin on the East Side was a widow with three sons and a daughter. Her husband, a religious Jew and an assiduous worker, fell off his wagon while delivering some merchandise and died from his injuries. The oldest son, a talented and devoted young man, drove a truck delivering plumbing supplies and gave his earnings to his mother so that she could keep the family together. The second son, who worked for me at a later date when I ran a grocery, was an intelligent boy and improved himself by attending college at night. I'm sure that if he'd had financial backing, he would have achieved the rank of professor. After studying for some time, he passed the test for policeman. Being ambitious, he continued to apply himself and became a captain. My family still meets with their children and maintains a close relationship with them.

On the East Side I found myself a little more settled. Here new immigrants in very much the same circumstances as I abounded in great numbers. Young people used to meet in a dance hall on Clinton Street near Delancey and as will happen when boy meets girl, many an acquaintanceship led to the marriage canopy. There I met a group with whom I had traveled on the same ship. Our casual relationship as fellow passengers developed into fast friendships.

During my troubled adjustment period I didn't



Beile with her sisters' two orphans
Taken in Philadelphia right after she arrived in America



Beile with her sister's daughter
Chane Bashe wanted Beile to bring up this girl.

touch the violin I had brought with me from Europe but now that things were looking up, I began playing and singing the old pioneer songs that were so meaningful to me from my Zeire Zion experience in Rutke.

Another effect of the improved condition I found myself in on the East Side was the re-awakening of the cruelly interrupted, but still-cherished friendship with Beile Cooper of Mienzhenin. I recalled our last meeting in Warsaw, where both of us had come to the American consul for a visa.

Is it actually possible, I thought to myself, that she got married to her deceased sister's husband in Philadelphia, a man ten years her senior? Was the friendship we had established over so many years in Mienzhenin and Rutke a passing phenomenon, covered over by oblivion? She knew that I was in America because from Warsaw I went directly to Danzig to book passage on a boat, so why does she remain silent? Probably because she married the widower and doesn't want to re-open wounds partly healed by the passage of time.

At the same moment, however, I thought that even if she had gotten married to her former brother-in-law, it would be a fine gesture on my part if I were to make a trip to Philadelphia to wish her good luck. After all, we were still friends of long standing!

Meanwhile, a letter from St. Louis came from the two Eastman girls, who had been Beile's neighbors in Mienzhenin and arrived in America but recently.

The Eastman's, who ran an inn in Mienzhenin in competition with Chane Bashe, already had four sons and a daughter in St. Louis. Incidentally, one son later had his own liquor distillery and sold it for four million dollars. Meyer, another son, also had wangled his way out of the Polish army. After coming to America, he

worked his way up the economic ladder, finally owning fifteen liquor stores in St. Louis.

After Poland became an independent state and life became more difficult from day to day, the children in St. Louis brought over their parents and the two youngest sisters to join them. The father of the family was a learned man and the Jews in St. Louis accorded him great honor and respect. The whole Eastman family maintained very close relationships among themselves and with their fellow townspeople living in America.

The two girls who came to St. Louis with their parents had been very close friends with Beile from Mienzhenin. They used to attend the theatrical performances I produced in Rutke and were members of my circle of young comrades.

As I mentioned earlier, I received a letter that they had sent from St. Louis, informing me that Beile was in Philadelphia, still single, and staying with Harry Stoop, a friend of her brother Shlomo, on the east side of Philadelphia.

I didn't waste a single moment and ran to buy a railroad ticket for the first available train to Philadelphia.

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Many years later, Hoffman in Florida with the Eastman sister, who wrote from St. Louis about Beile

18

I Meet Beile in Philadelphia

Going to Philadelphia at that stage of my development as a new American called for a bit of daring on my part. If at least I'd had an address to look for, I would have felt much more at ease. The Eastman girls wrote me from St. Louis only that Beile was in Philadelphia at the home of Harry Stoop, a friend of her brother Shlomo and that Shlomo was employed by Harry Slutzky's brother, a photographer by trade, who had his studio on South Street.

It was July. The temperature in New York was unusually high even for the summer and it was far worse in Philadelphia because of the sticky humidity. When I got to my destination I took a taxi and could only mumble in disjointed fashion: "East Side, Sixth Street, Slutzky's Studio." The number of words in my English vocabulary was extremely limited. In Philadelphia I felt constrained to use my meager knowledge despite the trepidation natural to most foreigners under such circumstances, because I couldn't be sure of the response I would get if I were to use Yiddish. New York, on the other hand, was another matter; Yiddish was so widely used that one never felt the need for any other language. I guess that feeling of linguistic security made many of us lazy with respect to acquiring a proper knowledge of our adopted country's tongue.

The taxi dropped me off near Slutzky's studio. Through the window I saw a young man whose face was

unfamiliar to me but somehow I knew that it wasn't Beile's brother Shlomo, whom Rivke brought to America shortly after the death of her father, Hersh Ber.

There was a restaurant close by the studio, so I went inside, partly for lack of anything else to do at the moment and partly to plan a course of action. My thought was to order something to eat and meanwhile make inquiries about the people I was trying to find. I sat down and looked around at the half-empty tables. I spotted a young man seated nearby who didn't seem to mind my gaze and in fact smiled at me quite affably. We continued to look at each other for some time, like two detectives trying to determine whether the person before them was the one they were after.

I guess I was the more anxious of the two because I "took my courage in both hands" and made the first approach. I went over to him and asked: "Excuse me, do you by any chance work in Slutzky's Studio?"

Instead of answering my question, he in turn asked me one, smiling as though he knew something I didn't: "Are you Yankel Hoffman from Rutke?"

It's hard to believe that we had met for the very first time. It must have been a case where perfect strangers feel an immediate affinity for each other because we embraced like brothers, without a sense of strain or artificiality.

"I was about to go to New York to look for you." Shlomo addressed me in the familier form "du", (you), usually reserved for speaking to children, intimate friends and members of the family, again illustrating the closeness between us. He asked me to sit at his table and wait while he ran to telephone his friend, Harry Stoop, then working in the Post Office, to come immediately with his car to take us to his home, where Beile was staying.

Given the series of events described above, I

imagine that even a non-believer in predestination might be given some pause and entertain the notion that He Who Dwells in Heaven had foreordained that Beile was to be my bride and I her groom.

While waiting for Harry Stoop to arrive with his automobile, Shlomo told me straight off that as soon as Beile had gotten to Philadelphia and he saw how really beautiful she was, he decided immediately not to allow her to marry Harry Slutzky and assume the raising of the orphaned children left him by her sister. Harry used all kinds of strategems to keep on postponing the discussion of "final arrangements." Meanwhile, with the passage of time, Beile herself realized that her mother's plan was not a viable one. She was altogether eighteen years old and Harry Slutzky about twenty-eight, an age spread that's quite significant at that point in a person's life.

Soon Mr. Stoop arrived and greeted me like a long-lost friend. The Stoop family came from Rumania and Beile and Shlomo lived with them as though they were members of the household.

The first sentence Harry Stoop uttered made me feel quite at home. "Beile's friend is my friend," he said as he shook hands and motioned for us to get into the car quickly so that he could take us home.

As we approached the house I saw Beile standing on the balcony. I thought that I'd always carried with me a faithful image of her appearance but I must admit to being stunned at what met my eyes. Beile had matured and become even more beautiful than before. Her tresses were longer and her face shone with that quiet grace that I had come to associate with her over the years.

Would it surprise you to learn that our first meeting was cold and strained? And I don't think it was due solely to the lapse of time since we'd last seen each



Beautiful Beile with her long hair.

other. I guess you would understand better why we felt strange if you take into account the following considerations. Beile may have felt a sense of insecurity because she had broken off our friendship in Rutke after we had known each other such a long time and obviously caused me much anguish and heartache. As for me, despite the inner joy I felt at seeing her so close again, I experienced a re-awakening of the disappointment and sorrow when she let me know that she was leaving for the States to marry her brother-in-law.

"Beile," I spoke her name with so many mixed emotions. She didn't look me in the eye, as though she were ashamed of the way she had treated me earlier.

The silence between us seemed like an eternity to me. Her brother Shlomo and the Stoop family quickly grasped what was going on, excused themselves and left the room. As he was leaving, Harry Stoop looked at me and said with a knowing smile: "We'll get things ready for dinner."

When Beile finally directed her gaze at me, I saw copious tears flowing down her face. Through the tears I pictured in my mind's eye the little girl I had seen for the first time six years before in Mienzhenin, when she was helping her mother bake challehs and rolls in the wee hours of the morning.

"Do you still remember Mienzhenin?" I asked her, in an attempt to break the embarrassing silence.

"I'll never forget that night . . . my mother didn't want to let you come into the house." Now there was a hint of a smile breaking through the tear-stained face, like the rainbow piercing a clouded sky before disappearing.

She told me that while she was in Danzig and about to board ship she received regards from me through a Christian girl, Marushka, who worked for a nobleman near Rutke that used to call me often to repair his

harnesses. Marushka too was waiting for a boat to America and told Beile that the leatherworker had sailed three weeks back.

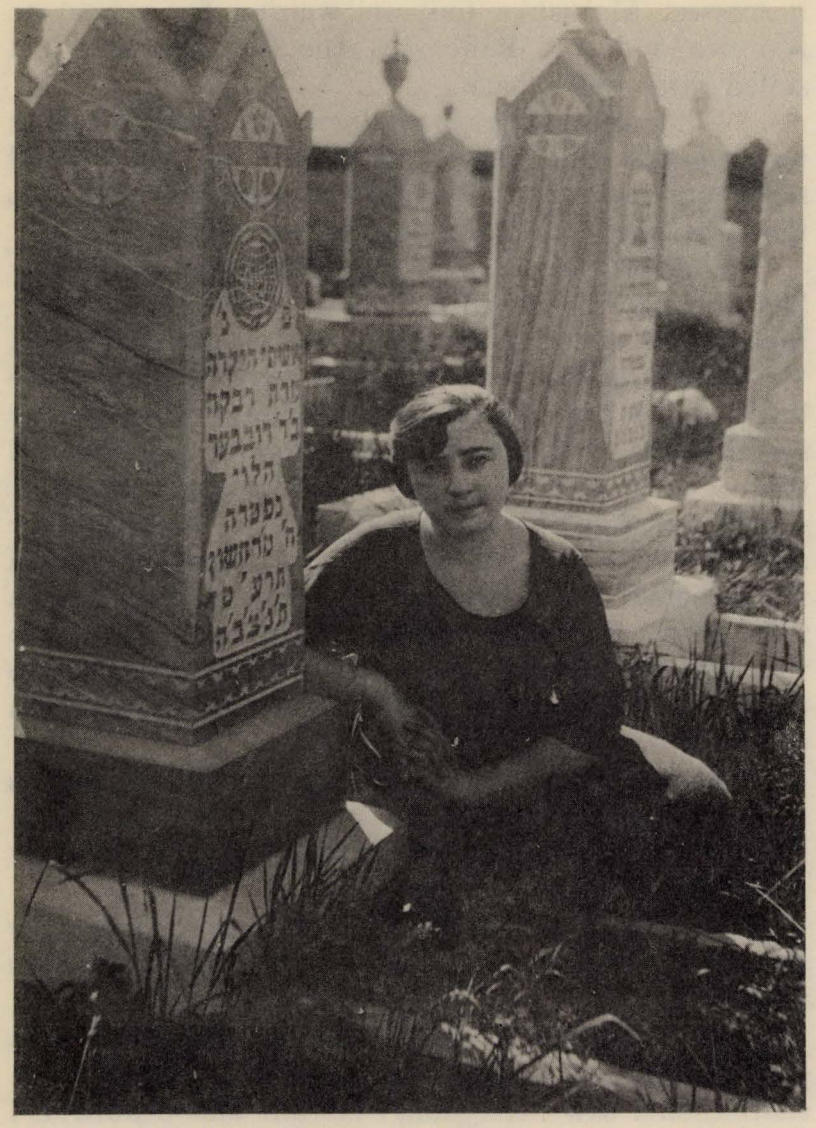
"What she said gave me new life, Yankel." That was the first time Beile had uttered my name aloud since our meeting. Hearing my name on her lips reminded me of so many bygone experiences.

While we were engaged in conversation, the Stoops had prepared a table with the best of Rumanian foods. Meanwhile, the whole family — Harry's mother-in-law, two sisters-in-law and a brother-in-law had come together. We had a party where all kinds of goodies were served. There was joy and laughter and the shedding of a tear or two, a combination not unknown to Jews. It turned out that Shlomo had an excellent singing voice and of course I filled in with the repertoire that I remembered from Ostrove and Rutke. We had a marvelous time that evening and began a friendship that lasted for many years, with visits taking place frequently between the New York and Philadelphia contingents.

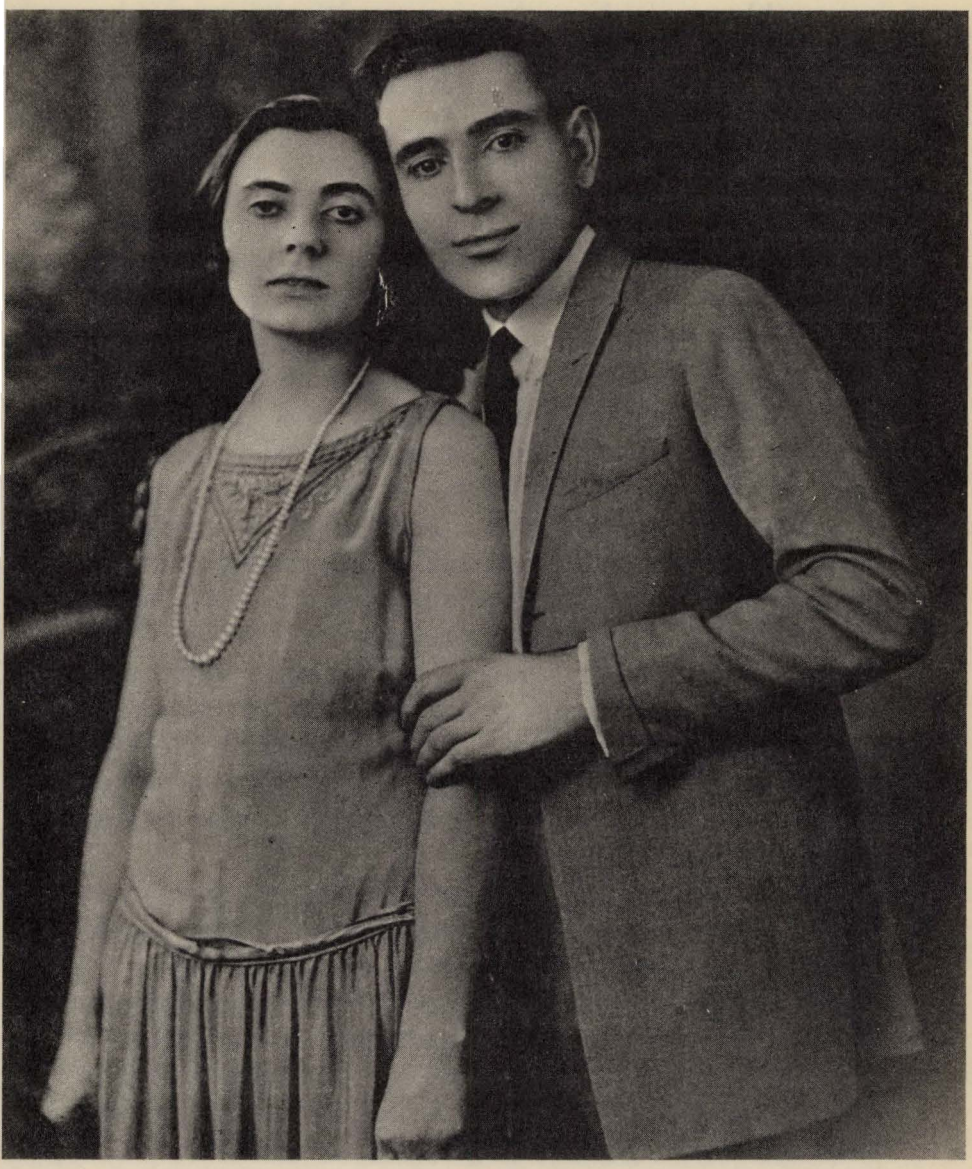
Shlomo had already mastered the photographer's art and was considered an excellent craftsman. In Slutzky's studio on Sixth Street he took the first picture of me and Beile in America.

In view of the obligation he felt to keep his mother abreast of developments, Shlomo wrote her a letter as follows:

"Dear Mother — Beile came to Philadelphia in good health and without mishap. But I must tell you that when I saw her, young, vibrant and beautiful, I realized on the spot that she's not a suitable mate for Harry Slutzky. I couldn't for the life of me permit her to become the mother of two children before she had even tasted what is every woman's right and the most important experience of her life: falling in love after a



Beile Cooper from Mienzhenin went immediately after her arrival in America in 1921 to the grave of her sister Rivke, who died while quite young. According to her mother's wish, Beile was to have married Harry Slutzky, her sister's widower, and raised his two orphans. She changed her mind, however, and married Jacob Hoffman, the sweetheart of her youth.



Jacob and Beile Hoffman at their first meeting in Philadelphia in July, 1921.

(Both pictures were taken by Beile's brother Shlomo, who worked in Slutzky's photo studio on South Street in Philadelphia).

reasonable courtship and marriage with the man of her choice. You can rest assured that, G-d willing, the children will grow up and develop well even without Beile. I don't think it right for her to become a slave and sacrifice her life even for the purpose of mitigating a tragedy, a tragedy moreover which was none of her doing. Mother, please read carefully what I'm writing you now: Yankel Hoffman, Beile's sweetheart, looked her up and found her. Now you might not think that what he did was particularly noteworthy, but I can tell you that in such a vast and populous country his perseverance bears witness to the depth of his love for our dear Beile. Now you'll understand why you don't have to worry about her future. We await your reply."

When I got back to my cousin's place on 25 Cherry Street I felt that lady luck had begun to smile at me again and I began to think about going into business for myself, instead of being someone else's employee. Once you've had the experience of running your own enterprise, it's difficult psychologically to become a worker again. I bought the Morning Journal, (a Yiddish-language daily), every morning, where there were ads concerning various business opportunities and looked for something suitable.

While all this was going on, I had an opportunity to be an eye witness to a tragedy that befell David Hoffman, a cousin of mine who had been living in Cleveland. He came to New York to take a boat home to Ostrove. He had a beautiful wife and two daughters in Ostrove and was very lonesome for them and his home town. He said that America was not for him because he had to work too hard and he knew no one here.

No matter how much we tried to persuade him to stay and assure him that we would give him every assistance to bring his family here, he remained stubborn and deaf to our arguments. Unfortunately he

perished in Hitler's ovens together with his whole family.

Some time after I had returned to New York Shlomo informed me from Philadelphia that his mother sent a letter from Rutke giving her blessing to the match between Beile and me. In the letter she wrote: "I see that it's something fated by heaven, so tell them that I wish them all good fortune. Let them get married and enjoy life together for a long time to come."

She wrote in addition that everyone in Rutke was delirious with joy to hear that Yankel the leatherworker had come to America and they were all astonished at my having been able to find Beile. Chane Bashe said that she invited all her neighbors and intimate friends to celebrate the event with a "kiddush", (a party, usually held in a synagogue to celebrate joyous occasions). Everyone wished her good luck and expressed the sentiment that she should feel herself fortunate to get such a capable young man as a son-in-law.

Shortly after I'd heard about Chane Bashe's letter, I had another piece of good news. Beile was coming to New York to visit an aunt on Burke Avenue in the Bronx.



Beile with her brothers Shlomo and Chaim and the orphans of her sister from Philadelphia.



The Hoffmans on the East Side



At a Zionist dinner in the Brooklyn Jewish Center, where Jacob Hoffman was presented with a plaque by Rabbi Benjamin Kreitman, the Center's spiritual leader.

Among those in the picture are, from right to left: Abraham Lindenbaum, Judge Bernard, Manny Kahan, President of the UJA, Rabbi Kreitman, Jacob Hoffman, Louis Kremer, Dr. Milton Schiff, At-

19

Wandering from Job to Job

Beile's aunt by marriage, Mrs. Toive Kloor — or as we later called her — Aunt Toive, lived in a handsome three-family house on Burke Avenue in the Bronx. She and her husband had ten children, five sons and five daughters, so when Beile came an eleventh child was added, as it were. The reason I say that is the fact that Aunt Toive really loved Beile as if she were her own child, especially because the new face in the family was one of her brother Hersh Ber's daughters.

When Beile first came to the Bronx, she used to help her aunt run the small, family-owned department store located on Burke Avenue, not far from where they lived. Beile's uncle ran a separate cleaning store business in Manhattan. Both establishments were quite profitable and afforded the aunt and uncle a very comfortable living.

Aunt Toive had another brother in Poland who managed to survive World War II by concealing himself through the use of various strategems. Ironically, however, his good fortune came to a tragic end in 1945, just after the termination of the war, when the Poles killed him and two of his sons.

With Beile living in the Bronx, thoughts of marriage and the establishment of a home began coursing through my mind. At that point the thought occurred to me that I'd be best off going into business for myself. Fine words

and a capital idea, but how does one translate them into reality?

Well, the process ran somewhat like this: Sorke Mulazevitz, who was a former resident of Rutke, lived not far from my cousin on Cherry Street. Her husband Ziskind was a tailor and they already had two married daughters. In Rutke I had my workshop in Sorke's house, and Alter, one of her sons, worked for me there.

One of Sorke's sons-in-law had a butcher shop on Henry Street. I used to step into his store quite often to see how he operated the business and parcelled out the meat to his customers. Since I was quite familiar with the techniques in that kind of work from my Ostrove days, I decided to start my own butcher store on the East Side. I rented a shop on Jefferson Street, paid half down on the fixtures and, like the rest of the butchers did at that time, got meat on credit. I opened the business on a Thursday, considered a lucky day for new enterprises. That was especially true in the case of butcher shops, since the women bought their meat then in preparation for Shabbat.

Beile and her aunt visited me on Jefferson Street. It turned out later that the frequency of the visits wasn't necessarily in connection with the purchase of meat. In fact, Beile told me subsequently that after every visit to my store her aunt would hold forth on the desirability of not postponing for too long the decision about setting the date for our wedding. "In America there are plenty of girls who would be interested in such a catch — a young man already established in business," her aunt used to repeat to Beile time and again.

The truth is that neither I nor Beile was in any particular hurry to walk down the aisle before we had a firm economic base under our feet. Even though we were both newcomers on the scene, we knew quite well that you can't make a go of it on love alone, especially in

America, where everything was measured in terms of the dollar.

I would visit Beile quite often at her aunt's and she in turn came around to my cousin's on Cherry Street, where I lived. As prospective man and wife are wont to do, we dreamt about a future together and looked forward to the happy day when we would stand under the bridal canopy.

The butcher shop I opened didn't last too long. The newly-arrived housewives demanded a lot and were willing to pay next to nothing for it. It wasn't entirely their fault because they too were struggling desperately to keep their heads above water, with very little means available to do so. Even though I was on the short end of the stick, it must be said in fairness to those charming but determined ladies that their behavior stemmed from the kind of fierce bargaining between customer and proprietor that they remembered from Europe. Without exaggeration, they could skin you alive for a penny and you could never count on wearing them down because they had the stamina of a marathon runner at the peak of his form. So after three months on Jefferson Street I sold the store and began looking for a job in the classified ad section of the Morning Journal. This time I was searching specifically for the leatherworking field, something that was really my forte.

I was a skilled mechanic from my European days and so didn't have to look for too long a time. I began to work in a shop on Broome and Greene Streets, where they made valises. The owners, three brothers who had been in America for a long time, would come by every once in a while to see how their new man was doing. My skills hadn't deteriorated at all since I left off my trade in Europe, so it goes without saying that the work I turned out was most satisfactory in terms of both quantity and quality. The other workers in the shop

would walk over to me and say they weren't too happy at my presence among them. "What the devil are you pushing yourself so hard for . . . will the boss give you a golden headstone for your grave?" That's the way they needled me not to be so eager and turn out so much work in order not to present them in a poor light by comparison.

After a week's work the owners gave me an envelope with twenty-five dollars for my salary. When I protested and said I was worth more, the answer was: "You're still so green and yet demand more money?" I didn't remonstrate any further, deciding that it would be more prudent to be patient for a little while. The next week showed that they agreed with my own assessment of the work I produced — the pay envelope contained thirty dollars.

Convinced that I could do even better than the increase given me, I went to another leather goods shop on Greene and Broome Streets and told the owner that I was a skilled, experienced craftsman, willing to be judged by the quality of the work I turned out. Without quibbling, he gave me forty-five dollars a week but sensing I could do better, I proposed that he pay me by the piece. He agreed and I was very happy because that arrangement allowed me freedom of movement, making it possible for me to come and go as I pleased. It may be hard to believe but even though I worked the shortest schedule in the shop, I had to hold back in order to keep from earning more than fifty dollars a week, at that time the highest wages being paid.

On that same street there was another leatherworking establishment that had belonged to a Mr. Bernstein, a manufacturer of a higher grade of valises. So I went in to see him told him of my capabilities and asked how much he was ready to pay. When I indicated to him after the first week that I

wanted sixty-five dollars, he agreed that I was worth it without question but said he couldn't give it to me because the foreman was getting only sixty. I answered: "You know what, Mr. Bernstein, let me continue on a piece basis; in that way the foreman won't feel slighted and you'll benefit by increased production." He agreed and I immediately began earning seventy dollars a week, a very great sum of money indeed for those days.

After I'd been working for about six months, Mr. Bernstein offered me the job of foreman but I turned him down with thanks for having considered me. The foreman was a fine, intelligent man with whom I used to discuss politics, Zionism and all the other current Jewish concerns of the times. I thought to myself: "Why take away the means of a livelihood from such a deserving person? Furthermore, what good would it do me to be a foreman if I earned more as a worker?"

Meanwhile, in September 1922 Beile and her brother Shlomo had brought their youngest brother, Chaim, to America. After he had rested from his trip and oriented himself during a two week period, I took him to the shop where I was working. Since Chaim had had considerable experience as an operator in my establishment in Rutke, he adapted himself very quickly, produced excellent work and began to earn good money in a short time.

Beile was extremely happy that her brother and I were working in the same place. She tried to send as much money as possible to her mother and youngest sister Zelda, still living in Rutke.

I've seen closely-knit families in my day, but till that moment I'd never encountered the kind of devotion displayed by Chane Bashe's children. Beile moved out of her aunt's place in the Bronx and rented a room for herself and her brother Chaim on Avenue B near Houston Street. She got herself work in a shoe shop,

where her job was sewing spats. Except for the money that we set aside and sent to our folks in Europe, she to Rutke and I to Ostrove, we saved dollar by dollar for our future together.

I myself moved away from Cherry Street to Williamsburgh, where my sister Judith's husband, Meyer Rosenthal, had a tailor shop in partnership with his brother. I rented a room on South Eighth Street so that I'd be close to Judith, who had come to join her husband in 1923, bringing with her their five year old child. Today, one of Judith's daughters, her husband and in fact the rest of her family are active in the "Hinneni" movement, whose purpose is to infuse Jewish young people who have never had or who have strayed from a sense of national or religious identity with a feeling of belonging to our people. The leader of the movement is a very charismatic young rebbetsin, Jungreis by name, who lives in Woodmere, Long Island.

I'll be the first to admit that one of my characteristics has been the inability to remain on the same job for too long a time. The nearer our wedding day approached, the more restless I became and the greater the urgency I felt to earn more money. In Brooklyn at that time there was one of the biggest manufacturers of suitcases producing a cheaper line of merchandise. I went to him with a plan for making a better article for a higher price, thus realizing a greater profit. He agreed and I took over the whole shop. I took along with me Chaim Wangel, a cousin of mine, and two other workers. In a short while things were popping. When the boss saw me going home with one hundred and fifty dollars in my pay envelope, he couldn't stand it and the deal fell apart.

The next employment I had was with Morris White, a big pocketbook manufacturer in Manhattan. He had the reputation of being a good technician. Even though I



A picture of bygone days. *Standing: Shlomo Cooper and his sister Beile Hoffman with their niece Leona, (center), whose mother Rivka left her an orphan at an early age. Below is the youngest brother, Chaim Cooper, with little Hersh Ber, (Herbert), the eldest child of Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman. The brothers Chaim and Shlomo Cooper died young. Shlomo died on the first day of Adar, 1941, aged 42. Chaim died on the 22nd of Tevet, 1953, aged 48.*

wasn't an enthusiastic supporter of labor unions, the pocketbook union called me and recommended me to White's shop. One of the things I noticed was that the workers weren't happy because I operated at a fast pace and produced more than they. When the boss gave me only fifty dollars after the first week, I said goodbye, slamming the door on the way out.

Just at that time the three brothers from Broome Street, who had been my first bosses, began to produce a new article, pressed leather, artistically colored. Since they knew that I was skilled at that kind of work, they looked me up and invited me to become the foreman in their newly-opened place in Newark, New Jersey. The enterprise was very successful and I earned a lot of money, managing to save a great deal of it. The drawback, however, was the long trek to Newark in the morning and back home to Brooklyn at night. During the few months I worked there I underwent a terrific strain, both physical and emotional. When I indicated to my employers that it was too much for me, they offered a substantial raise as an inducement to stay but I decided that was it. I hadn't come to America solely to earn money and not have a moment's rest.

Shortly after I left Newark, the shop closed down and one of the brothers took a job as a salesman in the same line.

Why do I tell you all this? I'm addressing myself to the latest wave of immigrants, who expect the red carpet treatment as soon as they step off the plane or the ship. They have the attitude that no matter what Jewish organizations do for them in so many ways, it's still not enough and they demand even more, as though it were owed them.

In my time there were no Jewish organizations to maintain immigrants for any length of time, nor would the newcomers themselves have agreed to a system

whereby they would sit and wait for handouts. We wanted to work and earn money to support ourselves without awaiting anyone's favors.

That's the way it was with me and my future wife when we arrived here. We worked hard and were satisfied, she on Avenue B on the East Side and I on South Eighth Street in Williamsburgh.

Three and one half years after we arrived in the States we decided to get married.

20

Two Greenhorns are Married in the Bronx

On Sunday evening, August 17, 1924, a miraculous transformation took place. Aunt Toive's house on Burke Avenue in the Bronx was converted into a grand ballroom whose equal for elegance I've yet to see.

Does that sound naive? By now you know that I've attended hundreds of weddings, dinners and banquets in the Waldorf Astoria, the Hilton and other beautiful places but I repeat without hesitation that the splendor and holiday glow of aunty's house that night made for an occasion that excelled all others that I can bring to memory.

It's obvious, of course, that I was a party to the affair and thus somewhat prejudiced, because that evening was the beginning of fifty-one and a half years of a wonderfully happy married life together for Beile and me. We shared tribulations and joys for over half a century until that nightmarish day when she was unexpectedly taken from me and the children — the twenty-sixth of Shevat, 5736, (January 28, 1976).

But let's not get ahead of ourselves, since there is so much more of interest to relate. Right now we're at a marvelous celebration in the Bronx. Two immigrants, a twenty-four-year-old young man from Ostrove and a girl of twenty-one years from Mienzhenin, a town near Rutke, are about to take their places beneath the

nuptial canopy. After an acquaintance of almost ten years that began during a midnight blizzard in the midst of the war in 1915 and survived so many gyrations and peregrinations, the fates intervened on our behalf. A bedevilled courtship culminated in a wedding in far-off America, where both of us ended up because of the bitter turn of events that befell the Jews in the cities and towns of Poland.

I still glow with the memory of the wedding scene. Beile's aunt and uncle had adorned the house with decorations expressing the good-luck motif and flowers that had been gathered by their children. Future in-laws began to appear and kiss each other, crying with joy. Beile's two brothers were the prime in-laws on the bride's side. I had my sister Judith, her husband Meyer and the cousins from Brownsville and the East Side.

Who ever thought of hiring a hall for a wedding in those days? Most Jewish weddings took place either in your own home or in a cantor-reverend's house, with a few bottles of whiskey and a small bite laid out on the table. If couples then had had what it takes to finance a wedding today, they would have been considered millionaires.

Instead of an orchestra costing a thousand dollars or more, we set up the phonograph and the crowd sang along and danced. I remember in particular the song "A Letter to Mother", a very popular tune at that time. We sang other songs of a similar genre, expressing our feelings of loneliness and longing for those near and dear to us on the other side of the ocean.

Beile didn't even wear a white gown with a long train, nor did I have a tuxedo but we were the happiest two people in the entire world. The rabbi — unfortunately I can't recall his name — chanted the "K-l Moleh Rachamim", (prayer after the departed), for Beile's father, Hersh Ber, (OBM). You will remember

that he had come here from Mienzhenin in order to earn enough money to buy the house where he and his wife ran an inn. He died in Philadelphia on the twenty-first day of Elul, (August), 1913.

I think it's too bad that Jews don't have a prayer in their liturgy blessing living parents unable for one reason or another to be present at the wedding of their children. We did the next best thing: Beile's brother Shlomo, the photographer,took pictures of the newly-married couple and we sent them to my parents in Ostrove and Chane Bashe in Rutke.

My sister Judith and her husband Meyer led me to the canopy and Toive Cloor and her spouse did the honors for Beile. As is the custom among Jews, the bride's face was covered with a diaphanous veil. When I looked at Beile's tearful eyes I experienced the same feelings of yearning and trepidation as she. We longed for our memory-filled past and were fearful about what the future held for us in the new world. "Don't cry, my little Beile," I said to her quietly as I slipped the marriage band on her finger and recited the "Harei Aht", (Behold thou are consecrated unto me"), a statement made by the groom to his bride declaring her his wife. When she looked back at me I felt the moisture in my own eyes.

The wedding on Burke Avenue lasted well into the night, even though all the in-laws and the bride and groom as well had to get up early the next morning to go to work. "And the honeymoon?" you might ask. Well, who in those days could so much as think about honeymoons and around-the-world trips? Thank G-d that in our married life we managed to more than make up what we couldn't afford early on by traveling dozens of times to Israel and other parts of the world for our vacations. But right after our wedding in the Bronx in 1924 we moved into our first apartment in America on



Jacob Hoffman the groom playfully holds the long tresses of Aunt Toive from the Bronx, where his wedding with Beile had taken place.

457 Williams Avenue, near the border between Brownsville and East New York. It's noteworthy too that the apartment was on Livonia Avenue, the street where even today the Seventh Avenue Elevated rushes by noisily seven days a week. I guess there's no way to compare such things, but that would make the El a little more cacophonous than the Sambatyon, (a mythical river that carried sand and rubble with such force as to shatter the eardrums, but was miraculously quiet on the Sabbath).

In an attempt, I suppose, to make the best of a bad situation, people used the open-air train as a source of humor, saying: "Oh yes, I live in a luxury apartment in Brownsville, with an elevator and everything."

The neighborhood was Jewish through and through, filled with new immigrants who had, thank G-d, improved their lot and moved there from the East Side. They began to build private one and two family houses. Big synagogues were erected where the greatest cantors officiated. I never failed to go to hear them. On Sutter Avenue near Williams there was a movie house that showed fine films and rented its premises from time to time for important Jewish meetings.

One summer day in 1926 the theater was packed solid with people and thousands more waited outside. Since I lived nearby, I came early and thus was able to get in to listen to the great Chayim Nachman Bialik, (OBM), universally considered to be the modern national poet in the Hebrew language. His voice thundered with criticism of Jews in America who neglected to raise their children in the spirit of their people. And when he spoke about the rebuilding of our homeland, you could literally see sparks shooting forth from his mouth. For us greenhorns Bialik's talk was a deeply moving experience, bringing us a fresh reminder of our old home and warning us not to sink too deeply

into the morass of American materialism, whose values were limited to the acquisition of money and other forms of wealth. When Bialik went outside after his talk, he was surrounded by thousands of Jews who pushed and shoved just to catch a glimpse of the great poet.

Just about that time they built a new movie house that became a byword over all of New York in terms of size and architectural beauty. It was called Loews Pitkin. I still remember that Ludwig Satz, one of the all-time luminaries of the Yiddish stage, appeared there often, chasing the gloom from our faces and the dark shadows from our minds. Among the many roles he played, the most popular was the naive yeshivah student who pulled ordination documents from the greatest rabbis out of his pockets in order to please and impress his future father-in-law, only to find that the latter had pledged his daughter, a real beauty, to a rich man's son.

After the wedding I brought Beile to the three-room apartment I had rented on Williams and Livonia Avenues. Imagine my surprise when the landlord led us both down to the cellar and showed us a corner where there was a pile of coal to be used for heating our quarters. There was no such luxury as central heating in those days and every tenant was given his own oven and coals that had to be dragged to whatever floor he lived on. In my case it was the third, so I got plenty of exercise.

Whenever both of us were occupied with this nuisance of transporting the coal, I used to comfort Beile by saying: "It's still better than heating the oven with wet wood or, even worse, peat that smelled up the whole house and gave everyone a headache." For a while anyway, the memory of what we had to endure in Europe when it came to keeping warm made our present circumstances more tolerable. With all that, naturally it

Miss Bella Cooper

Mr. Jack Hoffman

request the honor of your presence

at their marriage ceremony

Sunday, August 17th, 1924, at 5:00 P. M.

at the residence of

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Cloor

171 Burke Avenue

Bronx, N. Y.

Brides residence
457 Williams Avenue
Brooklyn, New York

מיסס ביילע קופּער

מר. דזשיק האָפמאַן

לאדעט אייך העפליכסט איין צו זייער האכצייט

זונטאג אוועגד, דעם 17טען אוגוסט, 1924

אום 5 אוהר

אין דער וואהנונג פון

מר. און מרס. העררי קלוער

171 בוירק עוועגוי

בראנקס, נ. י.

כלה׳ס וואהנונג
457 ווילליעמס עוע.
ברוקלין, נ. י.

A Jewish wedding invitation in America 53 years ago
The wedding invitation that Jacob Hoffman and his bride Beile Cooper sent to their relatives and friends.

was I who had to carry the coal from the cellar to our apartment because Beile was carrying something far more important and precious. Nine months after our marriage she had a safe delivery and gave birth to a little boy, whom we named Hersh Ber, after her father.

When the news that Beile had had a son reached Rutke and they learned that the child bore the name of Chane Bashe's husband, who had died quite young, their joy knew no bounds. Zelda, her youngest daughter, wrote us that the whole town came to congratulate her, saying it was better to experience happiness from afar than sorrow close by.

Yankel Hoffman and Beile Cooper again became — for a few days at least — the talk of the town. We here had to face the problem of finding more suitable lodgings for the growing Hoffman family.

Since I was then employed at leatherworking on Greene Avenue near Marcy, (where the shop I had been working at in Manhattan on Greene Street moved to), I rented a nice apartment in a two family house, not far from my place of business. The landlord was an observant Jew and very helpful and friendly. Today Greene Avenue is a part of Bedford Stuyvesant, but then it enjoyed an active Jewish life, with packed synagogues, Jewish stores and a multi-faceted communal existence.

I earned a very good salary at my trade. The valises we produced came out better than we had anticipated and I was the highest-paid among all the workers in the shop. The owners used to seek my advice as to what leather to buy, and what kind of samples to make up. My suggestions were found to be both practical and productive.

One evening I came home from work tired and hungry. As I sat at table with Beile and the baby, a thought I 'd had on previous occasions recurred. "Since

for all practical purposes I was running the shop on Greene Avenue, why should I simply work for others and get only a fixed salary for myself?" In a sense, I was working to enrich my bosses.

Since I was an afficionado of Jewish songs and cantorial music, I bought a phonograph and Jewish records. At that particular moment I was playing that beloved tune: "Belz, My Little Town of Belz", which for Beile and me was translated in terms of Rutke. That record always aroused terrific waves of nostalgic memories in me. Even today, when I attend concerts where singers ask for suggestions from the audience, I always request that song.

Beile looked at me, her eyes questioning: "What do you mean . . . going into business for yourself? This isn't Rutke . . . here I'll have to help you, at least initially — so who'll watch the child?"

I couldn't answer her but in my heart of hearts I had made a firm decision that in America I wouldn't work for others very long.

●



Beile Cooper Hoffman with her two brothers, Shlomo, (right), and Chaim.

21

A Grocer for Sixteen Years in Crown Heights

After the butcher trade, which I knew from my father's house in Ostrove, the second skill I made my living at in Poland was leatherwork, first as a worker and later as a manufacturer and merchant in Rutke.

Subsequent to my first failure as a butcher on Jefferson Street in the East Side section of Manhattan, I managed to save some money working for others. I looked on that failure as only a temporary set-back and the hankering after my own business never really left me. So after my wedding, I resolved to try again. To effectuate that resolve, I took a partner and rented a loft on 55 Christie Street near Delancey and we began to fabricate leather goods, valises and so forth.

As someone who had a practiced eye for business, I felt that our enterprise had an excellent chance for success. To my sorrow, however, I found out after several months that my "loyal" partner was keeping a double set of books. He used to sell valises to retail stores and instead of bringing the money back to be shared equally, put it in his pocket. You can well imagine that I got rid of that swindler as soon as I confronted him with his deception. I took over the shop and ran it myself, with some help from my wife Beile, or as she began calling herself — in keeping with the American mode — Bella.

The landlords of the house we lived in on Greene Avenue in Brooklyn were very generous, good-hearted people. The landlady and her daughters were of great help in that they baby sat for our little Hersh Ber. That released Beile from her household chores sufficiently to enable her to come to my shop and help me several days a week. She supervised the work while I went out to see customers, garner orders and collect money due me. The shop afforded a good livelihood, but at a steep price — first of all, the work itself was tiring and secondly it imposed a heavy load on Beile, so that I began to wonder whether it was worth the effort to maintain the operation. Beile was a whiz at managing the affairs of the shop but our child spent entire days under someone else's supervision, however competent it was. Lastly, I used to come home late at night, entirely drained by the work load I had to bear.

One fine day a salesman from Chicago came into my place of business and made me an offer that I seized as readily as would a drowning man a lifesaver. The plan was very appealing because it provided that I work exclusively for the mail order house he represented and get a check by mail every month for the work I turned out.

For about six months I really had a sense of relief and relaxation. I no longer had to go through the extremely unpleasant task of dunning my customers for overdue bills and, more important, Beile didn't have to spend so much time in the place, giving her more opportunity to provide our son with the maternal care every child needs and should have.

But, as the saying goes, it was too good to last. All of a sudden I discovered that the mail order house had gone bankrupt. To add to my woes, the last check I received from them as payment for my work came back marked "insufficient funds." The only money I could

look forward to was that due me from orders that had been previously shipped out. As a result of these latest developments, my shop had to close and I was once more a poor man without the means to make a livelihood.

I was about in as low a state as possible, my heart heavy with bitterness at this tragic turn of fortune. Being in such circumstances when one is single is not a happy situation but having a family to support makes you panicky with anxiety over the unknown. Beile was eating herself up alive just looking at me going about in a daze and not knowing where to turn. I again took to reading the ads in the Morning Journal but could find no situation appealing to me.

While going through that travail, I discovered that the former foreman at the shop on Greene Street where I had worked as a greenhorn had a grocery store on Union Street in the Crown Heights section of Brookyn — 1586 Union Street near Troy Avenue, to be exact. He was a very fine, intelligent gentleman and we became close friends where we worked together, eating lunch and discussing Jewish politics, Zionism and socialism. I mentioned previously that when the boss of the shop offered me the foremanship, I turned it down because it would have meant hurting my friend and I wouldn't do such a thing even though it meant that I lost out materially.

I had plenty of time on my hands and nothing especially to do with it, so I went to Crown Heights to pay a visit to my previous foreman. His reception re-confirmed what I had known about him all along. He embraced me warmly as though I were his brother and in the conversation that ensued got all his troubles off his chest. He had a partner in the grocery who was very nervous and otherwise causing him all kinds of difficulty. To boot, the partner had married a Christian woman who, though converted to Judaism, retained

whatever undesirable qualities she possessed in her earlier state and displayed them unabashedly when she quarreled with her husband in the presence of the customers. The unhealthy relationship between the partners, my friend explained further, had reached such an exacerbated state as to prompt him to think about selling the grocery. As yet, though, he had found no buyer.

What he said aroused considerable interest in me because here I saw a possible solution to my dilemma, so I instinctively asked him how much he wanted for the store.

"We would sell it for four thousand dollars," he answered quietly as he cut a piece of soft cheese for a worthy lady with whom Beile and I became very friendly later on. Her name was Mrs. Gribetz, the wife of Abraham Gribetz and mother of Judah, one of Governors Carey's aides in Albany. Abraham Gribetz was then office manager of the Hebrew Free Loan Society, an organization that lent money at little or no interest to needy people.

Ray Katz, one of my relatives who worked in the Society for forty years under Mr. Gribetz' administration, always told me what a wonderful person he was. Even today Ray helps out gratis in the Society several days a week.

Fate weaves its web in strange ways. From a grocery store connection I met so many kind and outstanding people. Another member of the Gribetz family, Louis J. Gribetz, later became my real estate lawyer and a close friend over a span of many years. We had personal as well as organizational contacts and were also neighbors at prayers in the Brooklyn Jewish Center on Eastern Parkway, where he would congratulate me after I had finished officiating at services.

When I heard from my foreman friend the sum of

four thousand dollars, I became very depressed. First of all, who knew whether I was in any way suited to the grocery business? And even if I were, where the devil does one put his hands on such an astronomical sum? (for me, that is). But then I became really determined to manage the situation somehow because while standing there I saw the heavy volume of business being transacted. I was of the opinion that Beile and I could work it up even more.

Not for nothing, I thought, was I brought by heavenly intervention to a grocery store on Union Street. The proverb says that necessity is the mother of invention and I add that it's stronger than steel. So I swallowed my pride and agreed to the proposal made by my brother-in-law Chaim. His idea was to ask our Rutke friends now residing here to help me out with an interest-free loan. They knew of my status as a merchant in Rutke even when I was a mere lad. Everyone in town marveled at me then and they had a great deal of faith in me in America too. Chaim brought me the money given him by our friends in the form of a loan for one year and Beile and I became the fortunate owners of a grocery store. (Incidentally, I paid off the loan before it was due).

The adjustment period in the early stages of my ownership was extremely difficult and at times it seemed that I'd never make it. First of all, I didn't even know the names of the articles that my lady customers asked for. I must say to his credit that the previous owner stayed with us for two full weeks but there were certain things that I had to learn for myself, even though I watched him do them many times. For example, somehow or other I found gouging out a precise amount of butter with a wooden spatula from a whole tubful of the stuff to be a skill beyond my ability to master. (In those days butter didn't come in such easy-to-manage

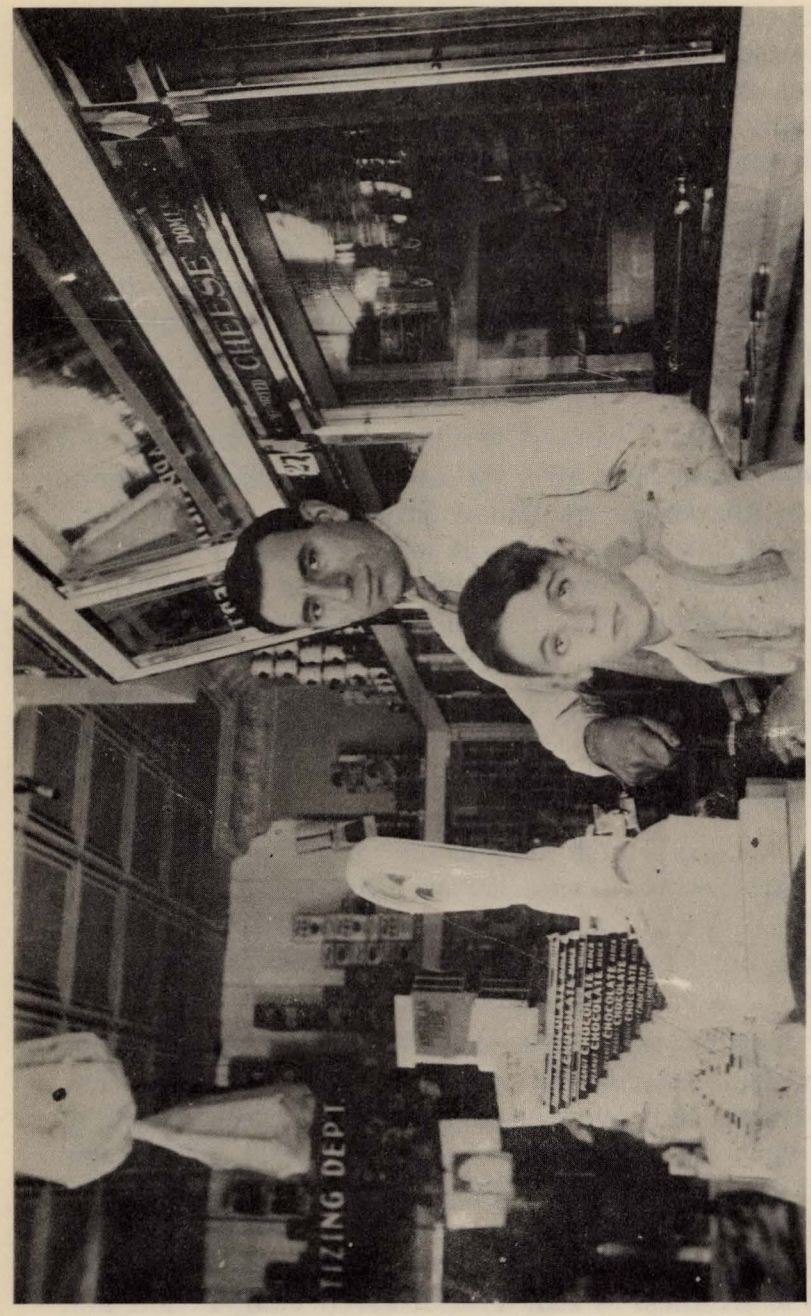
packaged form). Again, weighing cheese accurately was a problem. And G-d forbid if I forgot to whom to send sweet cream and not sour. But the women were very friendly and understanding and were particularly taken with the refinement and grace of my wife.

We had loyal customers who came to us from great distances just so Beile could make up their order. I don't hesitate to say that the success of the grocery store was due in toto to Beile, who had an endearing personality and attracted people with her sweet disposition and the kind words she had for everyone.

She and I worked very hard in the grocery. Our labors began right after we moved from Greene Avenue to an apartment on Union Street opposite the store. Beile of course had a double job. In addition to helping me with the running of the business, she would hurry to the apartment every free moment she had, clean and tidy up the rooms, make delicious meals, (where she found the time and patience to cook so elaborately I'll never know), and return to the work as saleslady with a smile, as if she'd done nothing in between the time she left and came back.

Our son Hersh Ber began to attend the Crown Heights Yeshivah, together with the well-known Judah Gribetz. A while after that G-d blessed us with a little daughter whom we named Gitl after my mother, (OBM), who passed away in 1928 in Ostrove.

It pains me to say that the five grocery stores in the immediate neighborhood gave me a very hard time. The old-timers told everyone they met that the greenhorn wouldn't last more than two weeks, after which time he'd have to give up the ghost. To make things as tough as they could for me, they displayed specials so as to draw away my customers. Having had experience before in the business world, I understood competition and



Jacob Hoffman in his grocery store on Troy Avenue in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, with his only son, Hersh Ber.

could have met it if my competitors had used legitimate means in their commercial struggle with me. What made things infinitely more difficult, however, were the calumnies and snide remarks about those "immigrant animals" just off the boat.

Never one to run away from a fight, the smell of powder in the air only increased my determination to make a success of the small grocery. Beile and I worked even harder than before, delivering orders ourselves to the very top floors of the buildings where our customers lived. To add to our troubles, we would sometimes get to one of the top floors only to find a note that the lady of the house had to leave for a while. They usually asked us to place the bag with the groceries near the door and said they would come by at some time or other to pay us. Some of them would come in and claim that the bag and its contents had been stolen because they didn't find it where we had left it.

When the children grew up and could manage physically, they helped us carry the orders after they'd finished their school day at the yeshivah. The grocery became a gathering place for the finest housewives, with the result that four of the five competing stores had to close and the greenhorn outlived them all. I was the last to leave the grocery line and at that I did so not because I couldn't have stayed on had I wished, but in order to help a newly-arrived immigrant make a living in his new home. I sold out in 1942 and the store did very well. I literally gave it away at one third its value because I remembered how others had come to my assistance when times were hard. The proof the store's worth lays in the fact that even when my successor sold it, he had managed to save enough money to buy a pocketbook business on Nostrand Avenue. He was a tenant in one of my houses located at 1418 President Street and



Beile with her grocery apron and Hersh Ber, who had just come home from the Yeshivah of Crown Heights, try to quiet young Gittl, (Gladys), then barely three years old.

whenever we met would thank me warmly for having aided him in getting established.

My grocery grew to such dimensions that I had to take a much bigger place, where I installed the most modern fixtures and began to carry new products. All those measures just about doubled my income.

You can't expect life to be eternally smooth, so when troubles come along the best thing to do is face them squarely and seek logical solutions. In my case, I was reasonably happy with the way my affairs were progressing, when certain problems arose in the grocery business in general. Having taken leadership roles in my youth, I suppose it was natural for me to assume a similar position here. Fate willed that I become the head of the Grocery Association. To conduct our business, we rented a hall on Eastern Parkway and Utica Avenue, near Dubrow's restaurant. What we had to watch out for on the one hand was that wholesalers not bilk us with their prices and on the other that we not yield to the Jewish grocery workers union that wanted to force us to hire help in the so-called "mama and papa" stores. More than one grocery was ruined by that tactic and the association helped them with an interest-free loan. If it was necessary, the association conducted a counter-strike against the union in defending our vital interests. I remember that we once led a boycott against the Stuhmer Company because it had set outrageous prices on its famous pumpernickel bread. We also published a weekly paper with news and reports about our business and carried ads from all the fruit and food vendors who cooperated with us.

But I began to get restless again. Was standing on my feet all day and carrying orders to the top floors the be-all and end-all of my life, especially when Beile had to work so hard? Was there no other means of livelihood

available to a young man with a business head on his shoulders? I'd heard that some Jews were buying houses and earning money either by holding them and collecting rent or reselling. So why not try my luck in the housing field?



Jacob and Beile Hoffman at dinner in Israel

22

My First Steps in the World of Real Estate

My grocery store on Union Street was a gathering place for a rare assortment of characters. They were not quite ne'er-do-wells, nor were they out-and-out crooks, but they were called "luftmenschen", or people who seemed to live on air, without having a secure economic base to their lives. Among other things, they dabbled in real estate and acted as brokers in that line of endeavor. As soon as the rumour spread that someone was selling a house, the poor buyer or seller didn't have much peace from that moment on.

Every day some of those people propositioned me too, at times staying well into the night. They offered houses that they considered real bargains, the kind that "could make you a rich man over night." I listened to all of them with great attention and noted down the addresses where those "finds" were located, so that I could find out more details about them.

It's true that I hadn't had much experience in real estate, but my general business sense told me that one house near Dubrow's Restuarant on Eastern Parkway near Utica Avenue that had been offered me had some possibilities. It was an eighteen family house and I'd have to put down only $10,000 in cash over and beyond the mortgage.

The understanding I brought to my first venture

was admittedly that of a neophyte, yet I felt instinctively that it was worthwhile investing in that house. Nevertheless, I didn't jump into the deal precipitously; I double-checked by talking with the Jewish super in the twenty-family house I lived in on Union Street and proposed that we go into the enterprise on a fifty-fifty basis. The truth is that I myself had $10,000 that I had saved from the profits on my grocery store, but I wanted a partner who would know his way around and be able to provide whatever services a house needs. Besides, I was still busy with the grocery and couldn't devote too much time to real estate deals.

The super, a Mr. Diamond by name, had worked around houses all his life. He was expert at all the chores involved in house maintenance, like cleaning the lobby, hauling coal, repairing broken windows, etc. To get him to agree, I reasoned with him as follows: "Diamond, what good is your money doing you lying in the bank? Invest it in a house and you'll see how much more you'll earn than the paltry interest the bank gives you." Never having given thought to the possibility of investing, Diamond was understandably frightened. It didn't help when some so-called experts told him that the house wasn't worth the money. Still, I guess I was quite persuasive, because he finally agreed to try his luck with me. I must admit that the written statement I gave him guaranteeing the return of his money on demand within one year may have been instrumental in allaying some of his doubts.

To make a long story short, after we had held the house only six months, a buyer came along who gave us $15,000 in addition to the thousand dollars we earned in rent.

Diamond saw that in one half year he made $3,000. What he liked as much as the money was the fact that it had come to him without strain or anxiety, so he

developed an appetite for carrying our partnership even further. Like in everything else, the appetite for real estate deals increases as you go along. The only thing is that you have to be careful as to what you "take in" as food and watch out for indigestion due to overeating. Lots of beginners in the real estate game come a cropper because they attempt deals that are too complicated or too costly for their level of sophistication.

Our brokers proposed another house to us, this time a sixty-family affair at 706 Lefferts Boulevard, also in Crown Heights. At that time Crown Heights was a ferverishly active real estate market, even in walk-up apartments not equipped with elevators. Here we invested a lot more money than in our previous venture. We bought it from the East New York Savings Bank, which had apparently repossessed the property from a landlord who failed to make his mortgage payments — one example of the kind of indigestion I mentioned earlier.

After we'd held the house for six months, we too had trouble in paying the bank, and Diamond, my partner began getting extremely nervous. "Hoffman, what will become of the money I set aside for my basic needs?" he would say to me like a baby, indirectly accusing me of dragging him into a morass that offered only a slim chance of escape. No matter how I tried to reason with him that real estate is not a hot potato that you drop when the going gets a little rough but an enterprise that requires you to hold on patiently and even endure hardship for some time, it didn't seem to penetrate and I couldn't calm him.

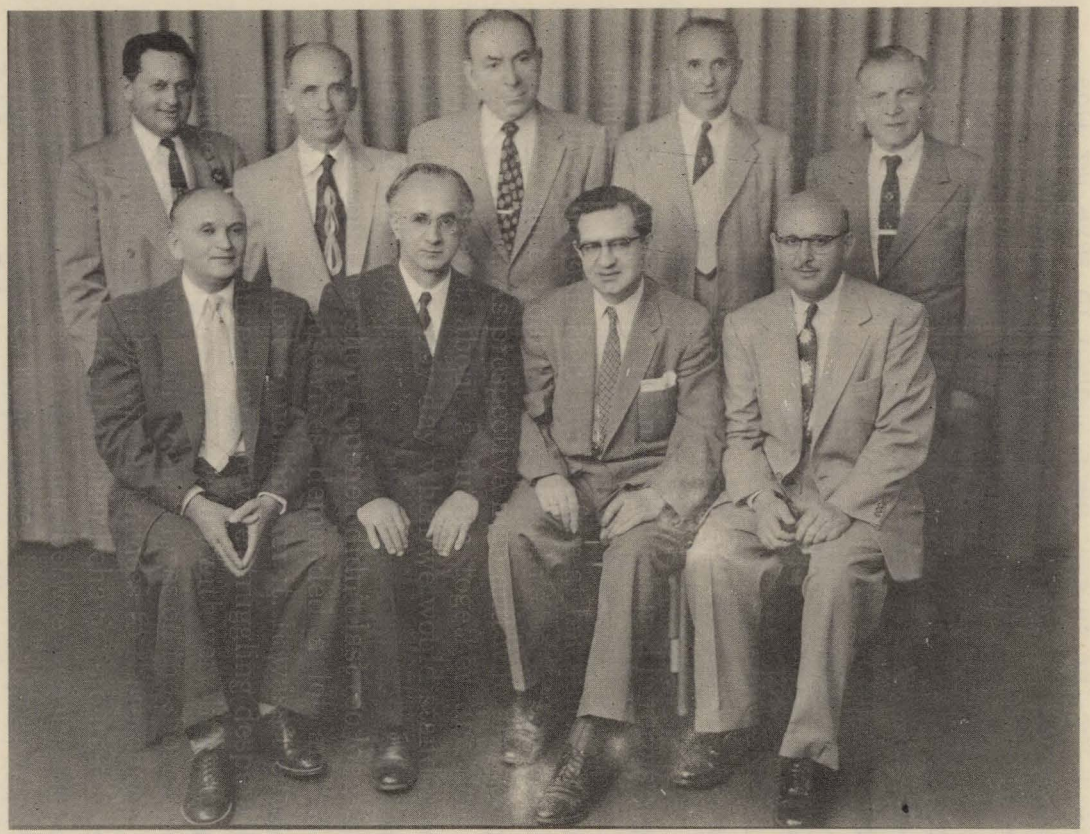
One evening he came into my grocery with a plan that both of us go to the president of the East New York Savings Bank, George Richards by name, of German origin and a former judge. Whenever we met, he would speak to us in his Yiddish and we would respond in our

German, an interesting linguistic by-play. The object of this visit would be to explain our situation to him so that he'd agree to reduce the rate of interest we were currently paying on the mortgage. At that time we paid 4 1/2 percent, and if he'd consent to a 1/2 percent reduction, we would save about $800 a year, a formidable sum in the early 30's, when President Hoover of depression fame sat in the White House.

I liked the idea of the plan and I told Diamond how I felt about it, but I thought of one change to improve the chances for it being accepted. It was my view that I should definitely not be a part of the encounter with Mr. Richards. "Maybe he'll take pity on you, but he thinks of me as a rich grocery man and real estate dealer," I explained to my partner. I wasn't at all concerned about the house and our ability to carry it, so I again offered Diamond a guarantee to return his entire investment at the end of the first year. But this time he turned down my gesture because he knew full well that the house was a sound investment; it was an elevator building with beautiful rooms and would ultimately bring in a handsome profit.

Diamond accepted my reasoning in re the visit, so he put on an old suit and a pair of dilapidated shoes from his superintendent days and went to the bank office, where he was made to cool his heels for hours. It didn't help his frame of mind much when, after having waited so long, he was told that the president is busy and can't see him.

But it took a lot more than such a rebuff to discourage my partner. He persisted and the next day went back to the bank and sat near the president's office door, with the idea of waiting till that dignitary would see him. The employees didn't know how to handle Diamond: pulling him out by force was something they didn't want to do, because bedraggled though he



Jacob Hoffman, (standing center), with the leadership of the Kinneret Day School, of which he was an original founder.

Right to left, sitting: Abraham Shudroff, Dr. Israel M. Biderman, Abraham Meyerowitz, the Principal, and Leizer Kvitko. Standing left is Sam Somorodin.

appeared, he was still a customer. Well, George Richards finally consented to see him in his office and Diamond gave him a good story about how hard he had worked for the money he managed to save for this investment and now there was a real danger that he'd lose everything, down to the last penny.

"Where is your partner, Hoffman?" the president asked, perhaps surmising that I'd had a hand in putting on this show by sending my bedraggled-looking partner to arouse sympathy.

"Your Honor," (flattery never hurt one's cause), "Hoffman is hard at work delivering groceries to the fifth floor and can't spare a moment from his labors," Diamond answered very quickly and cleverly.

The appeal to the judge was successful. He allowed us a reduction of 1/2 percent and Diamond was delirious with joy, maybe because initially he didn't have too much faith in the efficacy of the maneuver. When we finally sold the house, he thanked me again for my suggestion.

For Diamond this was the last real estate deal but it was only the merest beginning for me. I saw the possibility of making considerable sums of money within a relatively short time, so my appetite for bigger and better transactions was whetted to the point where I sold the grocery store and devoted all my time to buying and selling properties. I thank G-d for having directed me to this endeavor and blessed my efforts with success. Over the years my real estate dealings spread beyond the boundaries of Crown Heights and reached into all five boroughs of the metropolis. Here again I must interject a word about some remarkable qualities possessed by my unforgettable Beile. Where she derived her acute business sense from, I'm at a loss to say. All I know is that I found her advice sensible in terms of the pragmatic aspects of commerce and yet sensitive to human values,

sympathetic to other's needs and concerned for the well-being of our tenants.

Despite the widespread transactions and the financial ability to do so, I didn't leave Crown Heights. Nor did the fact that my children and grandchildren left for other parts influence me to do likewise. I'm proud to say that I'm still the landlord of the most beautiful, Jewishly-oriented apartment house in that neighborhood. It's the building in which I have my own apartment and I derive endless pleasure from the fact that the entire place is occupied by Jewish scholars, rabbis, heads of yeshivahs, doctors, businessmen and workers, most of them members of the Lubavitcher chassidic sect. I'm happy to say that a fair number of recently-arrived Russian-Jewish families are among my tenants too.

My closeness to the Lubavitcher yeshivah and participation in their annual banquet and other functions derive from personal observation of the wonderful work they do to assure Jewish continuity by their education network. In Israel too I often visit Kfar Chabad, (a Lubavitcher village), in whose construction and maintenance my wife and I, thank G-d, are represented quite substantially.

For me Crown Heights today is much more than a mere piece of real estate. Thanks to the Lubavitcher movement, it's a spiritual bastion of Jewish living. I'm very proud of my particular contribution to the preservation and continued development of what I consider to be one of the greatest forces for Jewish survival operative today.

During the years I ran a grocery store in Crown Heights and before the Lubavitcher came to America, I participated actively in furthering Jewish education in the neighborhood. However, at that time it was a different kind of education, nearer to the ideology of the

Poale Zion and Zeire Zion, among whom I was nourished spiritually in Poland.

The Mendele Yiddish Folkschul, (named after Mendele Mocher S'forim, the father of modern Yiddish literature), was run by the Labor Zionist Alliance on Schenectady Avenue and Lincoln Road. Later it became the Kinneret Day School, giving a Hebrew and Yiddish education in the national spirit and moved to Eastern Parkway and Buffalo Avenue.

I had the highest admiration and respect for the unforgettable Louis Segal (OBM), an imaginative and forceful leader in the Labor Zionist Movement. Since I dealt in real estate, I was greatly instrumental in acquiring a suitable location and building for Kinneret and became its second president after Mr. Shudroff, (OBM).

The success of Kinneret in Brooklyn was so ably fostered by the educational leadership of that great scholar and pedagogue, Dr. Yerachmiel Weingarten, (now residing in Israel), that we established a second school with the same name in the Bronx. It is still functioning in the Schiff Center at 2510 Valentine Avenue, and has a very sizeable student body. In Kinneret both Hebrew and Yiddish studies are taught, with a strong emphasis on Jewish lore, tradition and Israel. In viewing the products of the institution, I would judge that the students have achieved a great deal as regards both Jewish knowledge and attitudes.

Two years ago I was privileged to be the guest of honor at a dinner of the Bronx Kinneret School, of which Dr. Judah Shapiro is the president. His father, (OBM), was principal of the school after Dr. Weingarten. I also worked closely with Dr. Rudovsky and other important educators and activists in the Labor Zionist Alliance, all of whom are very dear to me.

Demographic changes brought about the closing of

the Brooklyn Kinneret School after ten years of superb educational achievements. One saving grace, however, was the fact that as president I was able to arrange for the transfer of the school buildings at a good price and reasonable terms to "Oholei Torah", a Lubavitcher educational institution founded by Jewish emigres from Russia. The leaders of Oholei Torah have declared on more than one occasion that I can be considered as a co-founder of their school because I helped secure a roof over their heads.

As one who started his real estate operations in Crown Heights more than four decades ago, I have a very warm feeling for that neighborhood. And small wonder. I think constantly of its Jewish faces, synagogues, houses of study, chassidic houses of prayer, the Brooklyn Jewish Center, where I have long been a member, its rabbis past and present who wore top-hats as they walked through the streets on the Sabbath, and its scholars and yeshivah students of today. Most of all do I admire the members of the Lubavitcher sect who fought against the trend of neighborhood abandonment and set an example of Jewish courage for all of us. They have taught us a lesson in fighting for one's rights as full-fledged citizens of our blessed America.



Hoffman with his granchildren, Paul and Robin, born to his son, *photographed with the District Attorney of Brooklyn, Eugene Gold, at a dinner for the Lubavitcher yeshivahs.*

23

My Relatives Overseas

Like all immigrants who had the good fortune to reach the golden shores of America, Beile and I lived and suffered through all that transpired in our former home and our towns Ostrove and Rutke. We frequently met fellow townspeople, and along with them "re-walked" the alleyways whose twists and turns we remembered so clearly. And what joy there was, albeit tinged with poignancy, in re-living the many memories of our vanished youth!

On the one hand, we were grateful to G-d for being in America and felt fortunate at our situation here. On the other, our hearts were drawn as though by an irresistible magnet to those whom fate had forced us to leave behind in the old country.

Beile continually longed for her mother, Chane Bashe and her younger sister Zelda. Zelda, who had remained behind by herself in Rutke, was now without a single relative. If that weren't bad enough, there didn't appear to be any possibility of her being rescued. Shlomo and Chaim, Chane Bashe's sons, were already in America and Rivke, the older daughter, died quite young in Philadelphia. And you now know that Beile herself had married Jacob Hoffman, the sweetheart of her youth, in New York.

Chane Bashe was really quite alone and lonely in Rutke, but her reputation grew as a very religious woman and a generous source of aid to everyone in need,

whether they asked for it or not. From America we sent her more than she actually needed in the way of expenses, so she was able to do many favors, give generously to charity and make interest-free loans. Times were extremely harsh for Jews in Poland. The "Endekes", virulent anti-Semites, and their cronies carried on an open and disastrously effective boycott against Jewish merchants. Upstanding Jews who had been fabulously rich only yesterday were on the morrow reduced to complete and shame-faced destitution. Jews who had occupied the coveted and prestigious seats of honor on the eastern wall of the synagogue became bedgraggled paupers. Whoever among them had a relative in America still retained a vestige of hope that their luck would turn. They could still look forward to a letter, a few dollars, a bundle of clothing and in time perhaps the magic papers that would enable them to leave for that cherished land of their dreams, America.

In town it was common knowledge that Chane Bashe's children were exceedingly generous in their aid to her, so she became the address for all who were in need — by now a very substantial number. In order to save face for the recipients of her kindness, they conducted a charade, making believe that what transpired between them was a lending transaction, although both parties knew that repayment would never take place.

We here were very happy to read the letters that she and Zelda sent us and we hoped to be able to arrange for papers to bring them to America, even though such matters were tremendously difficult to arrange at that time. The American consul in Warsaw was anything but generous in handling emigration applications and refused the vast majority of them.

Suddenly we received a letter with the sad news that Chane Bashe became ill and needed the services of

some great specialists. We sent a larger sum of money so that they'd be able to bring her to Warsaw and seek out doctors who could provide her with the best care available.

In Warsaw there was a family, Shapiro by name, with whom I'd been very close. They lived on 62 Agradov Street and opened their house to Chane Bashe, providing her with whatever she needed — as though she were their own mother. They got the best doctors in town and for a while maintained her in Otvotsk, where they thought the air might help her.

In Rutke Mrs. Shapiro's name had been Esther Rachel Shemborsky. She was one of the best educated girls in town, as well as among the finest performers in the theater I had organized. Her father was an itinerant preacher. He used to make the rounds of the small neighboring hamlets and give sermons. It could very well be that it was from him that Esther had inherited the talent to appear before the public and perform with so much aplomb. She was particularly outstanding when playing the role of Freide, the evil aunt in Jacob Gordon's "Chashe the Orphan." After I left for America, she continued with her theatrical presentations and raised money for those intending to be pioneers in Israel and their training farm, where they learned the necessary skills prior to leaving for the Holy Land.

Chane Bashe too maintained very close ties with Esther. She knew that Esther was very well read, so she asked her to instruct Zelda as to what books to read. I'm sure that Chane Bashe wanted to expose Zelda to good literature but I wouldn't be surprised if part of her motivation was to keep Zelda away from reading materials that would have a harmful influence on such a young and inexperienced girl.

Thanks to her participation in the Rutke dramatic troupe, Esther became acquainted with a talented

young man from the Shapiro family, who had come from Lomzhe to direct a play in Rutke. After their marriage, they settled in Warsaw, where he entered the contracting business with a Pole. They supplied windows and doors for houses that the Polish government had built. He was extremely successful in that enterprise and employed a large number of Jewish carpenters and other tradesmen.

In Warsaw, Esther had already become known as Mme. Shapiro. However, that "elevation" in a social sense didn't interfere with the very warm relationship that she had with Chane Bashe and her family. There was nothing too difficult when it came to helping Chane Bashe during her critical illness. But the decree had already been issued from on high and Chane Bashe departed this earth on the 29th day of Cheshvan, 5688, (October, 1928).

When the tragic news reached us in America, it was as though we had been struck by thunder in mid-day. For me personally Chane Bashe was the personification of the Jewish mother. She herself hadn't had a good day in her life, but she gave whatever she had to her children. However, as happens too often, the children left the nest and Chane Bashe remained alone. You will recall that she had been widowed when quite young, her husband dying in far-away America, leaving her with three orphans and an inn in Mienzhenin that she had to run herself.

Zelda wrote us that the whole town came to Chane Bashe's funeral and all the shops were closed out of respect for her. The trustees of the synagogue brought a Torah scroll into her house and a minyan prayed there all the first thirty days of mourning.

Beile and her brothers sat shiva in our house in Brooklyn. While they were there I told and re-told them the story of my first encounter with their mother on that



Zelda takes leave of her mother's grave.
Zelda Cooper, today Mrs. Davidson, Beile Hoffman's younger sister, takes leave of her mother's grave in the Rutke cemetery before leaving for America.

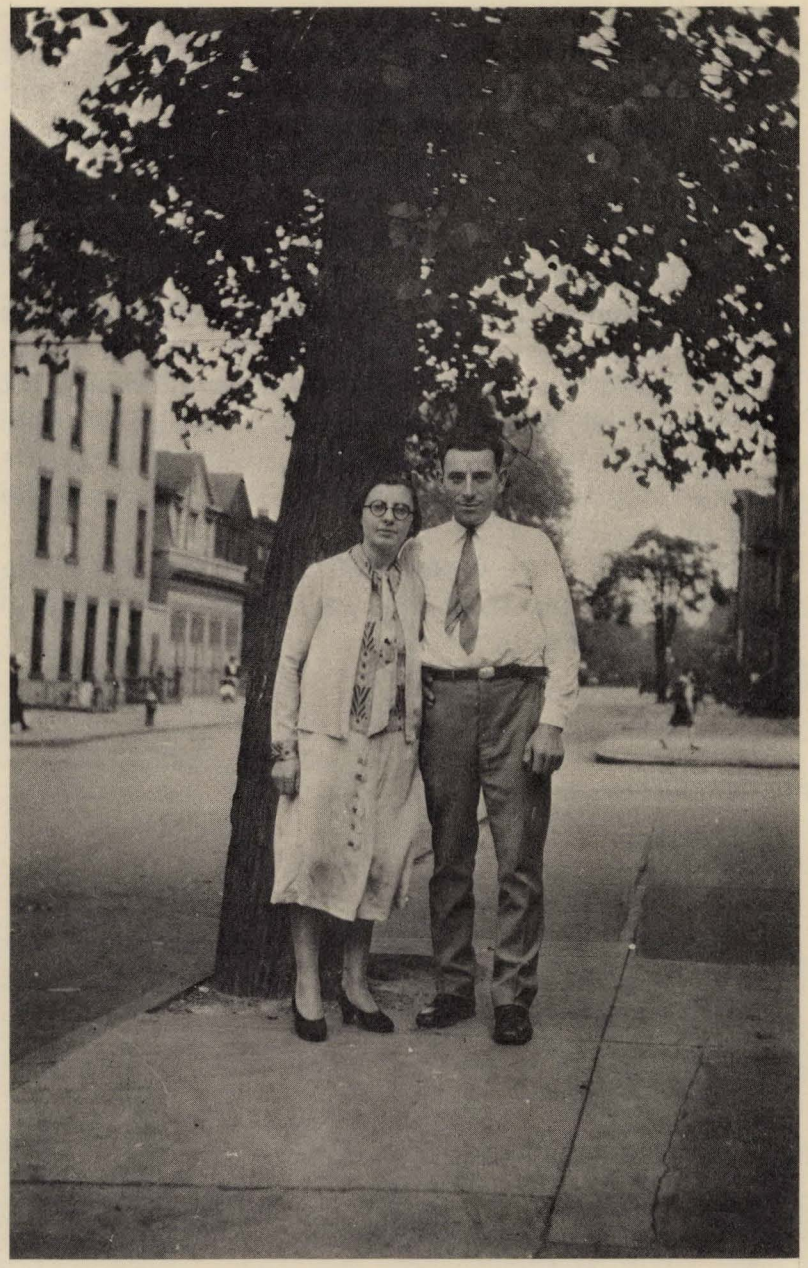
fateful night in Mienzhenin while I was caught in a blizzard and feared I would die before I could find shelter. I also reminded them of the other part of the story — when Chane Bashe was reluctant to open the door in the middle of the night because it was war time and my driver and I were in danger of frostbite or worse.

During the very week of shiva we resolved not to rest till Zelda could be brought to America. After her mother's death she was all alone in the town. Zelda didn't want to come — she refused to leave her sick mother — but now was the most opportune moment to bring the youngest sister over and have her join her family in the New World.

After Chane Bashe's death, the Shapiros in Warsaw took Zelda to their house and treated her as though she were their own daughter. Since they had no children of their own, they asked her to agree to being adopted as their daughter and assured her that she would lack for nothing. But Zelda refused even to consider the possibility of remaining in Poland. She tried to convince the Shapiros to go to the Land of Israel — where she would agree to accompany them — and there build doors and windows for Jewish houses instead of doing it for the Poles. Unfortunately, they laughed at her. Who at that time in Poland even dreamed, despite all the travails and boycotts they had to endure, that Jewish life there would come to such a frightful end?

We were willing to go to any lengths to bring Zelda here, but carrying out our wish was anything but easy. Added to the usual difficulties was the fact that she was a minor and thus couldn't be reckoned as part of the quota. No appeals to the America consul in Warsaw helped in the least; all he did was look for reasons to deny the visa.

Having no other choice, we turned in the direction of Canada and with G-d's help succeeded in rescuing



Jacob and Bella Hoffman in Philadelphia

Zelda from Poland. From there it was easier to bring her to the States, where she lives today — we hope for many years to come — Chane Bashe's only surviving child and my unforgettable Beile's only remaining sister. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and family as Mrs. Davidson. Very often we reminisce together about the years that flew by so swiftly and the many dear and wonderful people who had been part of our lives.

When Zelda left Poland, the Polish government no longer had access to Danzig, so she had to go to Hamburg and from there to Copenhagen. At that point she took the last Polish ship, Polska, to get to America. The ship was filled to overflowing with Jewish emigrants whose good fortune it was to escape from a Poland on the brink of destruction.

Regrettably, we heard nothing further from the Shapiros, who had tried so hard to persuade Zelda to remain with them in Warsaw.

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24

One from a City and Two from a Family

Like all American Jews who came here from abroad, I was plagued by that annoying question — why did it happen to them? Why was I privileged to remain alive, while those that stayed behind in Europe were liquidated in such a horrible way?

I'm afraid that we who live in security will never get a satisfactory answer. There are people much more knowledgeable than us who have probed into such things and been none the wiser for their troubles. Ultimately, I suppose, we would have to ask the Almighty, from whom nothing can be hidden, for the solution to the puzzle. In that connection, I believe that it's our faith in the Lord that constitutes the real secret of our existence in the face of adversity and the reason why we as a people have outlived all our enemies, past, present and future, (G-d willing).

Going back to that puzzling problem of survival — like many events tinged with tragedy, it had at least one positive effect on many of us. We were stimulated to trace those of our relatives who remained alive and help them with all the means at our disposal. In a certain sense, our total devotion to the Jewish State is an expression of the feeling that animates us: namely that if the wheel of fortune had turned in a slightly different direction, it's we who would have been buried under the

piles of rubble while they would be the big contributors and guests of honor at Israel Bonds and UJA dinners.

Unfortunately, very few relatives in my family were saved, as though bearing out the sentence in the Bible: "one from a city and two from a family." My wife and I always tried to help them and be with them in Israel on our visits there, sharing their joys and sorrows. When I'm in their company, I feel as though we're back in our home towns of Rutke and Ostrove. I've never yet missed the wedding of any of their children, and pray the Almighty that I be given the opportunity to dance at the weddings of their grandchildren.

One of the survivors is Sulke Cooper from Sokole, who today lives in Ramat Gan, enjoying her children and grandchildren.

Sulke is a cousin of my wife Beile. Her father, Alter, and Beile's father, Hersh Ber, were brothers. Uncle Alter, as we called him, lived in Sokole, where he married a second time and fathered eight children. Later he lived in Kolish, a hamlet with about forty Jewish families. He had Sulke with the first wife, a real beauty who tragically passed away while quite young. Sulke the orphan was brought up in others' homes, as though fate were preparing her for the difficult experiences lying ahead.

Of the nine children Alter had, only Sulke remained alive after the war. For a while Alter and two other children survived the conflict by living in the woods around Bialystok, but when they came to Kolish, a hamlet in which they had lived in a very substantial home before the war, they were shot by the Poles. It seems that the Poles couldn't stand the fact that anyone from the forty Jewish families in their town was still around.

Only Sulke was left of a family of nine children but that didn't mean that things went smoothly for her. She



Jacob Hoffman photographed with a surviving cousin, Sulke Cooper from Sokole, with three of her pretty daughters, in the summer of 1967, after the six-day war, in front of the American Zionist Organization building.

had been married to a fine young man and was the mother of a two-year-old child when the war broke out. They fled and sought shelter from the rain of bombs that fell from the sky and the murderous Nazis on the ground. Finally they succeeded in getting a peasant near Bialystok to let them into his barn.

They had hoped to survive the incessant hail of missiles in that hiding place. Unfortunately, the young father took his child outside to look for something that would still the youngster's hunger. As luck would have it, a German soldier happened by. He spied them and shot them on the spot.

When the peasant found out what had happened, he became very frightened. The Germans had warned the farmers of the village that they would pay with their lives for helping and hiding Jews. Sulke fell on her knees before the man who had concealed her and convinced him that she had a very rich family in America and after the war would share with him whatever she received from her relatives.

The peasant believed her and let her remain in the barn. It may be hard to grasp, but she never set foot outside that barn for the duration of the war.

After the hostilities were over, Sulke came back to Bialystok and met with other tragic remnants of the holocaust like herself. She shared a house with a group of men and women who had many relatives to mourn and remember. The men went to work and the women cooked, cleaned and generally managed the household. In the course of time she became friends with and married one of the men, Chaim Vrubel by name.

Vrubel too had lost a wife, children, brothers and sisters. He owed his life to the fact that he jumped into a ditch where the Germans threw the bodies of Jews whom they had shot. The Germans took him for dead and let him lie among the slain. Chaim was an engineer and got

a job building houses. Things were going very well for him. He had a good position with the Polish government and Sulke gave birth to four children — three girls and a boy, who attended a Polish school. The fly in the ointment was their fear that the other students would find out that they were Jews.

Sulke and her husband corresponded with us and we often sent them packages of clothing. We managed to stick something inside the clothes as well so that she could keep her word and have enough left over to give something to the peasant who had helped her.

But despite the material success, life in Poland was somehow not satisfactory. What would happen with the children? Would they have to live their lives in eternal terror that the secret of their Jewishness was somehow going to leak out?

When the Poles discovered that Chaim and Sulke were thinking of leaving the country, Chaim was arrested and sat in jail for six months. He was released and allowed to go to Israel only when Gomulka came to power. With G-d's help and some support sent him from America by Beile and myself, they got to Israel with their children: Tsvi, a boy of eleven, Sarah, aged nine, Chana, eight years old, and Esther, six. We attended the weddings of their children, all of whom served in the Israeli army. They are wonderful people and proud of their Jewishness.

Tsvi is an aeroplane mechanic of some renown. He told me he hopes to send his children to a yeshivah. When he came here for a visit a few years ago, a very large aircraft company asked him to remain in the States and work for them at double the salary he was making in Israel. He turned them down, saying that he was not interested in becoming a rich man and moreover his home is Israel.

Sulke, once a lonely orphan, is now a proud mother

and grandmother in Ramat Gan. She interested me in helping to build a new synagogue in the neighborhood where she lived. Her husband, unfortunately, died a short time ago but she is comforted by the pleasure her children and grandchildren give her.

There is another of my surviving relatives in Israel whose family celebrations I never miss. I refer to the son of my sister, Anna Lifschitz of Zembrove, and his family. Anna herself was killed in Zembrove together with her whole family but fate had it that one of her sons should escape and establish a new home in our own land.

The rescue of my sister's son and niece is tied to the tragic end of one of my cousins from Ostrove. I refer to Veze Hoffman, whose daughter married Anna's son. When the war broke out, Veze came to his children in Zembrove. From there, he, his daughter and her two children were taken by the Russians for a trip to far-away Siberia. The son-in-law, my nephew, was with the Polish army somewhere.

At one of the stations where the troop train they were riding in stopped, Veze and his daughter and granddaugters got off. To show how useful a trade can be, he was helped by a Russian peasant whom he told of his skill as a leatherworker and all of whose harnesses and other leather goods he promised to repair.

One night Veze went out to the field to gather a few potatoes with which to allay the children's hunger. A peasant caught him and shot him for what was then a "crime". Having no one to provide them with food, the children ultimately died of starvation.

After the war, his daughter accidentally found her husband and the two of them painfully made their way to the refugee camps in Germany and from there to Israel. The Master of the Universe blessed them with



At a wedding in Tel Aviv

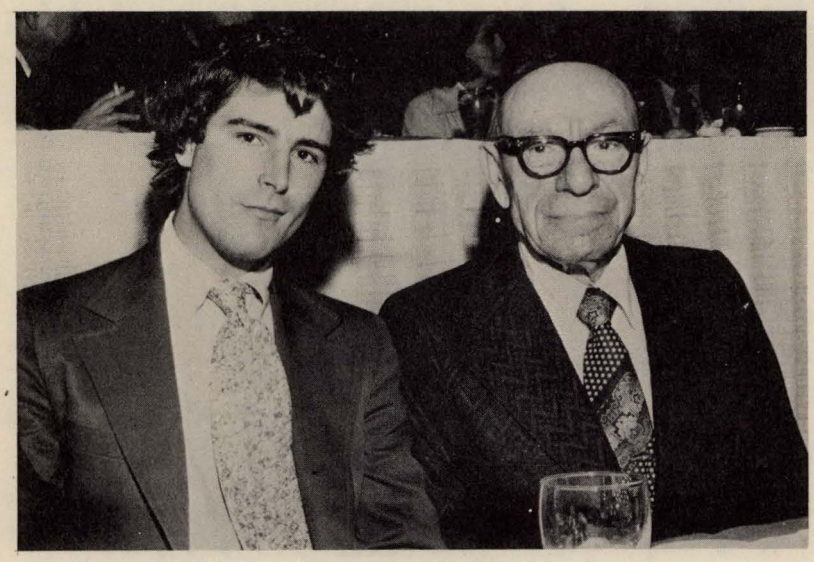
Jacob Hoffman, (Second from right), at a wedding of a sister's granddaugther, Gittl, named after his mother.

two other children, a boy and a girl, who today are themselves, thank G-d, heads of families.

The son is a trainer of new recruits in the Israeli army. The daughter too served in the army and both of them have homes that I visit often and feel welcome in.

My wife and I and my children travel to Israel quite frequently and maintain close contact with all the surviving families. My sister's son, the one who had been a Polish soldier, worked very hard in Israel carrying mortar and bricks to build new houses. He died after living in Israel eight years. His wife lives in Ramat Gan and derives much pleasure from seeing the growth and development of her children and grandchildren.

And I, living here at such a great remove from Israel, take a kind of poetic revenge from the enemies of our people by helping those in my family who remained among the living. I derive tremendous satisfaction when I see the children and grandchildren of the victims of the past in their roles as heroic builders and guardians of our own Homeland.





Judith Rosenthal, Jacob Hoffman's sister, with her child

25

The Realization of a Dream

If someone were to press me to choose the one incident that most deeply affected and influenced me in my seventy-seven years on earth, I'd answer without hesitation that it was the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.

Of course the destruction of European Jewry and all the centers of Jewish cultural and commerical activities was and still remains the greatest disaster that befell our people. The Holocaust impinged on every one of us, especially those who were born overseas and had their roots deep in the soil of Europe.

But destruction is unfortunately nothing new in Jewish history, so soaked in blood, inquisitions and pogroms. An enemy's hand raised threateningly over our heads is not an unusual occurrence. How tragic it is that exile has accustomed us to sorrows without end.

But the birth of the State of Israel is of an entirely different order.

In the course of my life I've experienced many moving events, good and bad. I have felt the sweet taste of happiness and the bitterness of misfortune, two polar emotional phenomena that every creature of flesh and blood must go through in his life. But nothing so moved me to the very depths of my being as the establishment of our Jewish Homeland in my lifetime and before my eyes.

At times I feel that we here in America still haven't

grasped the full import of what happened on that fifth day of Iyar, 5708, (May 14, 1948), when Ben Gurion, presiding at a session of the provisional government in the Tel Aviv museum, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel.

In my view Dr. Herzl's Zionism was not a brand new idea, a phenomenon that had never before been part of the Jewish experience. I believe that it was a fulfillment of the Biblical "And our eyes shall see Your return to Zion with mercy" and "For from Zion shall come forth the law and the word of G-d from Jerusalem."

The Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, the United Nations resolution November 29, 1947 and the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948 are not merely outstanding happenings in the history of our people. They are also deeply engraved memories in my personal life and should be so in the life of every Jew.

After World War II I stopped off in Europe on my way to Israel. Like other tourists, I went to see the palace in Versailles where the peace treaty had been signed at the end of World War I. At that moment two images hovered before my eyes: Lord Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Minsiter and our own Chaim Weizman, who was in a real sense the midwife of the Balfour Declaration.

I see in the Jewish State the concretization of everything I and my friends in Rutke and Ostrove had dreamed about and hoped for. Our nostalgic songs about Zion, Jerusalem and the Sea of Kinneret, our brandishing of the blue and white boxes in public markets and fairs to raise funds that would enable the Jewish National Fund to buy back our land, the training farms we opened to prepare ourselves for settling in Eretz Israel — all that took on skin, flesh and bones with the founding of the Medinah.

On all my trips to Israel I conjure up visions of the young people of my town bustling about in the performance of myriad activities on behalf of the land of their dreams. Unfortunately, most of them didn't live to see the realization of their aspirations but it certainly must be said that their work and devotion were not in vain. The most obvious proof of the efficacy of their labors are the parcels of land that their collective monies redeemed — land now being used productively for the ongoing development of Eretz Israel.

I remember how Yankel the blacksmith ridiculed us youngsters in Rutke for our Zionist agitation. Once he called me over in the synagogue and gave me an example of a wedding in town where young people are in the vanguard when the bride and groom are led into the hall, but are chased out after the young couple has entered the premises. At that moment the joke was barbed and painful, but now? If only more of the young and the old as well had joined us in the vanguard! . . .

The Zionist idea blossomed anew within me in America thanks to the Brooklyn Jewish Center. There my dear friend, Rabbi Israel Levinthal, brought to the lecture platform the great personalities of the day. They awakened us and reminded us that we were living in the diaspora. To mention just a few: Dr. Chaim Weizman, David ben Gurion, Meyer Weisgal, Golde Meir, Nachum Sokolov, Abba Hillel Silver, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Stephen Wise and Professor Zelig Brodetsky. In the quiet years before World War II as well as during the war years themselves, their talks stirred our spirits and bound us to the destiny of the Jewish people and the struggle for the Jewish nation and homeland.

As long as I live I'll never forget the tears I saw running from Dr. Weizmann's failing eyes at a grand rally in Manhattan Center, after the United Nations had passed the resolution calling for a Jewish State.



The Hoffmans with their eldest, Hersh Ber

Someone had brought him a document, possibly the text of a speech, but his eyes were overflowing with tears and he couldn't see. He put the paper in his pocket and began to talk ad lib, but what he said obviously came from the very depths of his soul.

At this gathering Professor Fabrigat appeared as well. He was a diplomat from Uruguay who had played a decisive role in mobilizing a majority for the resolution.

At that time a story was making the rounds among the Jews that before Professor Fabrigat left home for the United Nations session in New York, his mother called him in and asked him to see to it that the Jews regain their homeland. At the same time she told him that she wanted to reveal a secret that his father had forbidden her to disclose. She took out a tfillin sack from a drawer and said: "This is your father's . . . He was a Jew."

Another moment that sweetened our life and gave it purpose and direction occurred when we heard and saw President Shazar in 1966 at the Zionist Congress in Jerusalem on the platform of the concert hall. He made a special point of emphasizing the role of the generation that was already living at the time Dr. Herzl created the phrase "Jewish State". Shazar put his hand over his heart as though he were taking an oath and proclaimed in his dramatic style: "We did everything so that the flag that had been beleaguered from all sides should duly be handed over from generation to generation to those who will come after us and after you, in order to achieve the national objective of our people, now approaching ever closer to its full redemption."

At the time I went out of my way to note down those stirring words and take them with me, because I felt in them the voice of both ancient Israel and that of our resolute people of the present. Later that evening I had the honor of sitting next to Shazar at a banquet. When I told him that my house was on the same street as that of

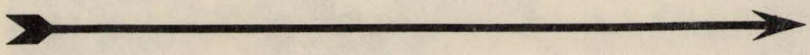


Jacob Hoffman, (left), in an animated conversation with President Zalman Shazar at a banquet in Jerusalem.

the Lubavitcher Rabbi, his face lit up and he asked me about the work that the Lubavitcher sect was doing and whether I was helping them. He seemed very pleased to hear that I was a close friend and supporter of the Lubavitcher yeshivahs in Israel and America. He also asked me to send his personal regards to the rabbi.

Returning to the Brooklyn Jewish Center for a moment, I can't help but mention the name of my long-standing friend and Zionist activist, Harold Carmeli. He was always brimming with plans to make our Center more active on behalf of Zionism and the Jewish State. We used to attend all the Zionist conferences and congresses together and I always learned a lot from his consistency and forthrightness in the realm of ideas and his devotion to the upbuilding of our country. I saw him for the last time in a hospital in Tiberias during a visit in Israel.

Carmeli was strongly interested in Kfar Silver where, in addition to the agricultural school, there had been established — thanks to the philanthropist Jacob Goodman — a Hebrew high school with a curriculum especially designed for American students. The contribution my wife and I made to that same enterprise is mentioned on the facade of the administration building.



Jacob Hoffman and his wife with their children and granchildren

From right to left, sitting, David and Gladys, (Gittl), Silber, son-in-law and daughter of the Hoffmans; the mother Mrs. Beile Hoffman; Irma and Herbert, (Hersh Ber), Hoffman, son and daughter-in-law of the Hoffmans. Standing, from right to left: the grandchildren and the grandfather — Amy Silber, a student in the Midwood Day School, Ary', (Larry), Silber, a student in the Flatbush Yeshiva High School, Jacob Hoffman, Pinchos Hoffman, a graduate of the Yeshivah of Flatbush and Robin Hoffman, a student in the Ramaz Academy.

Taken shortly before Mrs. Hoffman's death, the 26th of Shevat, 5736, January 28, 1976.


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When I contemplate the distance our people had traversed from the time I was seized as a lad in Rutke with the idea of a return to Zion and stuck the Jewish National Fund box in front of people's noses for contributions, I see in the establishment of the State the victory of the Jewish nation over all its enemies.

Even the greatest of our disasters didn't weaken our will nor diminish our drive to return home, as was promised us by the Master of the Universe through His prophets.

I consider it nothing short of a miracle when a Jew like myself has lived to see that goal achieved and been privileged to trod the free Jewish soil and breathe the free Jewish air. Moreover, to have had some part in all those accomplishments makes my seventy-seven years on G-d's earth most meaningful and worthwhile.

For all of that I give praise and thanks to the Master of the Universe.

●



At a Zionist Conference at the Brooklyn Jewish Center in honor of the dedication of a building in Kfar Silver, named after Jacob and Beile Hoffman.

From right to left: Rabbi Benjamin Kreitman, Dr. Milton Schiff, Rabbi Dr. Israel H. Levinthal, Jacob Hoffman, Mayor Abe Beam, Harold Carmeli and Jacques Torczyner.

26

Jacob Hoffman is Honored for His Memoirs

Jacob Hoffman's memoirs, entitled "Cantor Isaac's Youngest Son", and printed for the last six months in the Algemeiner Journal, will appear soon in book form. Added to them will be a great many new materials and pictures never published before.

The statement above was made at a luncheon that took place on Thursday, March 17th in the editorial offices of the Algemeiner Journal, in honor of Jacob Hoffman. Present were the permanent editorial staff, all the workers in the printing shop and management personnel. They expressed their wonderment at the author's powerful pen and recall, which, undimmed even after fifty-five years in America, re-awakened so many episodes and memories of Jewish life overseas and the early immigrant milieu in the States.

Mr. Hoffman received many letters from readers all over the States and Canada as well as other countries, who thanked him for his memoirs, which evoked remembrances of their own lives. Many readers asked that the chapters, which had been printed over six months, appear in a book.

Gershon Jacobson, editor of the Algemeiner Journal, pointed out in his talk at the luncheon the great historic contribution made by Hoffman's memoirs. Mr. Jacobson said that future writers on Jewish immigration

will draw treasures of information from "Cantor Isaac's Youngest Son", in which Mr. Hoffman describes his first steps in America and how earlier he himself, and later with his wife, got settled and raised noteworthy Jewish generations despite the difficulties they met as newcomers.

"You described not only your own life but that of the entire immigrant generation, which suffered greatly and experienced innumerable hardships till they reached a safe haven, even though they were already in America," said Mr. Jacobson. "Reader response to Mr. Hoffman's series was most enthusiastic and no less enthusiastic will be the reaction to the book when it appears," he added.

Nissan Gordon, who collaborated with Mr. Hoffman in preparing the memoirs for publication, thanked him in his own name and in the name of tens of thousands of readers, "for taking us along on one of the most interesting and informative trips over the by-roads of Jewish life in Europe and America." He also indicated that Mr. Hoffman functions not only as a raconteur when he tells about Jewish life in long-ago Ostrove, Rutke, Lomzhe, Zembrove and Warsaw but also as a man of practical affairs today when he helps recreate the old Jewish life-style by contributing to the upkeep of Yeshivahs both in the Holy Land and here.

Mr. Gordon said that in Jewish tradition we call out: "Let us continue our efforts vigorously so that we will increase our strength" on the occasion of finishing a book. Then, turning to Mr. Hoffman, he remarked: "As you get along in years, we wish you, our honored guest, ever-increasing strength in the conduct of your manifold communal activities. We wish too that all of Jewish life will be strengthened by your efforts."

Mr. Hoffman was strongly touched by the honor accorded him and with great emotion expressed his



At the luncheon in honor of Jacob Hoffman in the editorial room of the Algemeiner Journal.
From right to left: Chaim Blachman, Abraham Sobel, Naphtali Greenberger, Aharon Dox, Shmuel Hershkowitz, Gershon Jacobson, Jacob Hoffman, Shlomo Lev, Nissan Gordon and Shlomo Shamir.

gratitude for being able to tell his life story to American Jews. "I hope that our future generations will not forget the 'Golden Age' of Jewish life in the small Polish villages, where learning and scholarship burgeoned mightily," he said.

He recounted how he left home and cheder early in his youth and then spent his whole life in an effort to make up the loss by supporting institutions in which Jewish children receive the kind of education that will bind them to their people. It makes no difference under what auspices the institution is run because they are all dear to him, from Kinneret, sponsored by the Labor Zionist Alliance to a yeshiva run by the ultra-orthodox in Meah Sh'earim.

In closing, Mr. Hoffman took special cognizance of the popularity of the Algemeiner Journal. He received written reactions from all over the Jewish world, far and near, even from places where he never imagined there were readers of Yiddish.

Beile, (Bella), Hoffman OBM

Dear wife of Jacob, beloved mother of Herbert and Gladys Silber, devoted sister of Zelda Davidson, loving grandmother of Paul, Larry, Robin and Amy.

The funeral will take place this Thursday, Jan. 29, 1976

at 12 noon from Riverside, Brooklyn, 1 Ocean Parkway near Prospect Park.

THE UNITED LUBAVITCHER YESHIVAS

announces with deep sorrow the loss of that revered and gracious lady, charitable and kind,

MRS. BEILE (BELLA) HOFFMAN

devoted wife of our great friend and supporter, among the veterans and pillars of our yeshivas here and in Israel

Reb Jacob Hoffman, long may he live,
and dear mother, grandmother and sister

The funeral will take place today, Thursday, the 27th of Shevat, January 29, 1976 at 12 noon at the Riverside Chapel in Brooklyn, Ocean Parkway and Prospect Park

May her soul be bound up with eternal life

Rabbi Shmary' Gurary',
Chairman of the Executive Board

The Education Institution in Strict Conformity with Ritual Sanctity

Oholei Torah

1267 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn

shares the deep sorrow and grief of our devoted friend and constant supporter

Reb Jacob Hoffman, long may he live,

and his dear children at the loss of their beloved wife and mother

MRS. BEILE (BELLA) HOFFMAN, OBM

The funeral will take place today, Thursday, the 27th of Shevat, 1976 at twelve noon from Riverside, Brooklyn, near Ocean Parkway

The Administration

The Cantors Association of America and Canada

236 Second Avenue, New York

mourns deeply the loss of the well known

MRS. BEILE (BELLA) HOFFMAN

wife of our prominent honorary member and patron, great philanthropist and communal leader

REB JACOB HOFFMAN, long may he live

and calls for according the last respects to the deceased at the funeral today, Thursday, January 29th at 12 noon from the Riverside Chapel, Ocean Parkway and Prospect Park

May they know no more sorrow

Cantor Moshe Botsian,
President

Cantor Jacob Breitman,
Chmn. Memorial Committee

Beautiful Beile from Mienzhenin

Written upon the death of Mrs. Beile Hoffman, OBM, wife of the prominent community leader and activist on behalf of yeshivahs in Israel, Mr. Jacob Hoffman

by **N. Wilner**

Mienzhenin is a tiny hamlet on the road between Ostrove and Rutke, two small towns in the vicinity of Lomzhe. In their wanderings, wagoners and merchants from Bialystok, Lomzhe and Warsaw used to stop in Mienzhenin to refresh themselves with a meal or sleep overnight before continuing on their way.

Mienzhenin, a very small town, not even to be found on a map, is however deeply engraved in the mind and heart of Jacob Hoffman, one of Brooklyn's great real estate dealers and a warm Jew who is active in and supports Jewish education and Israel with great generosity.

Before leaving for America in 1921, it was here in Mienzhenin that he first saw beautiful Beile and recognized at once that they were a twosome ordained from heaven. At a tender age he left Ostrove and the house of his father, Cantor Isaac and became a pelt merchant, traveling from hamlet to hamlet and fair to fair. One night a terrible blizzard raged and it was impossible to continue on the road, so he stayed in the inn at Mienzhenin, run by Beile's mother, a widow with eight children to support.

Shortly after that, Beile too came to her family in Philadelphia. Not much time passed before Jacob and Beile were happily married and their good fortune continued until two weeks ago when she was taken from him after a brief illness.

"Her beauty was beyond compare . . . everyone called her 'beautiful Beile', but not less beauteous was her soul, her Jewish heart, her goodness", said Mr. Hoffman as he unburdened himself and looked at a series of pictures starting from their youth and continuing on after their wedding fifty two years ago.

"The first years in America were far from a picnic," Mr. Hoffman recalls, looking at a picture of himself and his wife and children — the son Tzvi David, (Herbert), and his wife and daughter Gittl, (Gladys), and her husband David Silber and the grandchildren, all of whom G-d had blessed

generously. Only a short time ago they had all celebrated a grandson's Bar Mitzvah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. It was a great experience for everyone, but especially for Jacob Hoffman himself, who is tied to Israel with every fiber of his being. He contributes to everything in Israel, from Histadrut institutions to a Neturei Karta yeshiva in Jerusalem. On his yearly trips to Israel he is an honored guest in the Lubavitcher Yeshivah in Kfar Chabad, since he's a close neighbor of the Lubavitcher in Brooklyn and extremely active on behalf of the Lubavitcher yeshivahs in America.

Bella, as she was called in America, endured the first few difficult years along with her husband, first in the leathergoods business and later in a grocery. She also played a great role in his later success in real estate.

Among the hundreds of letters and telegrams expressing sympathy, Mr. Hoffman held in his hand a condolence communication from the synagogue that he and his wife helped build Maoz Aviv, near Tel Aviv, a development inhabited by Haganah veterans. Mr. Hoffman officiates there as cantor every time he visits Israel.

"Everyone, everyone she helped lost a dear friend, but my loss is the greatest of all!" says Mr. Hoffman as he recalls his grief, harking back to those youthful years when a blizzard provided him with the opportunity to become acquainted with beautiful Beile from Mienzhenin.

Algemeiner Journal 2/13/76

Relatives and friends are invited to attend the unveiling of the monument to our dear and unforgettable wife, mother and grandmother

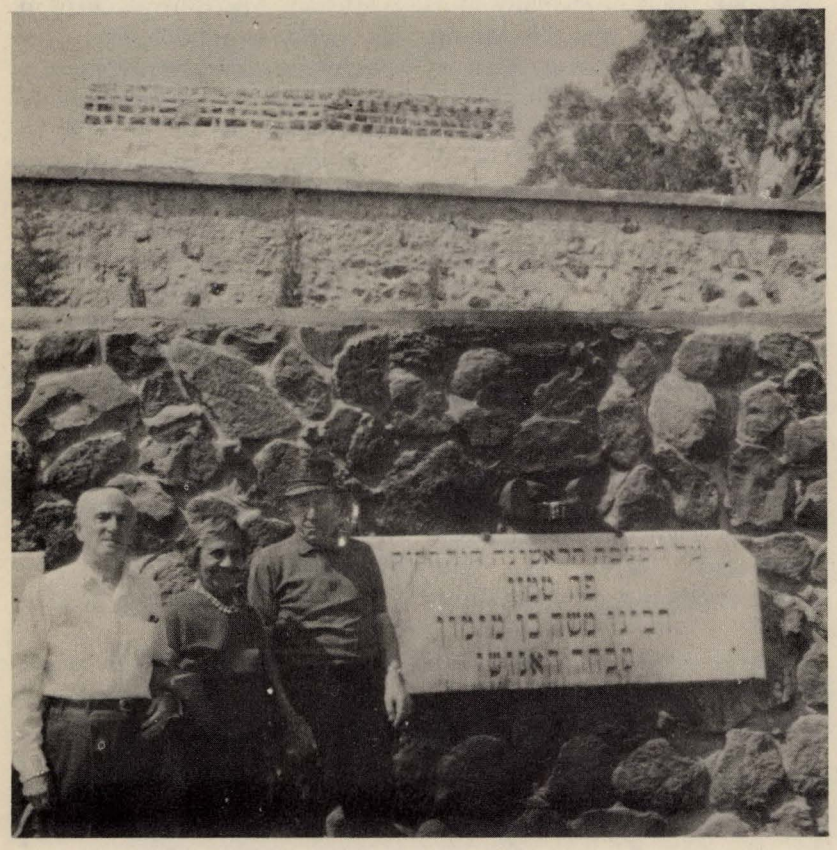
BEILE, (BELLA) HOFFMAN OBM

Sunday, the 7th of Tammuz, June 19th at 12 noon

at the Old Montefiore Cemetery, Springfield Boulevard, Queens, Hoffman family plot, Block 105

Her memory will always live in our hearts

Her husband — Jacob Hoffman
Son and daughter-in-law: Hersh Ber and Irma Hoffman
Daughter and son-in-law: Gittl and David Silber
and the grandchildren



Hoffman at Maimonides' grave

A YAHRZEIT LAMP



With great pain and sorrow we recall the illustrious memory of our unforgettable wife, mother and grandmother

BEILE (BELLA) HOFFMAN OBM

Beautiful Beile

from Mienzhenin



On the occasion of her first Yahrzeit, which falls Monday next, the 26th of Shevat, February 14, 1977

You live eternally in our hearts!

Her husband: Jacob Hoffman
Son and daughter-in-law: Hersh Ber (Herbert) and Chay' Leah
Daughter and son-in-law: Gladys and David Silber
And the grandchildren

A Memorial Lamp on the the Occasion of the Second Yahrzeit of Beile, (Bella) Hoffman OBM

Friday, the 27th of Shevat, February 3rd, 1978

by **Jacob Hoffman**

It's easy to remember and hard to forget those happy times in the old European home town Rutke in Poland, how we met while so young and loved each other and how the whole town admired the young, beautiful Beile from Mienzhenin. That's what everyone called her: "beautiful Beile."

Beile worked with me in the Zionist Club where we carried on pioneer work. We appeared together in dramatic presentations in the local theater. I remember as though it were today how the audience gave its full attention to the beautiful young girl with such a pretty face, fetching appearance, dramatic talent and stage presence.

She left Rutke, the town of her birth at age 18 and came to America, carrying with her all the bright dreams and hopes that we had spun together.

And thank G-d for having brought us together again here in America, where we got married, worked hard in separate shops and later in our own business, raised, thank G-d, upstanding children and grandchildren and conducted a fine Jewish home. We observed the Sabbath and holidays, gave charity to the needy and extended warmth and devotion to Israel and an open door of friendship and closeness to the whole family.

Everyone respected her for her goodness and modesty. She understood the world well and was able to discuss world problems cleverly and intelligently. She read various English and Yiddish papers and magazines and had her opinion about everything and everyone.

When she came to the synagogue on Sabbath, my friends and acquaintances greeted her with: "Good Sabbath." She was a deeply religious Jewish mother and her spirit filled and permeated our house.

Suddenly our luck turned and the crown of our house was taken from us. She is now gone two years, but her luminous face and smile, those golden days of our youth in our European home town and afterwards the happy years that we spent together will never leave me.

Beautiful Beile lives eternally in my heart.

Algemeiner Journal 1/27/78



Jacob Hoffman as a young man

Part Three

IN THE FLOW OF EVENTS

PERSONALITIES, SCENES AND ENCOUNTERS

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Murphy's Synagogue and Young Israel

Among the synagogues in Crown Heights in which I worshipped was the Young Israel on Eastern Parkway and Troy Avenue. In those days I lived at 1586 Union Street and went to prayers in Rokeach's synagogue, called by others Murphy's synagogue. Its real name was Chovevei Torah and it was located on the same block where the Young Israel came later.

Rokeach was a tremendously wealthy man, a manufacturer of various kosher products like soap, powder and pareve fats. In the course of time he built a gigantic plant in New Jersey and devoted himself to the fabrication of many other products. The aforementioned synagogue bore his name because he was one of its staunchest supporters. When Rokeach died, his son, a doctor took over the business. For whatever reason, it ultimately had to be sold for a fraction of its value.

The synagogue was also called Murphy's because the land on which it was built had belonged to an Irishman by that name who ran a saloon there. In the 1940's the Crown Heights section was settled by many Jews, a large number of them orthodox. On Friday nights and Saturday mornings, Rokeach's or Murphy's or the Chovevei Torah Synagogue was packed full of worshippers, mostly elderly people. Then the Young Israel came along and opened a synagogue that immediately filled with youngsters, most of whom had come from Murphy's synagogue.

The building that housed the Young Israel had

formerly belonged to a Jewish youth club whose members came from all parts of Brooklyn. When the club couldn't meet its financial obligations and the East New York Savings Bank took over the building, a group of Jews went to George Richards, the bank president, to see whether they could work out some sort of deal. He sold it to the Young Israel for thirty percent less than the mortgage value.

Mr. Liss, one of the important leaders of the new Young Israel synagogue, lived not far from me on Union Street and was a customer in my grocery. I was very friendly with him and his family. He persuaded me to become a member in the Young Israel. Mr. Liss later bought a beautiful home on President Street and from there moved to Flatbush and ultimately to Belle Harbor.

The Young Israel had a very fine rabbi, a gifted speaker in Yiddish and English, and extremely well liked by everyone. After fifteen years with that congregation, he left for another post in Queens. From there he settled in Israel, where unfortunately he passed away at a relatively early age. Even today I yearn for the beautiful Saturday afternoon meals cum study sessions in the Young Israel. The rabbi used to give a talk on some learned topics and I would join the group in singing Sabbath songs. Today the building is a senior citizens center supported by the Lubavitcher Chassidim.

Murphy's synagogue too is no longer what it was. Now it's run by the Lubavitcher. The last rabbi of that synagogue lived in my apartment house at 706 Eastern Parkway. Frequently he would pour out his heart to me on the bitter fate of a rabbi who in his old age has to take the wanderer's staff in hand and look for a position.

Irving Gabel, one of the trustees of Murphy's synagogue, lived at 706 Eastern Parkway. Frequently he



Jacob and Beile Hoffman, (center), with the family in New York

would invite me to accompany him to services and officiate as cantor. On one Sabbath when prayers for the new month were said, the synagogue was very well attended. After the services, they regaled us with a tasty snack provided by the parents of a boy who had become bar-mitzvah that day.

Forty years ago the Chovevei Torah and the Young Israel were two synagogues who competed with each other for congregants. Today they're both gone from the scene, victims of the changing milieu in Brooklyn.

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The Brooklyn Jewish Center, Abe Stark and Young Judea

It happened in 1965.

The executive committee of District 14 of the Zionist Organization of America, led by Judge Albert Shanzer, Harold Carmeli and your humble servant, decided, together with the rabbis and officers of the Brooklyn Jewish Center to arrange an affair in honor of the Zionist youth movement called Young Judea, whose aim is to foster devotion to Israel on the part of American-Jewish youth.

Abe Stark, then Borough President of Brooklyn, invited us and a Young Judea delegation to come to his office and there officially proclaimed October 24, 1965 as Young Judea Day. In keeping with the occasion, District 14 sponsored a festive evening with dinner in my honor, using the event to re-inforce its own work on behalf of the Zionist ideal and spur Young Judea on to even greater efforts. The guest speaker was Jacques Torczyner, then president of the Zionist Organization of America, who pointed out the pioneering role played by Young Judea in recruiting young people to settle in Israel, in many cases against the wishes of their parents.

Abe Stark was a close friend of mine for many years. He had been actively engaged in Jewish affairs and Zionist activities even before becoming borough president and his clothing store on Pitkin Avenue in Brownsville was a center for many Jewish enterprises,

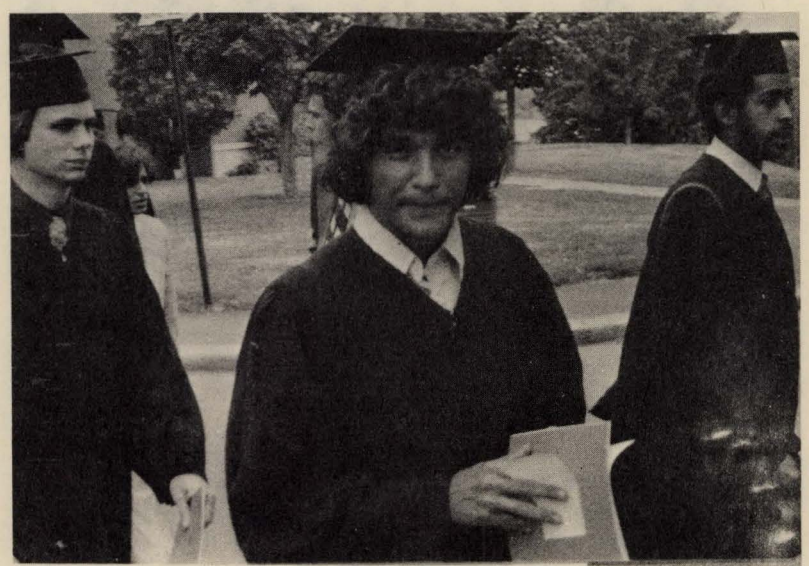


Abe Stark holding the proclamation

especially those on behalf of Israel. He was a very beneficent Jew, never refusing to do a favor, no matter how difficult it was for him.

Another festive evening that I spent with fellow Zionists in the Brooklyn Jewish Center took place on Chanukah. The affair was initiated by Harold Carmeli, Chairman of the National Board of the Zionist Organization of America. It was a very friendly gathering of District 14 members. Also attending were Jews from the Eastern Parkway area. All had a most enjoyable time, savoring a hearty Chanukah meal and applauding the Chanukah melodies rendered by Cantor Chatzkele Ritter, accompanied on the piano by his talented son.

The Brooklyn Jewish Center has been and to this day continues to be the locale for many Zionist conferences and festivities. The two occasions mentioned above are only a small sample of many other similar celebrations that I and my friends in District 14 participated in within the walls of that august building.



Hoffman's grandson Paul graduates from the Flatbush Yeshivah



A torch from Modin is brought to the Brooklyn Borough Hall while Abe Stark was Borough President

The boy in the center is Pinchos Hoffman, one of Jacob Hoffman's grandchildren. The girl on the left is the daughter of Rabbi Kreitman of the Brooklyn Jewish Center



Taken at the Chanukah Torch. From right to left: Jacob Hoffman, Mrs. Kreitman, Irma Hoffman and her husband Herbert. Also seen are Mr. Hoffman's two grandchildren and the Kreitman's daughter.

My Closeness to the Lubavitcher

I left my parent's home at a very tender age. At thirteen I departed Ostrove and began wandering over the province of Lomzhe. When I was fifteen I already ran my own business and settled in nearby Rutke, where I was drawn into all kinds of youth activities, both Zionist and cultural.

I really can't account for having gone away from my dear father and mother and the elementary school I was attending, at a stage in my life when I didn't have the powers of judgement necessary to assess the seriousness of my decision and its consequences. In retrospect, I had such a warm, beautiful, Jewishly-oriented home. My father was among the most prestigious leaders in Ostrove. The synagogue on Ostrolenker Street, known as the Old House of Study, was actually my second home in those young years. It was there that I had the pleasure of listening in on Mishnah lessons and discussions on other learned books.

It could be that I felt like following in the footsteps of my two older brothers, who had established themselves in Zembrove when they were quite young and did extremely well as business men. So I too got the itch to leave Ostrove and become an independent entrepreneur, despite the very strong objections my parents had to the departure of their youngest son.

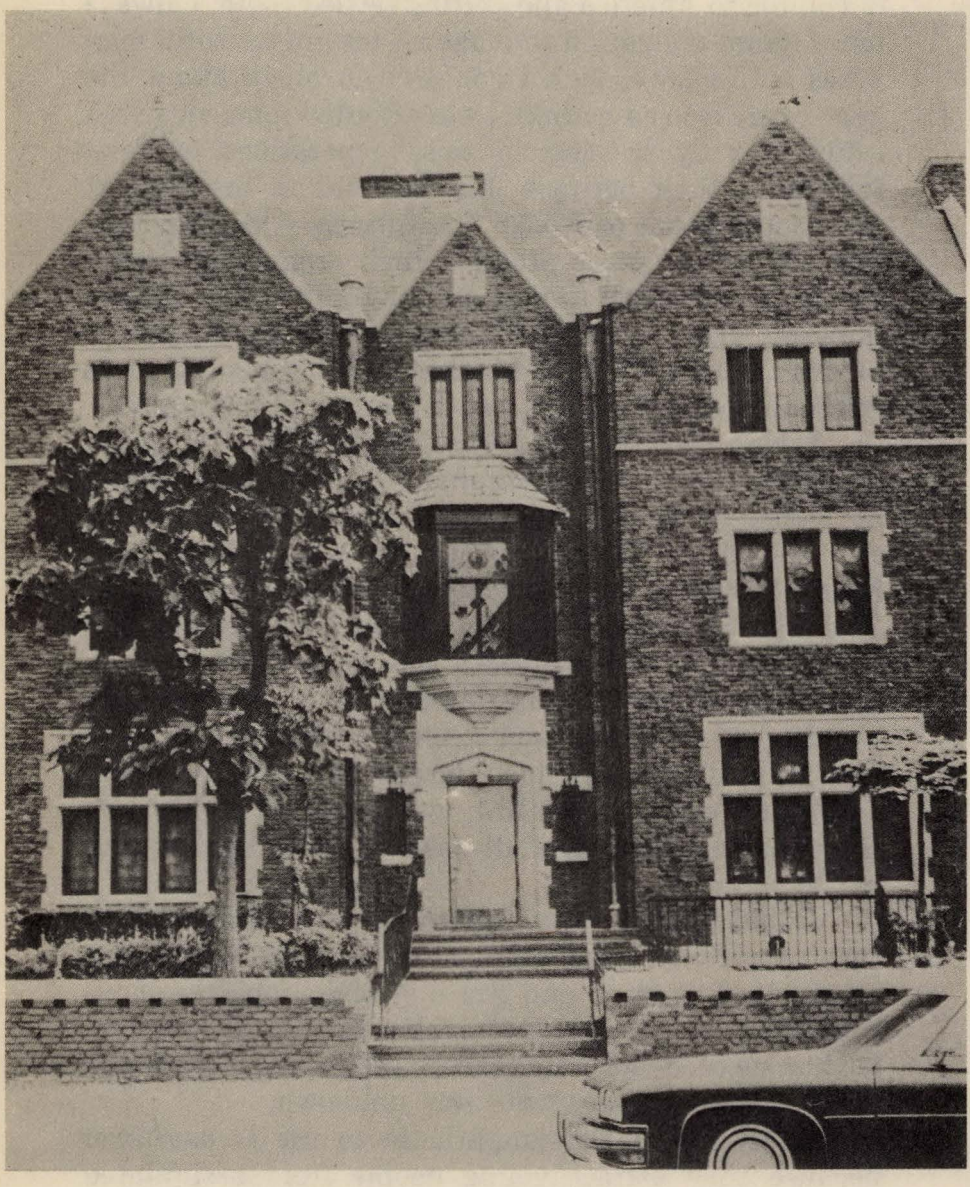
As traumatic as any other aspect of leaving was quitting school. While never much of a scholar, it ran against every instinct instilled in us in the education-

conscious milieu of Ostrove and my conscience was very troubled. My unease never left me all during the process of coming to America and getting settled there. I always felt a moral obligation to make up for my youthful mistakes and even though I couldn't do much about the gaps in my own education, I was afforded some vicarious fulfillment by helping to raise generations of Jews faithful to their heritage. I'm involved in the support and maintenance of Jewish institutions of learning that educate young people proud of their origins and create the scholars needed to pass on our traditions to the yet unborn. When I was still a hardworking groceryman, I helped the first Mendele Mocher Sforim school and was instrumental in founding two Kinneret all-day schools.

Living near the Lubavitcher Rebbe and the world-renowned Lubavitcher Center at 770 Eastern Parkway, I developed a strong interest in the activities carried on by that institution. When I travel to some of my apartment houses in Flatbush, I often drive by the new Lubavitcher Yeshivah on Ocean Parkway. When time permits, I'll stop for a moment and take a look inside. I derive such satisfaction from watching Jewish children studying the Torah. And of course I get a special feeling of pleasure looking into the classroom I bought in the name of my dear, departed wife, OBM, whose memory lives on through the education of all those wonderful young people.

Rabbi Gurary', the General Superintendent of all the Lubavitcher yeshivahs throughout the world, is a close friend of mine and I'm a strong supporter of his tireless efforts to spread yeshivah education in America. He has succeeded in establishing yeshivahs in cities and towns where the very word was unknown.

I feel especially sympathetic to the Lubavitcher because they attract young people from assimilated homes, bring them back to their roots and, using their



"770", The Lubavitcher Center on Eastern Parkway

children as a lever, frequently restore the parents to the Jewish fold as well. Never before has there been such a strong drive on the part of our youth to return to their people. The Lubavitcher helps them everywhere, and perhaps most significantly, on the campuses of universities throughout the length and breadth of the United States. As one who lives near the Lubavitcher on Eastern Parkway, I have the opportunity to observe quite closely how the yeshivah boys give guidance to students from various colleges who come to that institution for spiritual sustenance. The help takes the form of lectures, discussions and invitations to participate in the "farbrengens", (socials interspersed with homiletics delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe).

In this land of luxury, riches and assimilation, the Lubavitcher yeshivahs were among the foremost to proclaim the belief that 'America is not different', implying that here too we can rear generations who can faithfully and energetically carry on our eternal heritage. They provide an education that lightens an otherwise dark horizon in many towns and cities. Particularly effective is their principal yeshivah in Brooklyn, which instructs students from many parts of the world.

I'd like to mention that the Lubavitcher has a whole network of yeshivahs in Israel too. There is no greater pleasure for me than a visit to the school they run in Kfar Chabad, between Tel Aviv and Lod, where education is provided for Lubavitcher chassidim who are recent immigrants from Russia. My association with the Lubavitcher has given me an opportunity to be close to a mighty force for renascent Judaism. I cherish too the Jewish warmth I feel in their midst and the deep interest in all Jewish problems that they arouse in those coming into contact with them.



Jacob Hoffman with Rabbi Shmary' Gurary', Chairman of the Executive Committee of the United Lubavitcher Yeshivahs at their annual dinner, which took place on the 27th of Kislev 5737, December 19, 1977, where Mr. Hoffman was accorded the "Good Name" award.



At a UJA dinner honoring Jacob Hoffman at the Brooklyn Jewish Center
At Mr. Hoffman's right is Rabbi Israel Levinthal. At the mike is Harold Carmeli. Further right at the head table are Jacques Torczyner, Mayor Abe Beame and Judge Albert Chanzer.

With a Delegation in Washington

Jewish delegations to neutralize the United States State Department's moves against Israel and Jewish concerns about Washington's politics in the Middle East go back much further in time than President Carter's entertainment of the fantasy of a Palestinian State on the western bank of the Jordan. In 1956, after Israel's smashing Sinai campaign in cooperation with Great Britain and France to oppose Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, the then president, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, insisted that England and France desist from the war against Egypt and that Israel withdraw from the Sinai.

The Eisenhower-Dulles move, as all recognize today, played into the hands of both Israel's enemies and those of Washington. The situation in the Middle East and Israel's political position would have an entirely different face if it hadn't been for the United States' threat of sanctions against Israel, thus forcing her to return to Nasser territories from which he again menaced her existence.

If it hadn't been for the fatal error America made in 1956, we would have prevented the wars of 1967 and 1973, tens of thousands of lives wouldn't have been lost and the Soviet Union wouldn't have been given entree into the Middle East.

The Zionist Organization of America decided to send a delegation to Washington to try to cool the anger

of the White House and the State Department against Israel. The delegation, led by the then president of the ZOA, Rabbi Nussbaum of Los Angeles, consisted of Mendel Fisher, Harold Carmeli, Judge Albert Jenner, Ben Lasser and your humble servant. Our liaison person in Washington was Congressman Emanuel Celler, the dean of the House of Representatives, who arranged for us to meet first with the whole Jewish Congressional bloc and afterwards with a group of fifty-nine senators and congressmen in the House. They all assured us that they'd come out in opposition to Eisenhower's sanctions and also to press for a larger loan to Israel.

We spent a few days in Washington and knocked on the doors of various government personnel, demanding justice from them. Unfortunately Eisenhower and Dulles prevailed. Israel withdrew from the Sinai and the seeds of the next two wars were sown.



Congressman Abraham Multer and Emanual Celler, seated right to left, receive the Zionist delegates in Washington.

Among the delegates are: Harold Carmeli, Mendel Fisher, Rabbi Nussbaum, Jacob Hoffman and Judge Albert Chanzer.

Impressions of the Eighty-First Annual ZOA Convention

Although I've been a delegate to the Zionist Organization of America Convention for a long time, this year's eighty-first meeting strongly influenced and inspired me because most of the new ZOA leaders are still rather young people, full of love to their fellow Jews and with the drive and energy to contribute their share to our ideal and its realization — the State of Israel.

Joseph Sternstein, president of the ZOA up to the present and Jacques Torczyner, both veterans and important figures in American Zionism, chaired the proceedings with great tact. Their speeches reflected the great historic days through which we're living and gave expression to the tasks now facing us Jews in America.

The convention was held in the Shoreham Hotel from the sixth of September till Sunday the tenth, at which time the magnificent closing banquet was held. Throughout the five days of the convention there appeared a number of diplomats, senators and congressmen. Some members of Israel's diplomatic corps attended from time to time. It would take too much space and time to mention them all, but the outstanding ones were the then president Dr. Sternstein and the new Israeli ambassador, Yehuda Blum.

The new Israeli ambassador to the United Nations described in his talk how he escaped from a concentration camp at age fourteen and found his way to the



At the head table of the Zionist Organization of America Convention in Washington
From right to left: Dr. Joseph Sternstein, President of the ZOA, Jacob Hoffman, and the new Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Professor Yehudah Blum.



The world-famous actress, Elizabeth Taylor, snapped with Jacob Hoffman at the 1978 ZOA Convention in Washington.

Jewish Homeland, which he now serves as representative in the international arena. He sat at the head table with his beautiful wife and greeted everyone and was warmly applauded by all.

A very special impression was made by the world-famous actress Elizabeth Taylor at the Sunday night banquet. She made a speech full of love and devotion to Israel and expressed her gratitude for the honor accorded her. Even though she's a great actress, I, and others with me felt that on this occasion she didn't regard what she said as an act. On the contrary, she meant it very seriously and sincerely. She displayed her true feelings toward Israel and the Jewish people.

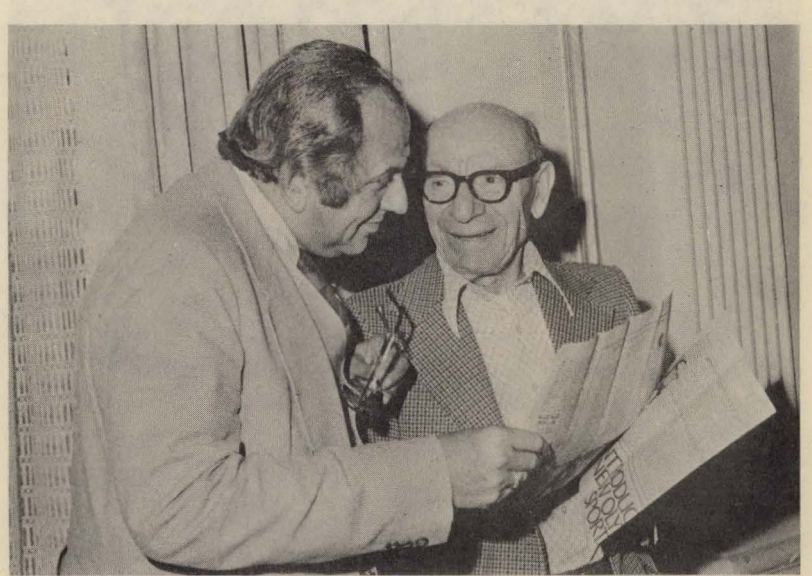
Since I'm writing about the ZOA convention, I can't allow the opportunity to pass without expressing my admiration for Prime Minister Begin, whom I had the honor to see and hear a week ago Wednesday in New York at the reception tendered him by the Presidents' Conference. His steadfastness at Camp David and his wonderful talk at the White House as he sat with President Jimmy Carter and President Sadat of Egypt brought great honor and gave much pleasure to us, the Jews of America.

The ZOA, headed by its new president, Ivan Novick from Pittsburgh, now has the colossal task of standing by the side of Prime Minister Begin and helping him so that the hope for peace that was kindled in Camp David should not, heaven forbid, be extinguished.

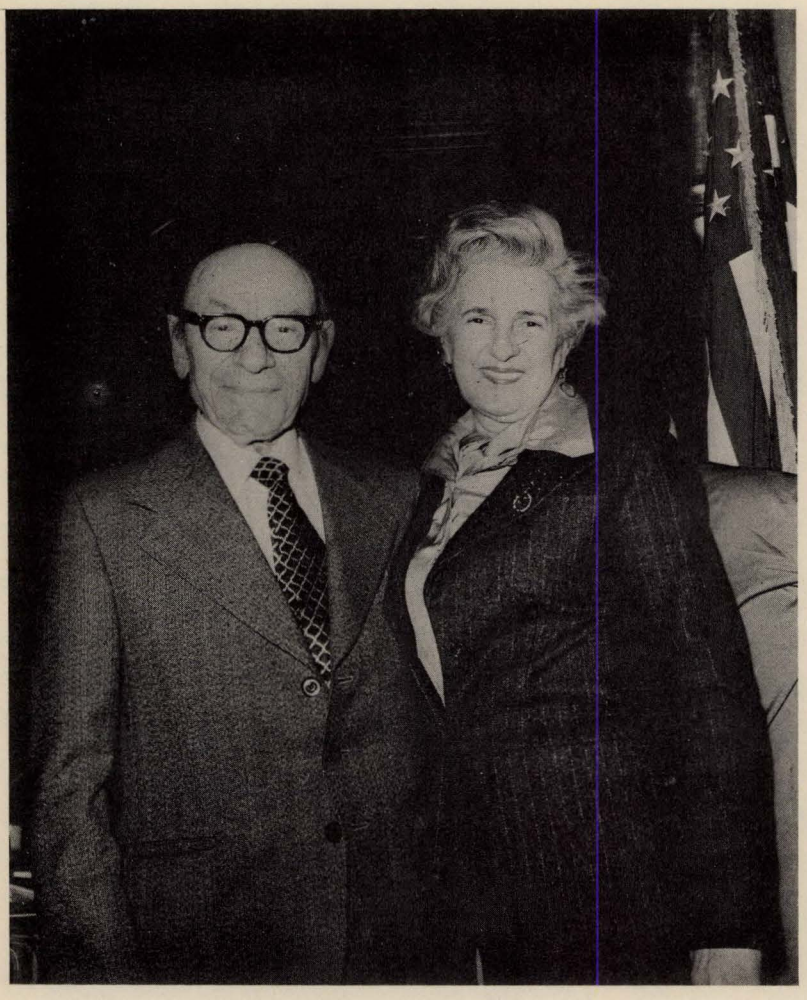
On this occasion I'd like to wish a good, blessed and happy year to all my relatives and friends, rabbis and heads of yeshivas, organizational workers on behalf of Israel and local beneficent purposes, my good neighbors the Lubavitcher Rabbi and Rabbi Shmary' Gurary', long may they live, the rabbis of the Brooklyn Jewish Center, Dr. Israel Levinthal and Dr. David Haymovitz, the leaders of the Histadrut in America and its religious

department, all Jews in Israel and the diaspora and especially our brethren living in travail and prison in Soviet Russia.

May the year past and its troubles end and the new year with its blessings begin.



Rabbi Dr. Joseph Sternstein in a friendly chat with Jacob Hoffman.



Jacob Hoffman and Mrs. Fay Schenck, representative of the Jewish Agency and important Zionist figure, at a dinner of the Histadrut Ivrit in 1977.

Isaac Bashevis Singer

Our guest Bashevis Singer is one of the greatest Jewish writers of these times. His talents as an interpreter of Jewish life have won him great recognition and popularity in American literary circles.

For those who read Bashevis Singer in the original, no lengthy introductions are necessary. He gives bold and artistic expression to the history of Polish Jews in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His depiction of the insecurities and trials experienced by the individual Polish Jew is representative of those of all Polish Jews.

Bashevis Singer is especially skilled at dialogue. Through the interplay of words he delineates entire worlds and involved ideas. It makes no difference whether the exchange is between a man and a woman in the Warsaw underworld or a rabbi from a Galician town in the old world and his son who became an apostate.

I greet this great artist on the occasion of his visit to us and we all wish him further success in his creative activity.

Knowing this famous writer intimately, I was very happy when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978. The Swedish Academy, in announcing the news, declared that Bashevis Singer had been accorded well-deserved international recognition for his story-telling talent. That talent has its roots in the Polish-Jewish cultural tradition, but it also brings to life universal human values.

I was drawn to this world-famous author many years back. I recognized his greatness and was enchanted with his descriptions of Jewish life. As a man

of two worlds, I lived through many American experiences but I can still feel the pulse of Jewish life in the small town, with all its beauty and splendor.

No other writer has succeeded like Bashevis Singer; his tales impress me so strongly, it's as though they were happening before my very eyes. I had the honor of inviting him to lecture at the Brooklyn Jewish Center twelve years ago. Since that time his name and prestige have grown to the point where he is a world-renowned literary figure.

(Author's Note: This is the text I used in my introduction of Bashevis Singer when he lectured at a forum I established in memory of my departed wife, Beile, (OBM).



Isaac Bashevis Singer, (second from left), during the lecture at the Brooklyn Jewish Center, sponsored by Jacob Hoffman in memory of his wife Beile, OBM

From right to left: Irma Hoffman, a niece, Jacob Hoffman, Rabbi David Haymovitz, Bashevis Singer and Herbert Hoffman



Hoffman with Isaac Bashevis Singer

Elie Wiesel

Another individual who has affected me in my Jewish activities, especially on behalf of Israel and Jewish education, is the well-known writer Elie Wiesel.

Like the prophets of old, he raises his voice to the world, Jewish and non-Jewish, and speaks of Jewish suffering, Jewish victims, and Jews caught behind the iron curtain — the Jews of silence.

Elie Wiesel came to America after World War II, having gone through the Holocaust and seen with his own eyes the rivers of Jewish blood that flooded the European continent.

Now he addresses the corrupt world that allowed all that to happen and said nothing. He lectures before various organizations and on college campuses. As he speaks, one hears the cries of woe emanating from Jewish martyrs, together with a prayer and a plea for our old-new homeland, the State of Israel.

Elie Wiesel is a Jew who bears a sense of mission, a fierce refusal to be silent. He will not allow himself to forget, nor will he allow others to do so. He demands and reminds. His own escape from the slaughter has lit an inner fire, a burning sense of responsibility and an obligation that finds expression every moment of his life.

From the first day I heard him speak until this very moment I feel the great outcry that wells up from his innermost being, his call to rescue everyone and everything one can.



Hoffman with Elie Wiesel

Professor Velvl Green — A Lubavitcher Dividend

On Sunday, May 21, 1978, my neighbor at the head table of the Lubavitcher Yeshivahs Scholarship Dinner in the Roosevelt Hotel was introduced to me as Professor Velvl Green of the University of Minnesota. He was the main speaker and had come especially from Minneapolis to address the audience.

A handsome young man, with lots of Jewish charm and a fetching smile, he made a speech that was, in common parlance, a masterpiece. He works as a professor of microbiology and is a participant in American space experiments, but that night he spoke as an ardent Jew and a loyal Lubavitcher adherent, for whom the Rebbe's every word is a command.

After his talk I told him that even though I'm not formally a Chassid, I'm nevertheless a great admirer of the tremendous educational work the Lubavitcher Rebbe conducts all over the world. That work is controlled centrally from 770 Eastern Parkway, a few steps from the house where I live in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

My chat with the professor deepened my involvement with the Lubavitcher because it showed me how widespread and effective its rescue operation is in areas where assimilation is rife and official Jewish leadership is completely indifferent to a phenomenon so fraught with danger to Jewish continuity. I told the professor that I'm writing a book and would consider it interesting and worthwhile for my readers to learn about a Jew like

him and how he became orthodox and joined the Lubavitcher.

Velvl Green was born in Winnipeg, Canada in a liberal Jewish home. His father, a member of Poale Zion, had given him a secular Jewish education. Abraham Golomb was one of his teachers. He studied microbiology and in 1949 came to the States. In 1956 he married a girl from an assimilated home and they lived in California. In the course of time, they were blessed with five children, two girls and three boys.

The big change came about in their lives in 1963 in Minneapolis, where he had been appointed as professor in the local university. There he made the acquaintance of a Lubavitcher emissary, an American chassid named Moshe Feller. Before long, the thirty-six year old professor discovered a new world, a deeply Jewish world. It's as though he had experienced the giving of the Ten Commandments and the lightning that accompanied that dramatic event at Mount Sinai.

When Dr. Green's father found out that he had become a Lubavitcher Chassid, he said: "I applaud what you've done; the Rebbe does some wonderful things." Illustrative of the warm relationship that existed between Professor Green and his folks is the fact that he would bring them flowers every Friday night.

Today he and his wife, who is an opera singer, derive great joy in Jewish terms from their children. One boy is a student in the Lubavitcher Yeshivah in Montreal and the other two follow the same course of study in Chicago. One daughter is studying in Israel.

Further along in our chat, my new friend said that he would rather have been in Israel than at the banquet in New York, but he accounts himself a soldier in the Lubavitcher Rebbe's army and the Rebbe had told him to be at the affair.

I'm sure my readers can feel how great a pleasure it

was for me to meet a Jew such as Professor Velvl Green. No less joyful for me was it to feel a sense of partnership in the holy work of the Lubavitcher, when it can attract such conscientious soldiers to help accomplish its task.



Dr. Velvl Green with Jacob Hoffman at the dinner of the Lubavitcher Yeshivahs.



At a dinner of the Lubavitcher Yeshivahs
From right to left: Rabbi Shmary' Gurary', Director of the Lubavitcher Yeshivahs, Jacob Hoffman and his son Herbert

Chaver Meyer Brown

In recounting my memories, I simply can't pass over Chaver Meyer Brown, father of the Jewish National Workers Alliance.

He was not only one of the gentlest people the movement possessed in America. He also occupied an important position in the World Zionist Movement and gave a full measure of devotion to the Jewish people and Eretz Israel, its national home.

His Poale Zionism was based on his love for the Jewish people and its ethics, justice and righteousness. He brought his love for Jewish tradition with him from Europe and the founding of the Farband was his contribution to preventing the recently arrived Jewish immigrants from getting lost and crushed under the weight of the American melting pot.

A lot of the new arrivals actually did wander off and get lost along strange paths and byways. Through the Farband, however, many were saved and remained true to the Jewish faith and Zionism. The Farband gave them a Zionist address and a Zionist content and anchor.

I had the privilege of being a close friend of Meyer Brown, as well as of his brother. The latter lived in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn and was a teacher in the Crown Heights Yeshivah, where he taught my son.

When Meyer Brown died, his brother said kaddish in the Brooklyn Jewish Center, where we prayed together. Meyer Brown belongs in the gallery of those who built and strengthened Jewish life in America.



Farband Women for Kupat Cholim. Three of the leading women of the Labor Zionist Movement present a check for Kupat Cholim to Jacob Hoffman, Treasurer of the Campaign.
From right to left: Gnendl Bonchek, President of the Women's Division, Yetta Goldstein, Treasurer, and Hilda Luster, Secretary.

Dr. Judah Shapiro — Teacher and Mentor

Dr. Judah Shapiro, President of the Labor Zionist Movement in America, is an interesting personality, beloved throughout the whole Jewish world.

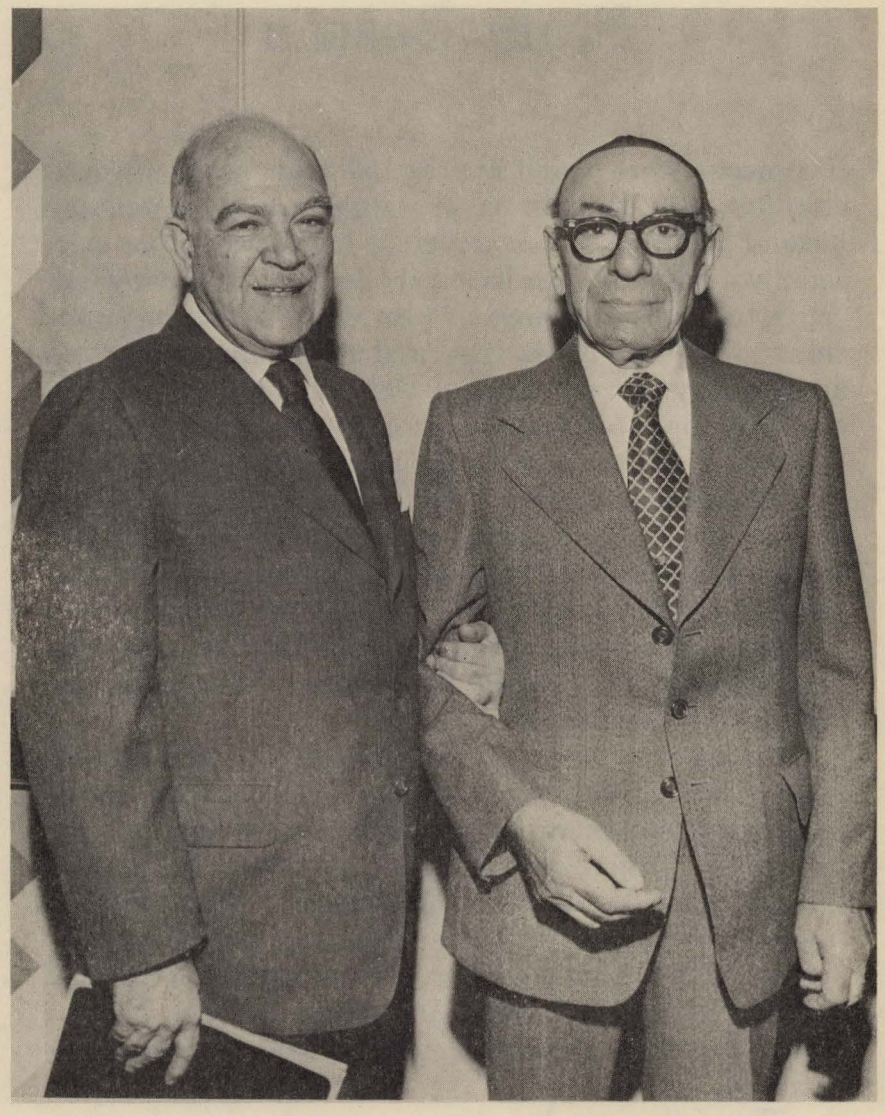
His father, (OBM), was principal of the first Kinneret School at 1267 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, at the time when I was its president. The Shapiro house was beautiful and proud of its Jewishness; small wonder then that it produced a scion of such high quality.

Dr. Shapiro is a well-known scholar, writer, lecturer and professor. Being a longstanding member of the movement he leads, I've had the opportunity to see and hear him at many of our affairs.

It's always a pleasure to hear him describe the role of the Histadrut in Israel and the conferences and seminars it conducts for American labor leaders.

Another facet of Dr. Shapiro's career is his role as radio commentator on station WEVD. His interpretation of the news is listened to appreciatively in thousands of Jewish homes.

●



Dr. Judah Shapiro, (left), with his friend, Jacob Hoffman

The Mysterious Young Lady From Boston

If someone were to tell me the following story, I would consider it a figment of the imagination, a fantasy beyond belief. Since, however, it happened to me personally, I can't dismiss it and the reader, not having had cause to doubt anything I've set down so far, can continue to rely on my integrity and accept the incident as an actuality. I'm not denying that there are elements in the story that are cause for astonishment but I wouldn't be the first one to say that truth is stranger than fiction.

The saga begins on a Friday eve in the summer of 1973 in the lobby of the Brooklyn Jewish Center, after the conclusion of the services. All the congregants had already left the synagogue, except for one young woman who remained sitting at the place she had occupied during prayers. "Who is she?" I wondered. "What's she doing here in our center?"

I went over to her, greeted her with 'Good Sabbath' and explained that since the only people around would be the two caretakers, she couldn't possibly remain here by herself. She assented and said she'd go to the Lubavitcher synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway, a block from us. Happy at the thought that she had some connection with the Lubavitcher, it occurred to me that she might be one of those repentants who seek a way back to Jewish tradition through the aid extended by that institution.

The following day, as we were leaving the synagogue after the havdalah, (the evening ceremony

separating the Sabbath from the rest of the week), I saw that same pretty young lady sitting in the lobby of the Center. Again I approached her and made her aware that she couldn't stay here alone. This time, however, I noticed that she was emotionally upset. Tears appeared in her eyes. I observed too that she was poorly dressed. Remembering that at home I had a closetful of beautiful women's clothing that my wife and daughter had hardly worn, I asked her to come up and choose whatever she wanted.

"Why don't you have a room of your own?" I asked her. "Because I have no money for rent," she answered, her face downcast and tears welling up in her eyes. "What would it cost to rent a room?" I inquired again. "Forty dollars a month," was the reply.

I gave her forty dollars and told her that she could return the money to me whenever she had it. "Should you need more help, you can phone me, and I'll be glad to oblige," I said as I wished her good night. She left, ostensibly to pay for the room she wanted to rent but couldn't for lack of funds.

I heard nothing further from this young lady nor did I see her for three and a half years afterwards, when our scene moves from Eastern Parkway to Borough Park. On January 8, 1977 I was the guest of honor at a 'melaveh malkeh', (a late-afternoon Sabbath meal, accompanied by songs, designed to delay the departure of the day of rest), at the Be'er Shmuel Yeshivah, one of the loveliest educational institutions in Brooklyn. Earlier I had visited the yeshivah, saw the classrooms where the students receive their instruction and was happy to lend a measure of support so that new generations of Jews could continue our traditions.

It's customary at such functions to praise the guest of honor, with a view, of course, towards getting an increased contribution from him. But then I heard the

speaker, the famous Rabbi Chaim Zvi Kruger, father-in-law of the principal of the Be'er Shmuel Yeshivah, who deals customarily with questions of marriage and divorce, do something most unusual. Among the encomia he heaped on me, (he didn't at all observe the talmudic injunction about recounting only a small portion of an honoree's commendable attributes in his presence), was the fact that I had helped a lovely girl from Boston in her hour of need. The incident was by now only the vaguest of memories for me but when he retold the story, Rabbi Kruger brought it to life. Still to be explained, however, was how he had learned about the event.

In America, when you arrange a dinner or a melaveh malkeh, everyone goes his own way after the appeal for funds, so that until the next such affair, all that happened plus the honoree fade from memory. That's how it was after the melaveh malkeh in Borough Park. I was in a hurry to get home and didn't have the opportunity to ask Rabbi Kruger how he knew about my encounter.

On January 10th, the Monday after the melaveh malkeh, he told me that a handsome young man had come during the day and asked about me. Since I wasn't home, the caller left an envelope containing a message for me. I opened the envelope and found a check for two hundred and fifty dollars made out to the Yeshivah Be'er Shmuel, together with a letter in English and Hebrew. The letter stated that the check was a donation to the yeshivah in honor of Jack Hoffman, "from me, the former young miss from Boston that you helped three and one half years ago. Today I'm happily married and have a wonderful husband and two beautiful children."

Still, who is this girl really? How did she happen to be at the melaveh malkeh in Borough Park? I read the letter once and many times after that, thinking to



At the Melaveh Malkeh of the Yeshivah B'er Shmuel in Borough Park. Taken with eminent rabbis and yeshivah principals, in honor of Mr. Hoffman, (second from right).
Second from the left is Rabbi Chaim Kruger, prominent spiritual leader, the guest speaker of the evening.





Purim in Israel, with masked children

myself how precious a people Jews are and how impenetrable G-d's ways of guiding the affairs of His world.

Again — what about that girl. Who is she?

About 7 P.M. that same January 10th, my door bell rang. Looking through the crack in the door, I saw something quite vaguely. Could that be the Boston girl and her family?

No sooner had I opened the door and say hello than she asked: "Do you recognize the girl who sat in the lobby of the Brooklyn Jewish Center three and one half years ago? This is my husband and my two little sabras." All of them embraced and kissed me as one would a father or grandfather. They thanked me for the friendship I had displayed toward a lonely young girl who didn't have forty dollars of her own to pay her room rent.

"Did you receive the cards I sent you from Israel and other places?" The fact is that I probably didn't realize at the time who had sent them and so put them away some place or other. I thanked her for remembering a friendship even from an unknown and served them fruit and some drinks. Together with the young and happy parents, I was proud of the two little princesses, aged two and one year respectively.

And so, sitting in my house that evening, the whole story about the mysterious Bostonian unfolded. The husband had been a yeshivah student in New York who later went to Boston to study. There he made the acquaintance of a pretty non-Jewish girl who was studying at the same school. They fell in love, but the fellow said he couldn't even consider marrying his sweetheart unless she converted to Judaism as he wanted to practice it. That meant not just a perfunctory ceremony, but thoroughgoing instruction to learn everything necessary for a woman to know in order to be a proper Jewish wife

and mother. On the advice of her fiance, the girl came to the Lubavitcher in Brooklyn and wanted to enroll in their institute for women who had been non-observant and now wanted to become orthodox.

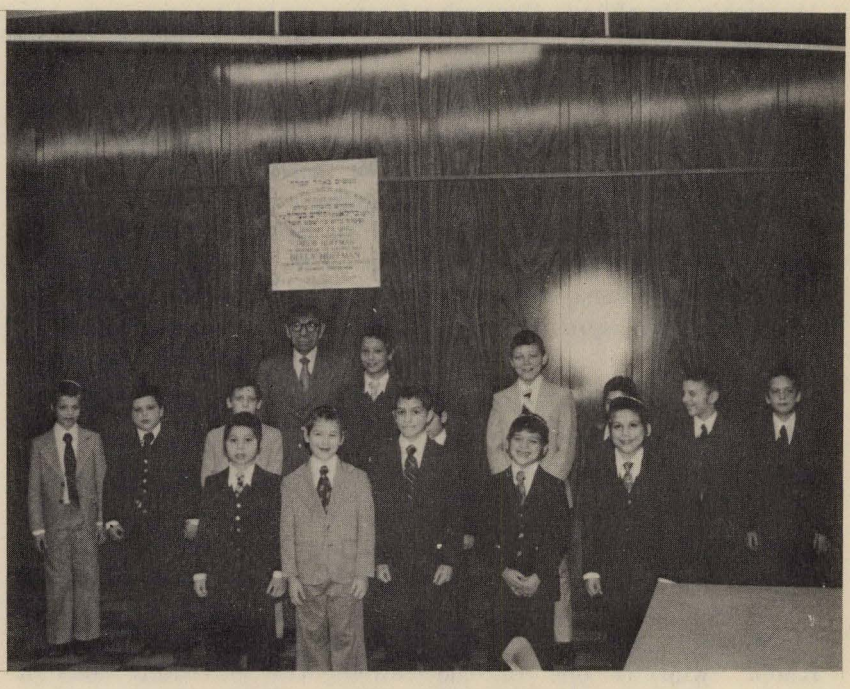
The girl was very much in love and was ready to conform to everything her groom-to-be asked of her. She came to the Lubavitcher on Eastern Parkway but it wasn't easy for a Christian girl who wanted to convert. They tried to dissuade her and didn't even allow her near a table set up for a Sabbath meal lest she touch the wine and profane it. Even in the synagogue they showed her no friendship; that explains why she came to my Center, where she was only one more among the women worshippers.

But by now she already knew what Jewish law requires of an aspirant to conversion and remained determined and unshaken in her resolve. She overcame all difficulties and held out till the Lubavitcher finally were convinced that she really wanted to become Jewish. She was accepted by the women's institute and did better than many Jewish girls. Before long, a rabbinical court confirmed her conversion. She went to the ritual bath and undertook the observance of all Jewish laws. After she married her one-time New York yeshivah student,they went to Israel and rented an apartment in Meah Shearim, (the most orthodox quarter of Jewish Jerusalem). They came to America to visit the husband's parents, who are supporters of the Yeshivah Be'er Shmuel. It was at the time of their visit that they saw the invitation to the melaveh malkeh with my picture on it, so they decided that they must personally attend that function and also give a donation to the yeshivah in my honor.

Since they already knew Rabbi Kruger because of the conversion process, they telephoned him and asked that he mention in his talk that Jack Hoffman had

helped a lonely girl from Boston. Because of the mechitzah, (divider between men and women), at the melaveh malkeh, she couldn't get to me. That explained her presence in my house with her whole family. She simply had to tell me personally what had happened to her until she succeeded in becoming a Jewish wife and mother.

Well, we Jews believe that we get rewarded for good deeds in the world to come. For what I did on behalf of a lonesome girl from Boston I already received my reward in this world — it was a view of the radiant faces of a man and wife at peace with themselves and happy with their lot as Jews.



Hoffman with yeshivah students
The plaque on the wall is in honor of Beile Hoffman

Jacob Hoffman at a Melaveh Malkeh Sponsored by the Yeshiva B'er Shmuel This Saturday Night

Jacob Hoffman, the well-known philanthropist and supporter of Torah education, will be honored this Saturday night with the Crown of Torah award at the Melaveh Malkeh of Yeshivah Be'er Shmuel. The ceremony will take place in Menorah Hall, 5000 Fourteenth Avenue in Brooklyn's Borough Park section. Mr. Hoffman is a devoted friend of the Yeshivah, which he visited personally last year. He expressed his enthusiasm over the splendid education the children receive there, as well as the physical attention given every child, with particular emphasis on the nourishing meals provided daily.

This Saturday the yeshivah will express its gratitude for Mr. Hoffman's friendship, especially for his renovation of the study hall in the name of his departed wife, (OBM).

The guest of honor will be Mr. Mordechai Yosef Hacohen Knopf, who is one of the yeshiva's founders. He has continued to be a very close and devoted friend and supporter, untiring in his efforts on its behalf.

Also to be honored as community benefactors and lovers of Torah are Mr. Yitzchak Kirzner, who will receive the Supporters of Torah Award and Mr. Abraham Mannen, designated as recipient of the award entitled 'Pillar of Lovingkindness.' The chairman is the well-known philanthropist Mr. Abraham Weinberger, who has always been most generous in encouraging Torah study.

The Be'er Shmuel Yeshivah earned its reputation as one of the most important Torah institutions in the country. Many resident students, friends of the yeshivah and hundreds of parents will come together for the festive Melaveh Malkeh.

The Yeshivah B'er Shmuel is especially famous for its illustrious graduates, whose scholastic accomplishments are legion. Beyond scholarship, however, they are reckoned among the important links in the continuity of Torah study as practiced in our great yeshivahs.

Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis and "Hinneni"

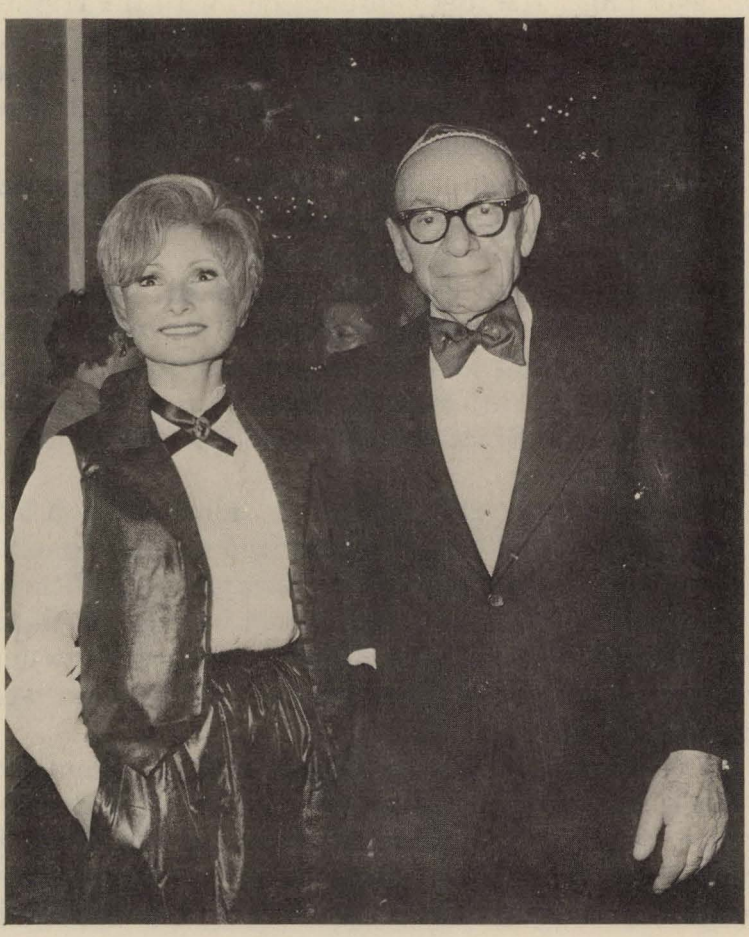
I'll never forget the first contact I had with the Hinneni movement and how I got to meet Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, its founder and leader. Hinneni merits much praise and gratitude for the spiritual salvation of thousands of Jewish youths.

My first encounter with that unique group came about because of my sister's children and their families. All of them are active in Hinneni and they invited me to a dinner sponsored by their movement. Rebbetzin Jungreis apparently had learned about my relatives and my cantorial talent and invited me to lead the participants in the grace after meals. The audience sang along enthusiastically. Since then I continue to be invited to all their gatherings.

Rebbetzin Jungreis, Hinneni's "mother", is a lady whose tenacity and talent concretized an idea that has saved many Jewish souls from assimilation. With her modesty, Jewish charm and dynamism she enthuses and enthralls her listeners. Twenty thousand Jews once listened to her in Madison Square Garden and went away captivated.

Her oratorical style, her appeal and the formulation of her ideas are shot through with sincerity, pathos and drama. When she speaks, a hush settles over the auditorium. Everyone's thoughts are concentrated on her words. She speaks from the heart and so reaches the hearts of her audience, leading them to a higher sphere of consciousness.

I consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to be a co-worker in and contributor to her movement.



Hoffman with Esther Jungreis



Esther Jungreis and Hoffman with his grandson Paul

The Balfour Declaration

Right after the Balfour Declaration the fire of Zionism was kindled in Jewish hearts.

Just imagine! Jews will finally get back their homeland! For many long centuries we had prayed and pleaded that "The Law shall come forth from Zion and the word of G-d from Jerusalem." Every Jew was waiting, full of hope and impatience, to have an independent Jewish State where our brothers and sisters would live free in the long-yearned-for land.

And now — my thoughts began to take shape — all that would actually happen. Would it cease being only a dream? Will the enemies who spilled our blood for so long really understand the justice of the Jewish people's return to their home?

Right after World War II I stopped in Paris on my way home from Israel. While there I somehow felt like going to Versailles, where the treaty ending World War II was signed. I saw the large dining room where King Henry had had his residence and the extensive courtyard containing many houses and horses. I took a good look at the table on which the peace treaty had been signed and where the decision was made to issue the Balfour Declaration.

The whole world then congratulated Lord Balfour for his noble friendship to the Jews. As for me, I looked at the diplomatic table and came to the conclusion that the time had come to begin working for our homeland and resume the course I had begun to follow in the old country — in the little Polish town of Rutke.

From that moment I knew no rest. The Balfour

Declaration had re-awakened me and called to me and all the other Jewish young people.

I remember as though it were today how Yankel the smith, who didn't approve of our Zionism, used to argue with us and say: "When the bride and groom are led from the marriage canopy into the fine-looking hall, they chase out the young boys who had gathered there earlier."

The older Jews were indifferent to what was happening in the Jewish world but the young people in each town had begun to act to the degree possible with the means at their disposal. In Rutke I was the one involved because I had the time and patience needed for organizational work and mostly because I had grasped the historic nature of that great moment.

We organized a Zionist club to carry on appropriate activities on behalf of the homeland and against the Polish anti-Semites who derided the Jews and caused them a lot of trouble. We were in contact with bigger cities from which we received instructions and newspapers filled with reports about everything going on in the Zionist world.

When I came to America I became involved with my own difficult problems and neglected my Zionist work to some degree. But that neglect didn't last long. As soon as I was freed in some measure from economic pressures, I re-established contact — spiritually, morally and financially with what had been accomplished up to that time in Eretz Israel.

My visit to Versailles had bound me even more strongly to the Zionism of my youth, especially after the Jewish people had experienced a holocaust that demonstrated as nothing else could that we must have our own homeland.

The Brooklyn Jewish Center played a pivotal role in my Zionist re-awakening and rejuvenation. The plat-



In Versailles at the historic palace where the peace after World War I was signed. Jacob Hoffman is in the center of the picture, hat in hand.

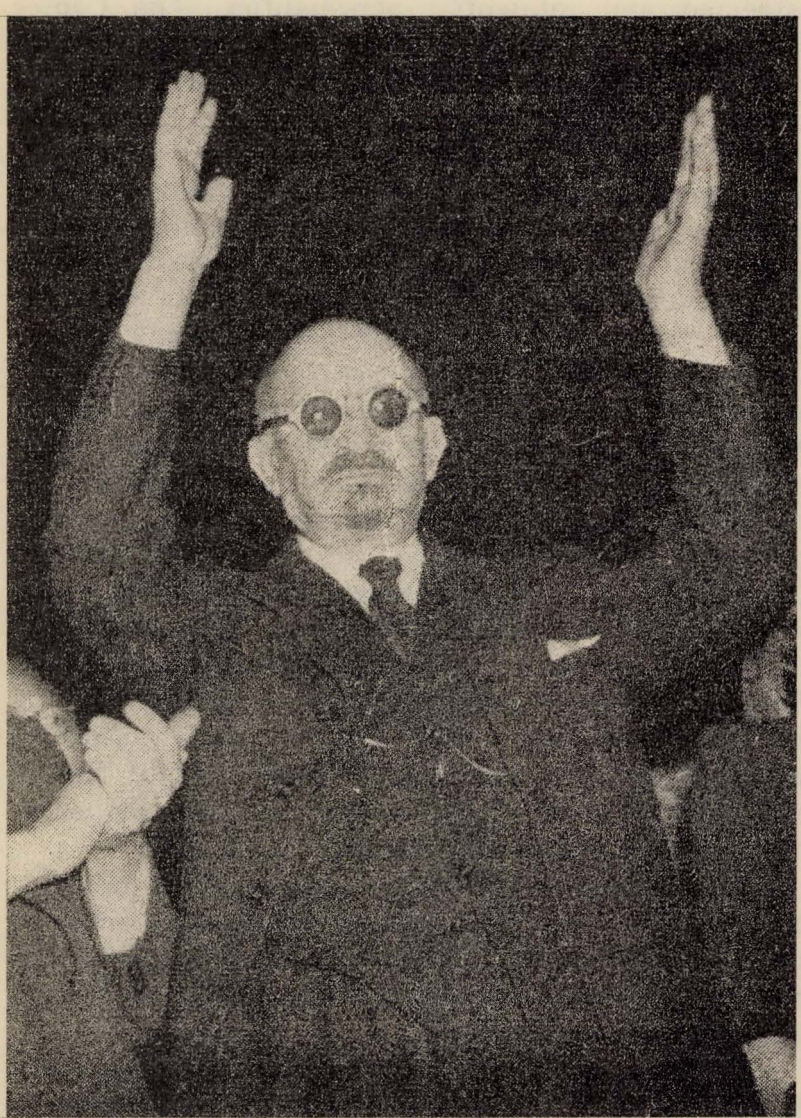
form provided by the Center on Eastern Parkway enabled us to react to everything happening in the Jewish world. All problems were discussed by the most esteemed and influential personalities. The Center forums drew intelligent Jews from all over New York who wanted to be informed first hand about everything that was occurring. I too made every effort not to miss even one forum, especially when our demands on the world were being brought forth. The demands I refer to were those that the official leaders of American Jewry kept silent about at the request of President Roosevelt.

President Roosevelt was afraid that if he allowed a ship of nine hundred Jewish refugees to debark its passengers on American soil, our country would lose the war against Hitler. He threw a scare into our Jewish leaders, who thereupon remained mute and immobilized. That was a tragic episode that must never be forgotten.

I mention only some of the names of those who appeared at the Center: Golda Meir, David Ben Gurion, Dr. Chaim Weizman, Professor Albert Einstein, Nachum Sokolov, Rabbi Goldman, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Stephen Wise, our own Rabbi Levinthal, Martin Buber, Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, Professor Zelig Brodetzky and Samuel Housman. They and many others of repute stormed from the platform against a world full of enemies and encouraged us as Jews not to lose hope but to increase our efforts on behalf of Zionism.

My closeness to Zionism made it possible for me to be an eye-witness to a historic moment — imagine standing next to Dr. Chaim Weizman on Saturday night, November 29, 1947 after the vote at Lake Success to establish a Jewish State.

It was at a large mass meeting in St. Nicholas Arena at the opening of the Israel Histadrut Campaign in America and Canada. Someone brought a piece of paper for Dr. Weizman to read. His eyes had begun to fail him



Dr. Chaim Weizmann

at that time. After he managed to peruse the message, he wept openly.

Outside stood thousands of people who couldn't get in. It was a momentous experience standing next to the future first president of Israel. He put the paper in his pocket and lightly wiped the tears from his eyes.

The Jewish State had been born at a propitious time.

My First Meeting with Family Survivors

After the cease-fire of the War of Independence, I was among the first American tourists to go to Israel. My anxiety to get there as soon as possible was overpowering for several reasons. First of all, I was drawn as though by a magnet to see the much yearned-for and recently embattled Jewish State. All of the years of my youth in Ostrove and Rutke were filled with Zionist activity and longing to go to Palestine. During all the years I lived in America, my heart and soul were really in Eretz Israel and I worked earnestly and devotedly to strengthen the Zionist movement. With that as background, how could one sit by quietly and not travel frequently to our beloved Land of Israel?

Secondly, I was eager to see my older sister Anna's surviving son and his family. Anna, her husband, all of her children except one son that somehow was saved, were killed by the Nazis. So you can imagine how ardently I wanted to see the rescued remnants of my family, only a very few of whom had survived the holocaust. Thirdly, as a real estate man I wanted to see the land I had bought in Mitzpeh Yerushalayim back in 1928. I acquired the property with the help of Moshe Rivlin, a Jewish writer of Jerusalem ancestry.

In the summer of 1949, when I decided to fly to Israel, it was very difficult to get a ticket. The planes to Israel were filled to overflowing. One hot summer day I received a phone call that someone had given up his

ticket and that if I wanted to, I could have it. I packed in a jiffy and was at the airport in two seconds flat.

I remember that it was a Sunday in July when the flight took place. As I write these words I relive the tension I felt as the plane neared Israel's shore, after a short stopover in Rome. Through the mountains of white clouds our precious Holy Land appeared like a gleaming tablecloth spread in honor of the Sabbath. All the passengers were as one family. Together they wept with joy and sang pioneer songs. The customs officials in their uniforms and the beautiful Jewish girls dressed in attractive garb examined our documents with despatch. Everything was handled with great precision and courtesy and added joy to the expectancy of taking our first steps on the holy soil.

At the hotel on the Tel Aviv seashore I couldn't sleep a wink. I was relentlessly pulled to the out of doors, simply to look at Jews passing by. Most of all, I wanted to go to Jaffa, where my sister's son and his family live. At that time Jaffa was still in ruins due to the fierce fighting that had gone on there with the Arabs who lived in the city previously.

At last the awaited moment came. On the way to Jaffa I was reminded that that very road and the city itself used to be nothing but a succession of sand dunes and broken-down houses — a far cry from its current flourishing appearance. Now you see streets bedecked with flowers, beautiful houses of various sizes and a population which, forefending the evil eye, has grown to metropolitan dimensions. Jaffa is now a part of Tel Aviv.

In 1949 the taxi that brought me to Jaffa stopped near a two-family house in such ramshackle condition that one couldn't believe that anybody would dare live there. It was supported by some beams so that it wouldn't collapse altogether. I simply couldn't unders-

tand how they could leave it in such a state. And how could people who had gone through and survived the hell of World War II again endanger their lives in a deathtrap like that?

But instead of wasting time complaining to the people, I kissed my precious and beloved and nephews and their children, a girl of six and a boy aged four, and immediately thereafter began inquiring as to where a decent house for the family could be found. Someone recommended a firm by the name of Rassco whose office is on Allenby Street in Tel Aviv, near the great synagogue. "Well," I thought, "I purchased some Rassco stock through Moshe Torczyner, the former president of the General Zionist Organization, so they will certainly be most happy to help me out."

From Jaffa I went directly to the Rassco office and made the acquaintance of its very friendly director, Dr. Hoffman, (no relative of mine). He immediately looked up his records and found my name and how much stock I owned. Then he told me that they were just about finished building six one-family houses in Cholon, two miles south of Tel Aviv and that if I wanted to, he was ready to take me and my relatives there to have a look at the houses.

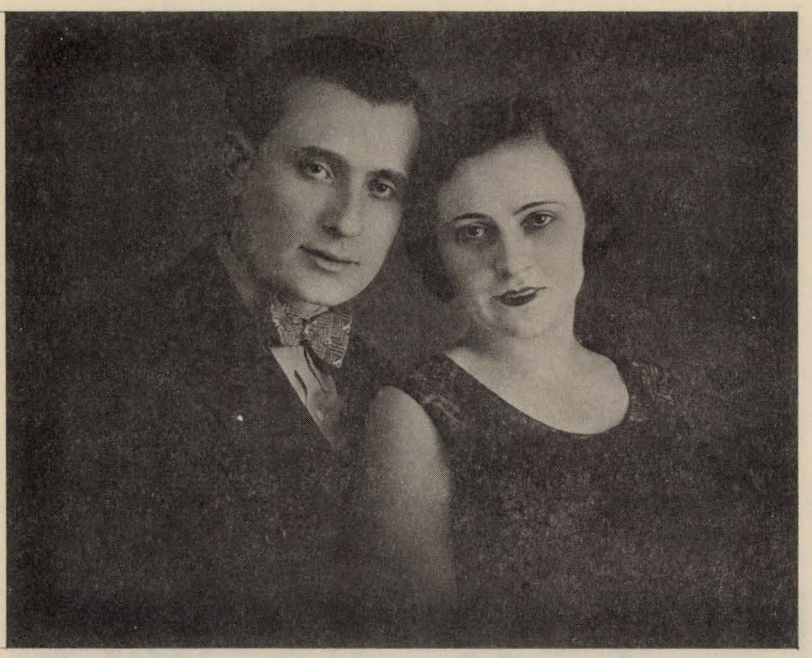
No sooner said than done. We rode directly from his office to Cholon, immediately made a deal and bought a house for four thousand dollars. I was very pleased to see the members of my family in a beautiful new dwelling but at the same time it was tragic to look at the new immigrants living in ma-abarot, (transient camps), where the huts provided no respite from the sun in summer and the rains in winter.

The two small children I met in 1949 are now married and have children of their own. The boy is an instructor in the Israeli army, teaching young soldiers defense techniques. My sister's son died after living in

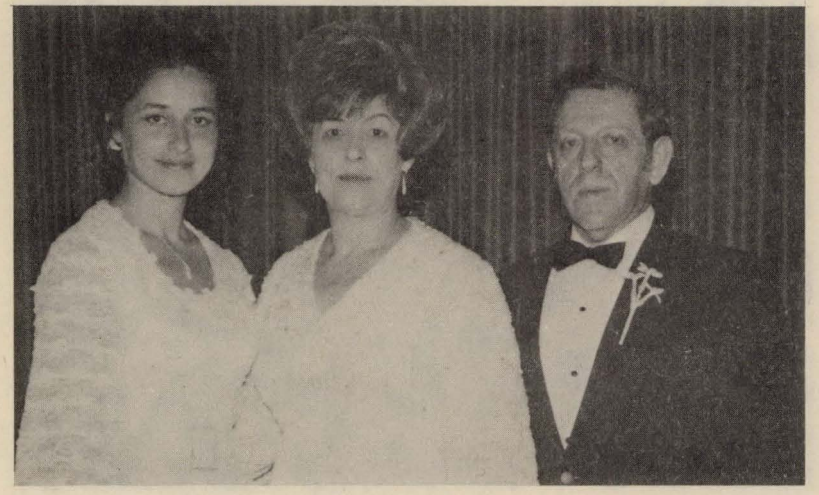
Israel for eight years, but she has been privileged to see much joy from her other children and grandchildren. I too enjoy them from afar and my delight increases manifold when I visit them every year in Israel.



Hoffman with surviving members of his family



Members of the family who were saved from the European Holocaust: Shmuel Hoffman, a nephew, and his wife, in Argentina



Cousins who were rediscovered and sought each other out after reading the life-story of the Hoffman family in the Algemeiner Journal. The articles began appearing in the winter of '76-'77

The Burma Road

During my visit to Israel in 1949, immediately after the birth of the State, I was very curious to see the "Burma Road" close up. That was the road the Israeli soldiers had carved out under a hail of Arab bullets to save Jerusalem from starvation and free her from the siege laid down to get the encircled Jews to surrender.

Riding with a tour from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the guide told us a lot about the bitter battle that took place along that whole road. The Arabs had fortified themselves on the heights and in the mountains, isolating the capital. The people didn't have enough food and water. In addition, there weren't enough arms to properly protect the city. The situation was most desperate and if the Arab blockade had lasted a little longer, who knows, G-d forbid, what would have happened. The battle was fanatically fought on both sides. The Jewish fighters had no choice other than to break through the siege with a new road.

The Burma Road was cut through by the expenditure of many Jewish lives. Even today you can still see the rusted skeletons of Jewish tanks that remained frozen in their upward thrust, stopped dead in their tracks by direct hits. The list of casualties that the Burma Road cost was long and painful. When you visit the military cemetery, you see the graves of Jewish young people who were cut down at the peak of their growth and development.

Among those who fell in the War of Independence was the Jewish-American Colonel David Marcus, who had come to help his brothers in their struggle but



The Burma Road to Jerusalem (Heroic Road)

tragically didn't live to see their victory. He was brought to his eternal rest in West Point, the American military academy in New York State, of which he was an alumnus.

All of us owe a debt of gratitude to the heroes of the Burma Road, since it was their sacrifice that made it possible for Jerusalem to be Israel's capital today with all its government offices and institutions. Now that Jerusalem is one united city, let's not forget the immortal stalwarts of the Burma Road, created in 1949 to restore Israel's capital to its rightful place as the spiritual center of world Jewry.



Hoffman addresses a Histadrut Campaign meeting

In Historic Safed

My first visit to Safed took place in 1949. It was a deeply moving experience, from both the historical and personal point of view.

As a young child in Ostrove, our teacher in the one-room schoolhouse told wondrous tales about Safed, the city in which Rabbi Joseph Caro wrote the Shulchan Aruch, (code of laws minutely regulating the life of the religious Jew). There too the Ari, (Rabbi Isaac Lurie, a leader in the study of 'kabbalah', or occult studies) reportedly roved the heavens in his mystic peregrinations. Also, it was in Safed that Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, a colleague of Caro's sang his "L'cha Dodi", ("Come My Beloved"), a hymn welcoming the Sabbath, and many other luminaries lived and created works of towering spirituality. After Jerusalem, Hebron and Tiberias, Safed is fourth in the spectrum of Israel's holy cities. Those are the cities we dreamed about in school. In a never-never kind of fantasy, we would imagine how deliriously happy any one of us would be if he were privileged to trod the soil of such consecrated places.

So here I was, threading my way through Safed's crooked alleyways, feeling my heart beat somewhat faster than normal. A vision of my childhood years had materialized. I saw the houses, still marked with the Arab bullets directed at them in the 1949 War of Independence. The Arabs were ensconced on high points in the surrounding mountains and the Jews, fighting with their bare hands, were in the valleys below. But, as in similar miraculous episodes in our history, the few bested the many and the Arabs fled in terror. As the

Jews in Safed tell it, a sudden thunder storm broke out, even though it was still too early for the rainy season. The Arabs thought they were being bombarded, perhaps even with the atomic bomb, so they ran away in fear for their lives.

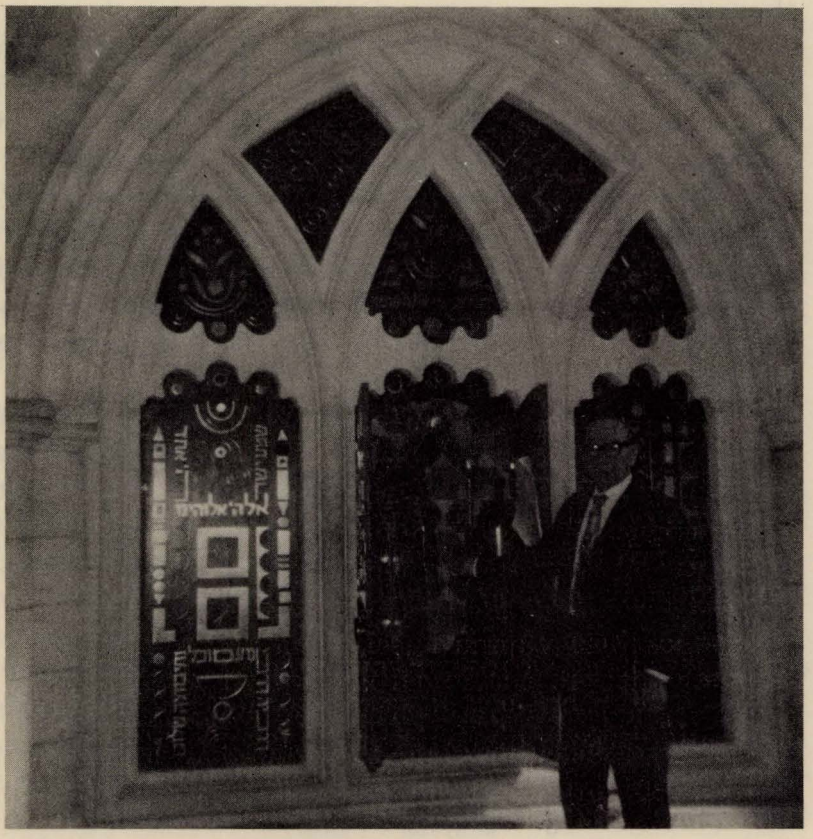
"Granny, where's the Rabbi Joseph Caro synagogue?" I asked a little old lady emerging from a half-ruined house in the old part of the city. "And you, at your age, how do you manage to climb all those steps?"

The oldster looked at me with a gentle smile and answered in authentic Safedian Yiddish, somewhat similar to that spoken in Bessarabia, "Thank G-d that at a hundred I can still find the strength to walk on my own two feet . . . the road to the Caro synagogue is straight ahead and then left . . ."

The man in charge of the Caro synagogue took out a first-edition copy of the Shulchan Aruch and allowed me to touch its pages. For me it was a great privilege; one I'll never forget. A little later I was sitting in a restaurant on beautiful Jerusalem Street. The proprietress cracked some jokes at the expense of Safed's elder citizens. "In Safed," she said, "people live long. To give you an example, one of my neighbors, a man one hundred years old, beat his sixty-year-old grandchild for insulting his grandpa, aged one hundred and twenty." To be a Safedian is considered a great distinction, as is expressed in that famous song, "I'm from Safed."

I was in Safed again during Passover in 1976, when the Histadrut asked me to be a participant in establishing a new synagogue in the "housing complexes," that is in the new, modern part of the city that developed after 1948. A chauffeur-driven car awaited me in the Hilton Hotel and took me to Safed, about a three-hour trip through the mountains and valleys of our Jewish homeland's beautiful landscape.

We stopped in front of the mayor's office. His



Hoffman at the artistic Holy Ark in the old Ari Synagogue in Safed

deputy conducted me on a tour of the city, the beautiful new houses and the roads winding through the mountains. In the evening, the roads give the impression that Safed is a city built five or six stories high, the lowest being the section containing the old houses, and the highest ending in the new villas on Mount Canaan.

The synagogue erected by the Histadrut appeared finished from the outside and was executed in a very beautiful style. I also saw the signs urging you to visit the new housing development being built by the Lubavitcher. An interesting experience was a visit I paid to the "kolel", (community of residents from a particular country), to which my Eastern Parkway neighbor, the Brooklyn Lubavitcher Rebbe had sent some youngsters to deepen their knowledge and appreciation of Jewish lore and tradition. The name Lubavitcher is much loved in Safed and their movement influences the surrounding communities in the Galilee and the Huleh region, formerly a swamp but now a flourishing Jewish agricultural area.

At this point in my wanderings I went to visit the Caro synagogue again. According to what I'm told, it's eight hundred years old. That fact, plus some ideas I had been mulling over for a while, aroused the feeling that on this occasion I'd like to do something to refurbish that venerable shrine. But a Canadian Jew beat me to it and when I arrived at the site I saw that the house of worship had been completely remodeled and beautified. May G-d bless him for his generous act of kindness.

The old Rabbi Isaac Lurie synagogue, where he studied with his students, seemed quite neglected but since I was about to return home, I promised the deputy mayor that, G-d willing, on my next visit I'd help him repair the institution, considered the cradle of the kabbalah in ancient Safed.

Safed is also a painting and sculpture center and

has an artists' colony whose members draw inspiration from the marvelous landscape that surrounds them.

For me, however, Safed is primarily the holy city described in the stories told me by my early teachers. It's a story all the more marvelous because I had the privilege of seeing it become a reality before my very eyes.



With a group of young men of the Lubavitcher community in Safed

At Haifa's Shore and the Summit of Mount Carmel

It was a pleasure to enter a room in the Technion, (Israel's MIT), and see some tens of young people sitting at their highly technical machines and working with delicate instruments. For me, a Jew from a small European town, it was a tremendous experience seeing Jewish young men and women figuring out such complicated problems. I had thought that only a few well-known industrial countries like the United States, England and France had such establishments. Imagine my surprise when I was told that instruments developed in the Technion are actually shipped to America.

At Haifa's city hall I and some other members of the Labor Zionist Movement, friends of the Histadrut, were received by Mayor Abba Chushi. He personally took us on a tour to show us how they're building the Carmelit, the subway leading all the way from Hadar Hacarmel, Mount Carmel's summit, to the seaport at the bottom of the descent. All of us put on helmets, ('hard hats'), as they call them in the States, and entered the bowels of the tunnel. In front of us was an array of machines for breaking up the earth and dynamiting the rocks and boulders leading to the top of the mountain. The workers in their special clothing looked as though they had come from a foreign country.

I thought about it for a while and finally asked: "Where do these non-Jews come from?" "What do you mean 'where from'," answered Abba Chushi. Those are all our fellow-Jews. We have only one engineer from

France," he continued with unconcealed pride. I then asked the mayor when the Carmelit would be finished. "In two years," was the reply. And so it was. Two years later I had the pleasure of riding in the new subway from top to bottom and I did so with the ease and sense of security that I would taking a walk in the countryside.

I noticed an Egyptian ship at anchor in the harbor. Israeli soldiers had captured it during the War of Independence in 1948. Jews boarded the ship and derived satisfaction from the victory of the Israeli heroes. The panorama of the harbor together with the Jewish soldiers guarding the ship was a source of gratification for the heart and a beautiful sight for the eyes.

Haifa is a center for both light and heavy industry. They manufacture everything here, from a nail to a steel wall. I went to a glass works and watched the fabrication process. "Why do you need such tremendous sheets of glass?" I asked the factory foreman. "They're exported abroad," he replied. Formerly Israel had to import the fine sand necessary for making delicate glass. Now they found the needed sand in their own desert, so they can produce the finest glass possible.

I happened to be in the harbor when a shipload of new immigrants, weighted down with their baggage, arrived from Russia. Since I was curious to see what kind of things they had brought from the Russian paradise, I went over to a young member of the group, a tall, handsome man and asked him whether he'd permit me to have a look at the contents of the trunk he had brought with him. "Certainly," he answered and opened the big trunk. I saw copies of the Vilna edition of the Talmud, jumbled together with communist books in Russian and Yiddish. As soon as he pulled out the communist books he threw them contemptuously on the ground and began to trample them as one would dung. "Why did you bring

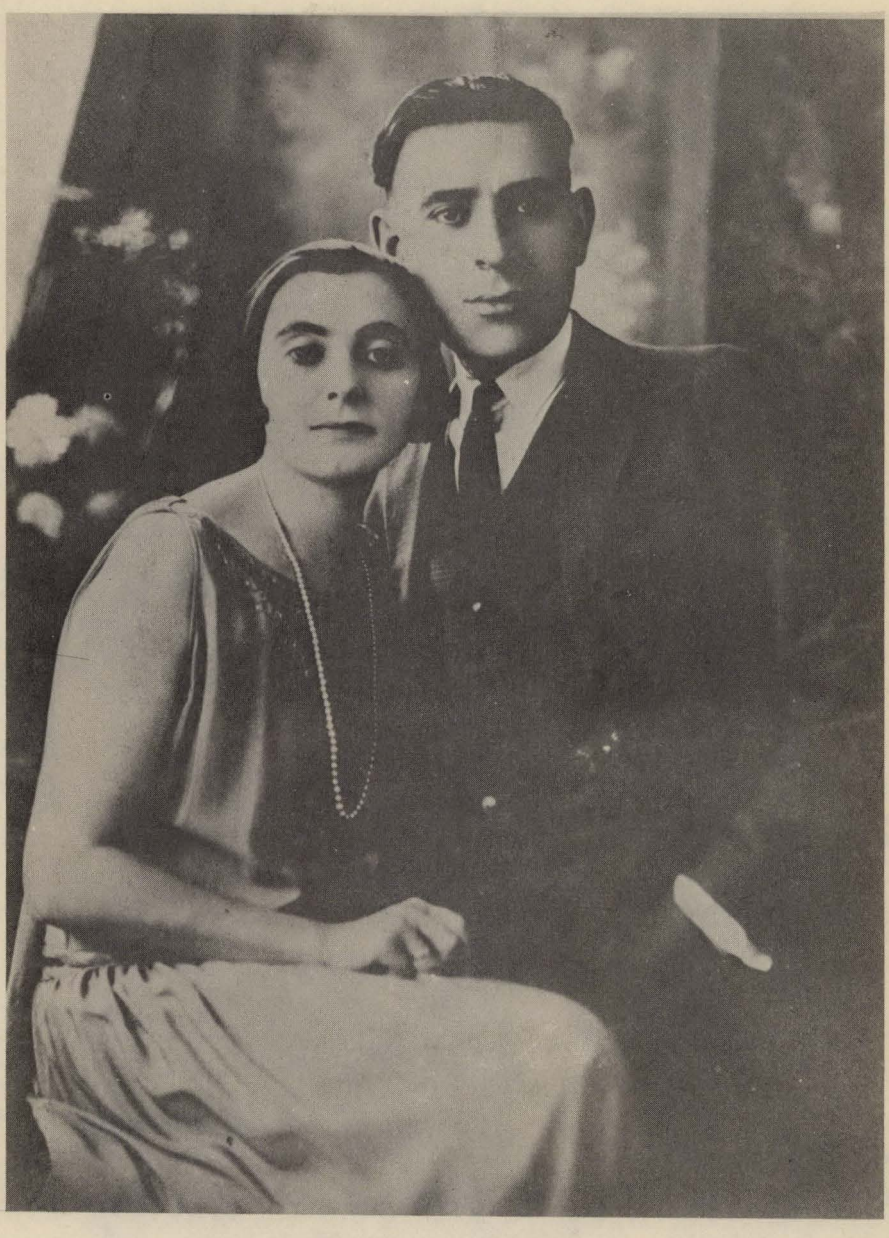
them along, if you walk on them," I inquired, puzzled at the sight. "My dear comrade . . . I was an official in my city and up to the last moment I had to display my ideological commitment to communism . . . now I trample them and I'll start studying our own Jewish sources."

Haifa, the second largest city in Israel from the point of view of commerce and industry and the principal port in all of the Middle East, had the good fortune to be headed by such a dynamic mayor as Abba Chushi, who was a master at developing and governing a city. I was also quite taken with his friendliness and geniality on the many occasions when we held discussions in his office and took pictures together.

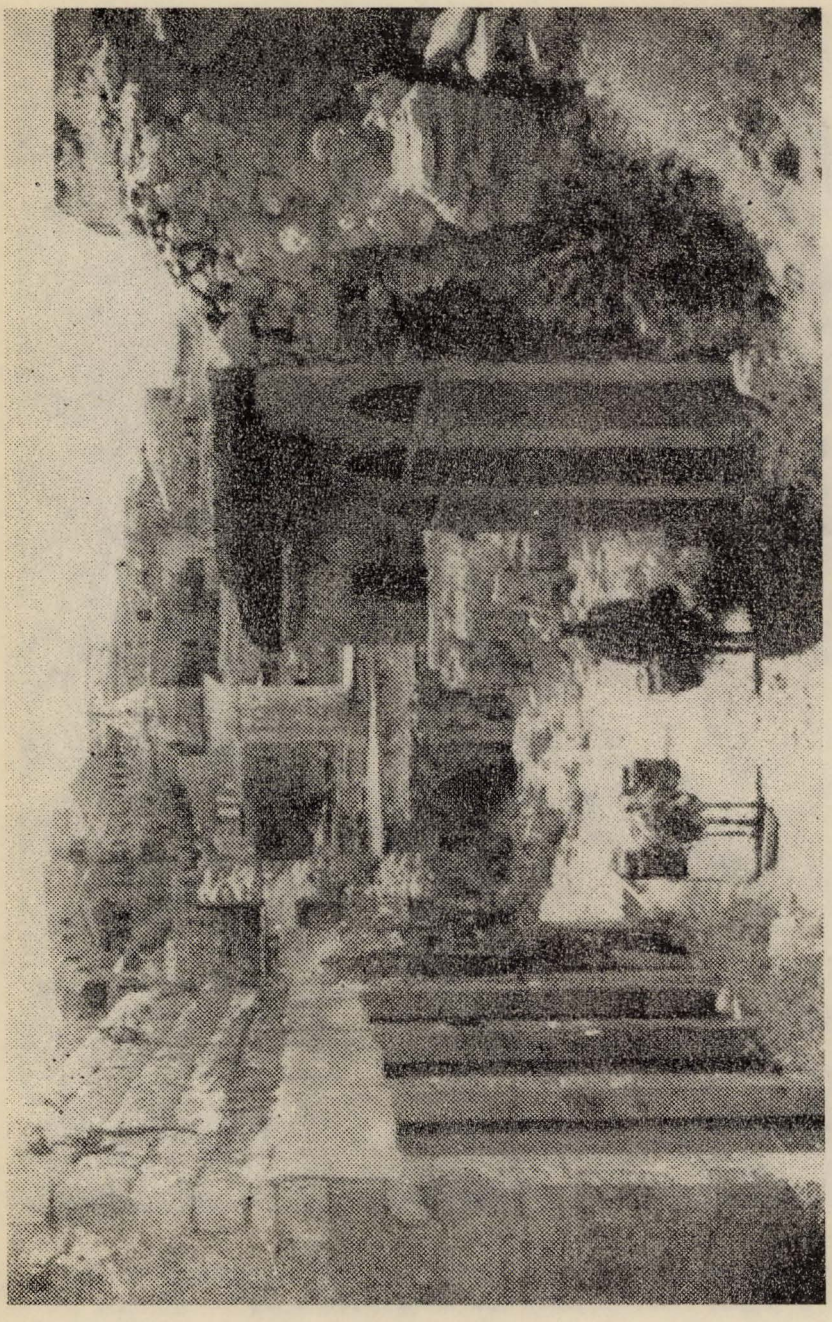
Only in Israel does one see so many devoted builders of our Homeland and such an exquisitely beautiful landscape as the one you see from Mt. Carmel, overlooking the port that gives you such charming entree into Israel from the Mediterranean Sea.



With Mayor Abba Chushi in the Haifa City Hall



Jacob Hoffman with Beile when they met in Philadelphia in 1921, at a time when both were greenhorns.



The approach to Nazareth

Nazareth

A visit to Nazareth, that is the lower part of the city where the Arabs live, is not too pleasant an experience. Every time my wife and I used to be in Nazareth, the Arabs would plead with us to give them alms. And they didn't just ask; they demanded. "We are cousins and you have to help us out," they would declare, their hands outstretched for a contribution. Our 'cousins' in Nazareth, however, are communistically oriented, even though they're religious. And it makes no difference whether they are Christian or Moslem. Their communism isn't socialist in its ideology but simply anti-Israel. The communist affiliation gives them a basis or an excuse for hatred of the Jewish State.

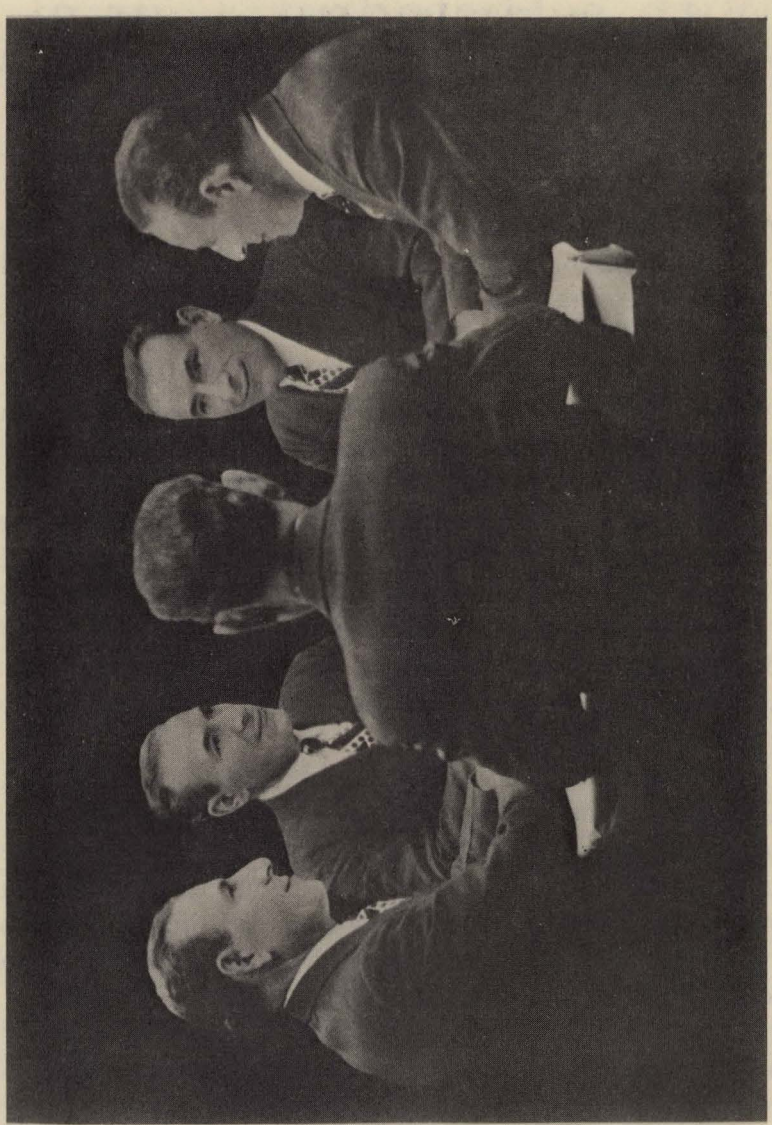
Nazareth is a holy city to the Christians, with churches and monasteries connected with "that man", (a Talmudic reference to Jesus). But my wife was apprehensive about visiting Christian shrines, even though there was free movement everywhere in the narrow side-streets and alleys.

The Arabs belong to the credit unions and Kupat Cholim (Sickness Fund), run by the Histadrut. Of the 30,000 Arabs in Nazareth, two thirds are Christian and one third Moslem. They are petty merchants and artisans for the most part. They also own several small factories that produce various items for local consumption.

The Israeli military keeps a watchful eye, though at a discreet distance, on all aspects of security. The Arabs know that Israeli power is available to maintain order at all times and under all circumstances.

There is also a Jewish Nazareth, called Upper Nazareth, from whose heights Israelis can note everything happening in the lower city. We were in Upper Nazareth when they first began to build it and the first settlers arrived. There I met families who had just come from Poland with their children. We were able to converse with them, but only in Polish. They were then going through the first tribulations of settling in a new home, a new country and a new milieu. I remember especially one woman, a mother of two children, who complained that her husband works very hard and that she herself was having no easy time getting acclimatized.

During my last visit to Upper Nazareth I already found, thank G-d, a flourishing Jewish city, with modern streets, good-looking buildings and Jewish mothers satisfied with their new situation. It was heartwarming to see what our Sabras' talents can produce.



A photographic trick that shows Jacob Hoffman's many "facets."

With a Histadrut Tour at President Ben Zvi's House

Going to Israel with a Histadrut tour and having the privilege of being taken around by such a colorful and beloved guide as Isaac Hamlin is an experience I can't forget.

Especially unforgettable is a visit the whole Histadrut delegation had with President Yitzchak Ben Zvi in his 'bungalow' and the sight of our good friend and well-known Poale Zion leader seated on the President's chair. I often saw and heard him speaking during his visits to New York. It was characteristic of his kind of personality that now as President he hadn't changed his genial and friendly approach to people. There was not the least attempt to put on airs of superiority or act the snob, as sometimes happens with those who have achieved "upward mobility".

It was a large delegation and yet the President had enough patience to talk with everyone and memorialize the occasion with individual photos. And it's precisely his simplicity and his concern for people that evoked a feeling of great respect and honor toward him. Such was this simple Jew who had been privileged to become the second President of the re-established Jewish State.

The White House in which the President of Israel and his wife stayed was then still small and crowded, a far cry from the presidential mansion built during Shazar's incumbency. But not a single person complained, in the words of our sages, who said: "No one has ever said that any place where he spent a night in

Jerusalem was uncomfortable." In Jerusalem it's never crowded for Jews.

After that first meeting I went twice more to greet President Ben Zvi and each time it was a new and refreshing experience.



Meeting with President Ben Zvi in Jerusalem





Jacob Hoffman, (right), in a conversation with the second president of Israel, Yitzchak Ben Zvi, in Jerusalem



A warm handshake with the third president of Israel. Shneur Zalman Shazar and his wife Rachel in the President's mansion in Jerusalem

Louis Segal and Kiryat Segal

Kiryat Segal, near Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv, is a town that perpetuates the memory of Chaver Louis Segal, a man whose very name is synonymous with Zionist work in America. Both as General Secretary of the Jewish National Workers Alliance for many years and as prime mover in a whole gamut of Zionist and Jewish activity in America — Jewish National Fund, Histadrut, Israel Bonds, the Jewish Folk School Movement, the Jewish Culture Congress, Jewish Teachers Seminary and many others — he will be remembered as the Jewish communal worker par excellence.

Chaver Segal, as we called him with love and admiration, was a very close friend of mine. He was endowed with talent and tact, two characteristics that unfortunately don't always go together. Segal was the architect as well as the concretizer of many functions and enterprises. With his savoir-faire and influence he was always successful in drawing others to work in tandem with him.

Frequently I personally had the opportunity to observe Chaver Segal at the very peak of his activity and was continually astonished at his scope and grasp of things. I was especially indebted to him for the support he extended at the founding of the Kinneret Day School on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. The difficulties we faced were enormous. To organize a school where the children would be taught Yiddish, Hebrew and the traditional English curriculum and have everything



Jacob Hoffman is honored at a UJA Dinner at the Brooklyn Jewish Center
From left to right: Emanual Cohen, Rabbi Israel H. Levinthal, Jacob Hoffman, Herbert H. Hoffman, Benjamin Z. Kreitman, Abraham M. Lindenbaum

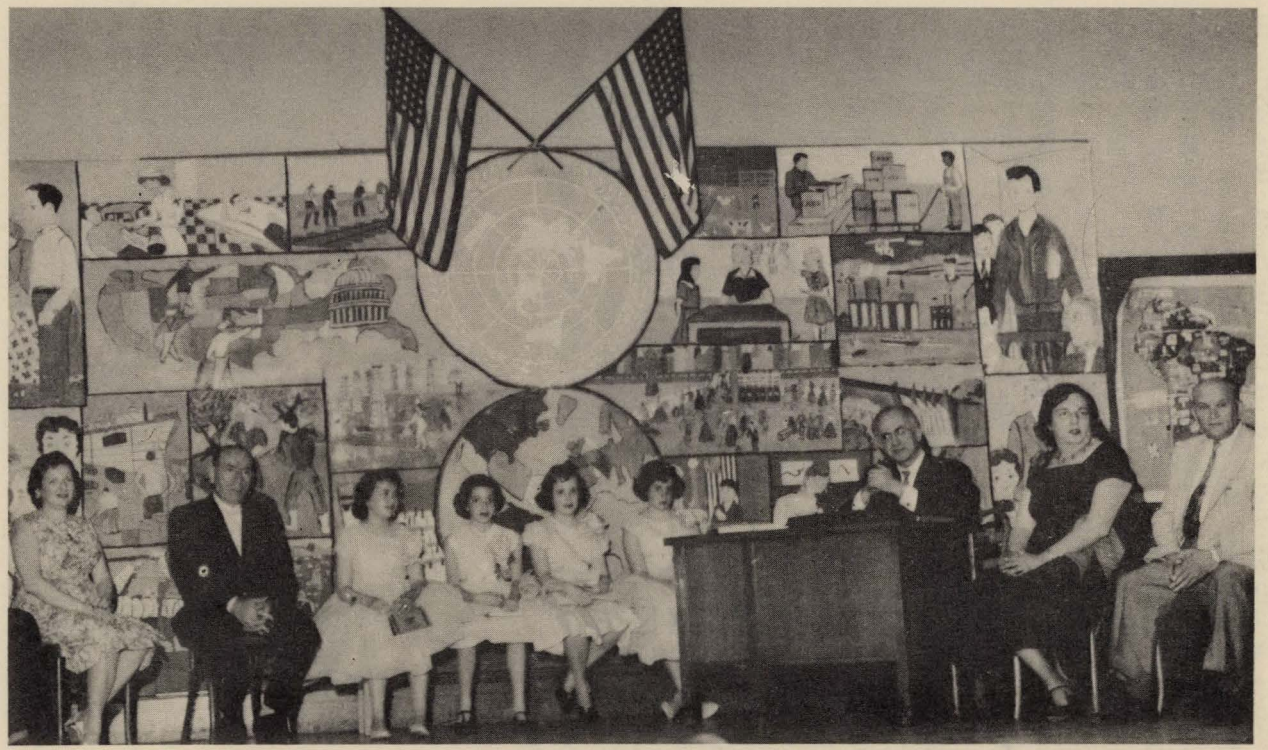
mesh smoothly, required much patience and endurance, in addition, of course, to large sums of money.

I remember how I, Chaver Shudroff and the Principal of Kinneret, Yerachmiel Weingarten, went as a committee to see Chaver Segal in the Farband office on Seventeenth Street in Manhattan. We told him that without his help we wouldn't be able to open the school. He heard us out, as one would members of his family. For him, Jewish education had the highest priority, so he encouraged us to continue working towards the opening of the school. "Come tomorrow, G-d willing, and you'll get the financial help you're looking for," he said as he bade us goodbye and wished us success.

And that's exactly what happened. The next day I was in his office again and he kept his word. He gave me enough money to begin operating and that's how we were able to continue for ten years. When the neighborhood changed, of course, the school could no longer remain there. With my help and Chaver Segal's cooperation, the Farband, which had the mortgage on the building, sold it at a cheap price to the Lubavitcher Yeshivah. They started with a small number of children and now have expanded to a much larger operation.

Thanks to Chaver Segal's aid, a second Kinneret School was opened on Valentine Avenue in the Bronx, where at one time two hundred and fifty students attended. Today they have moved to Netherland Avenue in Westchester, where the tradition of the first Kinneret School is carried on in more spacious and modern quarters.

My dealings with Louis Segal were never theoretical because both of us were interested in practical outcomes. When Israel Stolarsky and Yehoshua Levy of the Histadrut came to me with the proposal to build a synagogue in Kiryat Segal, I accepted the idea with delight. Now the names of the Hoffman family are inscribed on



At an assembly of the Kinneret Day School

From left to right: a teacher, Jacob Hoffman, some students, the Principal, a local banker.

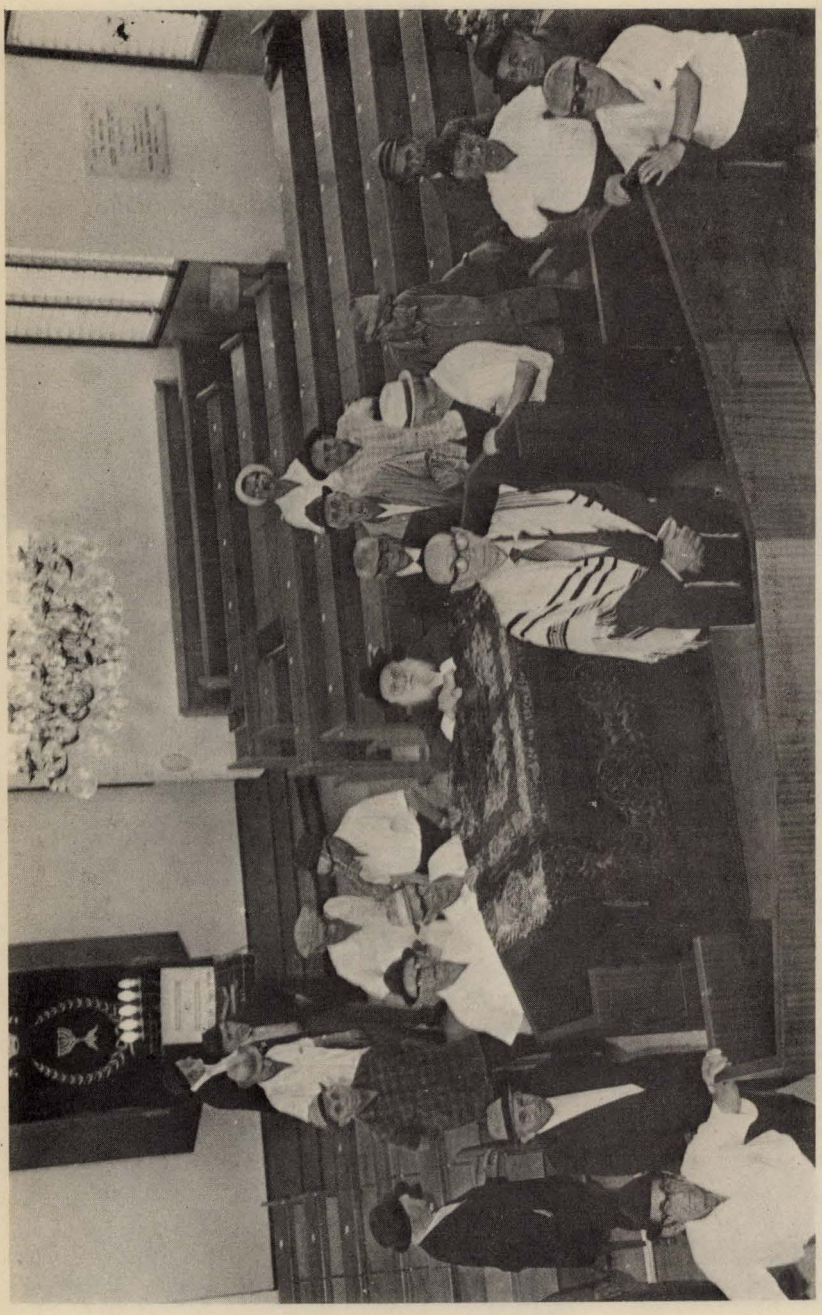
the walls of the synagogue in the housing development built in his memory. On all my visits to Israel I have the privilege of praying in the Kiryat Segal synagogue. It's a beautiful, modern building, surrounded by trees in bloom and filled with worshippers, young and old. When it's announced that I'll officiate at services on a given Saturday, the number of congregants is even larger than usual and all thank me for the fine synagogue they enjoy.

It's a pleasure for me to see the handsome dwellings in Kiryat Segal and observe how happy and fortunate the residents are there. Often after Friday night services we eat the Sabbath meal and then enjoy an Oneg Shabbat that is indescribably beautiful.

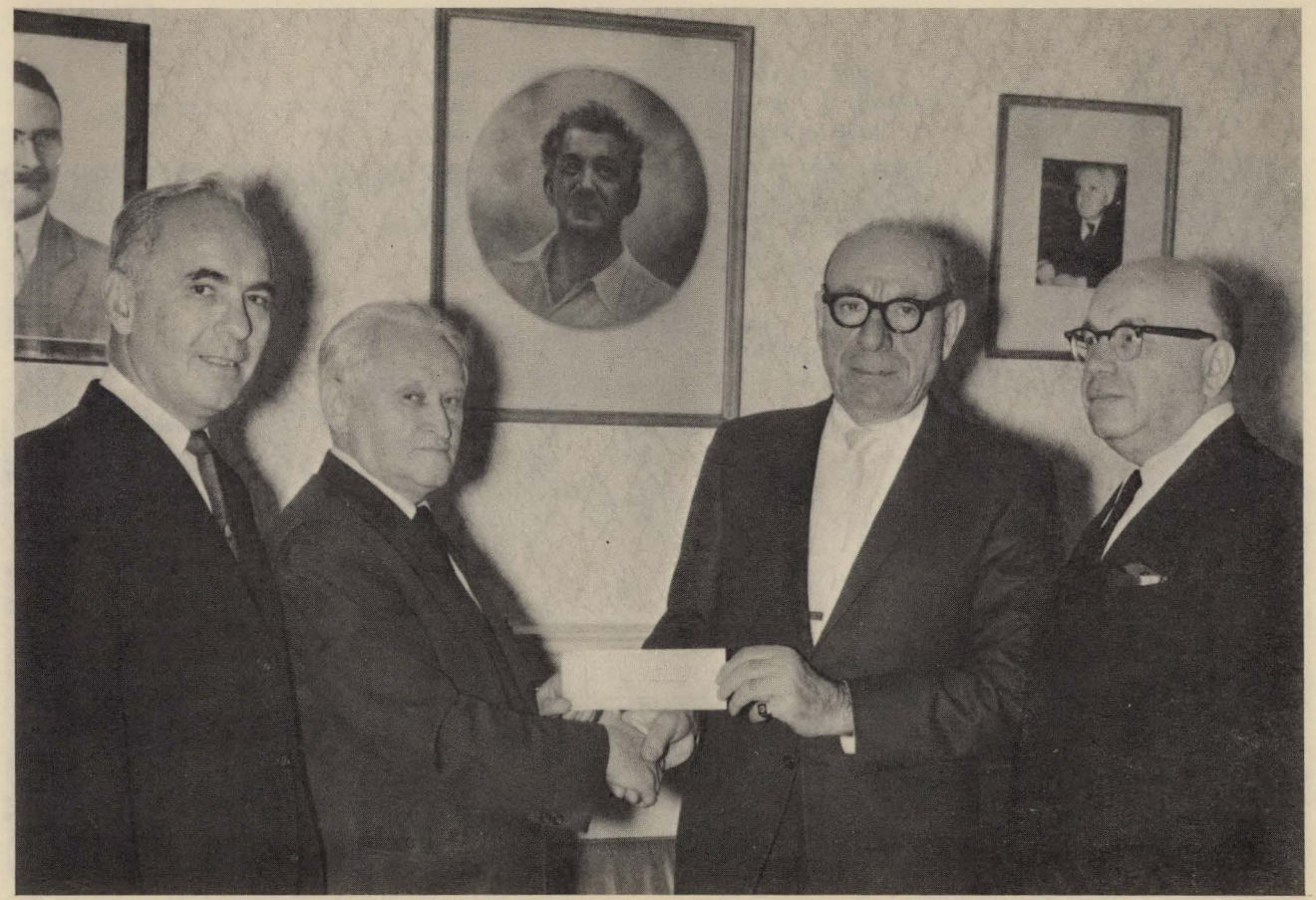
During one of my last visits to Kfar Segal I decided that the synagogue could use a nicer Holy Ark, so I arranged for it. The congregants tell me that it beautifies the synagogue and they enjoy it greatly. I was very close to Louis Segal during his lifetime and our friendship now, after his death, has been reinforced by our new cooperative venture, the Hoffman Synagogue in Kiryat Segal.



Hoffman with his family outside the synagogue in Kiryat Segal



Hoffman officiates at the late-afternoon service in the synagogue in Kiryat Segal



At the payment of the first check for the synagogue in Kiryat Segal
From right to left: Isaac Faigenbaum, Israel Stolarsky and Samuel Shulsinger



At a dinner of the Kinneret Day School

Right to left: Baruch Zuckerman, Louis Segal, Jacob Hoffman, (at the mike), Abraham Shudroff, Yerachmiel Weingarten, Pinchas Gingold

In the Maoz Aviv Synagogue

The Histadrut has a religious department which devotes itself, among other things, to the building of synagogues in those settlements whose residents request one. Since it's known in Histadrut circles that I attend services regularly, the National Committee for Labor Israel proposed that I build a synagogue in Maoz Aviv, a suburb of Tel Aviv, whose population consists for the most part of Haganah veterans. After some deliberation, I signed a contract to that end with Israel Stolarsky, then Executive-Director of the Histadrut in New York. I then made a special trip to Israel to see where and how the synagogue could be built, the land available, the dimensions of the building would have and the people who would administer the institution. When I arrived, I found all the arrangements very much to my liking. It's wonderful to be able to say that the synagogue was built in short order and has been in use since 1968.

There was one hitch in the process. I had neglected to include in the contract a stipulation that the synagogue be properly equipped with such things as a Holy Ark, a bimah, (platform from which the rabbi and the cantor officiate), et cetera. Now we had to face the unpleasantness as to who was responsible for those accoutrements. Temporarily, they were using a hastily knocked-together Holy Ark and bimah. That went on till I could no longer stand the synagogue's shabby appearance. Finally, I contacted the worshippers in Maoz Aviv and donated an additional sum for a decent-looking bimah and Holy Ark.

When I was in Israel for Passover in 1976 I was informed that everything had been installed. I'm delighted to say that the synagogue is commodious and handsomely furnished, to the point that it can easily stand comparison with the best synagogues in America.

Whenever I visit Israel, the trustees in Maoz Aviv invite me to officiate at Sabbath services and then spend some time with them socially. The first time I sang there, some of the congregants who didn't know that I was a guest from America asked why I don't attend there regularly and serve as cantor all the time. "We like the way you lead us in prayer," they said.

Adults and children pray together. The trustees are very observant Jews and Pinchas Rubin, the chief trustee, is a colonel in the Israeli army. He and his wife were rescued from Hitler's clutches. It was intimated to me that Colonel Rubin had invented an instrument that the Israeli artillery found very useful. Every time I come to Israel he takes me to another place to see how the Army functions and carries out its defense mission.

It's a pleasure to see the Israeli heroes first hand. I'm always astounded looking at the young soldiers and the way they handle themselves. I have a very warm, close feeling toward them. The army maintains strictly kosher kitchens and I noted that all military personnel respect the separation of dishes for milk and meat.

The synagogue at Maoz Aviv gives me great satisfaction, as do all the worshippers there, especially Colonel Pinchas Rubin, the Chief Trustee. Every one of them is a source of pride to the Jewish people.

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Jacob Hoffman beams with pleasure when his daughter Gittl graduates from high school.



The family of Colonel Pinchas Rubin, Trustee of the synagogue in Maoz Aviv, enjoys Hoffman's playing Chanukah melodies on the piano while the children sing along.

General Matti Gur — Jerusalem's Liberator In Our Day

In the 1973 Yom Kippur War, General Matti Gur took over the military leadership when Egypt suddenly attacked and crossed the border with thousands of tanks and a great many planes. The attack came when the Israeli army wasn't adequately prepared. The Egyptians used the opportunity when Jews were in synagogue for Yom Kippur services. At that time the one-hundred-mile long border was not fully manned, thus enabling the Egyptians to march into Israel with great ease.

Sadat thought that victory was assured but his joy didn't last too long. Matti Gur, who led Israel's army to victory when he recaptured old Jerusalem in the 1967 war, was able in 1973 to encircle the Egyptians, who thereupon cried out to their Russian mentors and the UN. Brezhnev then began to bang on the table at the UN and threatened that if the war between Israel and Egypt weren't stopped immediately, he would send his soldiers to deal a death blow to 'the Zionist murderers'. General Matti Gur threw Brezhnev, Sadat and America into a panic. Finally America helped Sadat and Brezhnev by persuading Israel to end the fighting.

Matti Gur was commander-in-chief when the Sinai was taken over by the Israeli army. Israel is really blessed when she has such a tall, handsome sabra, full of vigor, at the head of its military establishment.

The general says that Israel must be prepared

against her enemies at every moment. Another of his sayings is that Israel serves as a beacon of light to American Jewry.

I met Matti Gur at an Israel Bond dinner in the Waldorf Astoria hotel on June 4, 1978. At the same time we celebrated Israel's thirtieth anniversary.

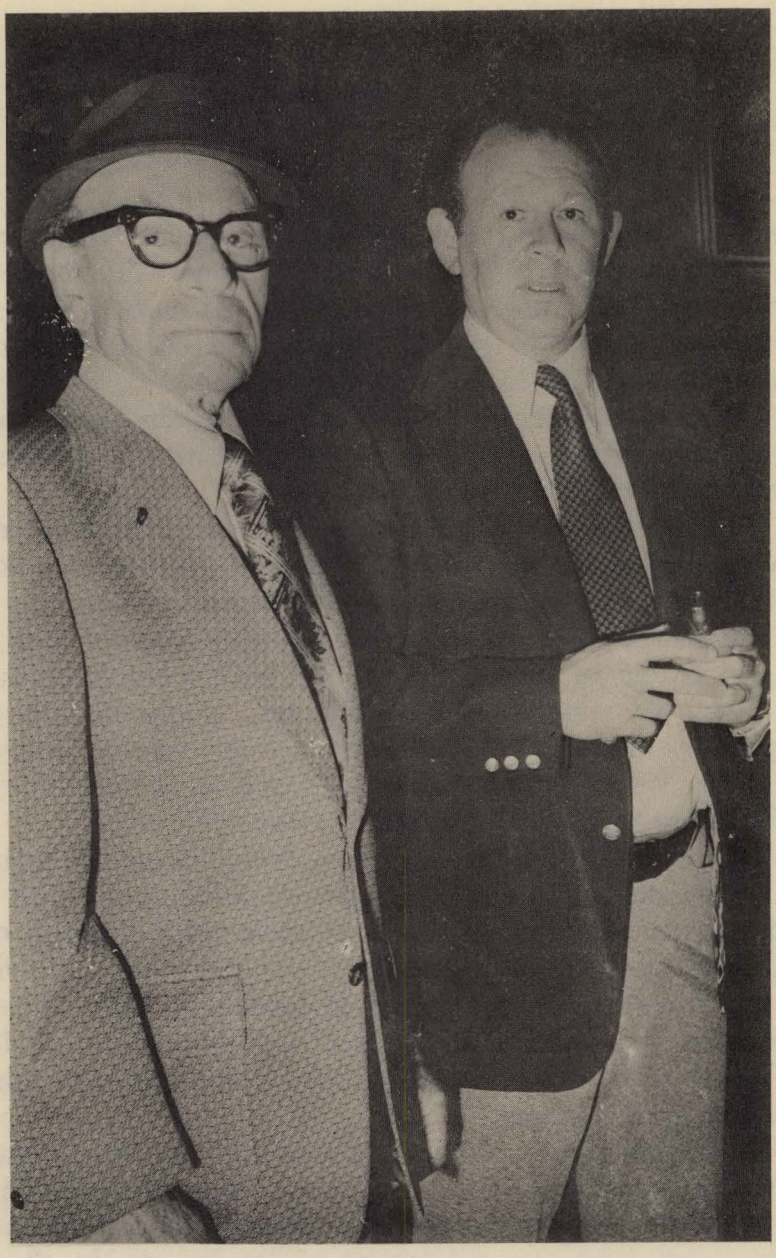
It was also eleven years to the day that Matti Gur, now retired head of Israel's General Staff, had personally commanded the operation that liberated Jerusalem.

When you listen to Matti Gur talk about Israel and her battles and our obligations here in America, you hear the voice of one who himself stood in the very thick of battle, first in the six-day war and later in the Yom Kippur war. He's the sort of commander who says to his troops: 'After me . . ." He is the first to move forward in battle and his troops follow.

In strange contrast to his status as a general, Matti Gur is a sentimentalist, an affectionate sabra who writes dreamy children's books that breathe with love to man and Nature, green grass and dumb creatures.

Such are the generals we have in Israel. They long for peace for themselves and future generations. At the same time, they are heroic fighters in the cause of bringing closer the times for which they yearn.

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Hoffman with General Matti Gur at a meeting in New York in 1978

Kibbutz Gesher Haziv

Kibbutz life doesn't change the individual or his nature and character. His instincts don't become transformed by means of ideological prescriptions. Kibbutz life does, however, free you from insecurity and the tension of urban living. The kibbutz member is free of worry about the morrow, either for himself or his children, so that he has more patience and more time to think about the world of ideas.

My visits to Kibbutz Gesher Haziv, situated in Western Galilee opposite the Lebanese mountains, were motivated both out of a desire to see close-up what their life was like and more simply to convey regards from a good friend of mine in Brooklyn to his family living there. My friend Max Goldberg, a distinguished member of the Brooklyn Jewish Center, had requested me to visit his brother and sister-in-law, Sol and Ruth Goldberg and their children in Gesher Haziv.

How did the Goldbergs from Brooklyn get to live in Gesher Haziv? In 1947 their two children, a son and a daughter, went to spend the summer with a group of youngsters in Gesher Haziv. When the time came to return home, the two kids said 'absolutely not'. They wanted to remain in Israel, and more to the point, in Gesher Haziv. The girl, aged twenty, and the boy, eighteen, had their way.

Gesher Haziv was then a new kibbutz. There was neither water nor lights. They slept on mattresses. The parents, especially Ruth, the mother, worried night and day and kept up a barrage of letters asking their children to come home. The children, however, turning



At a farewell evening in the Histadrut House tendered to Ben and Helen Mazur, members of the Labor Zionist Movement, on their making aliyah
Jacob Hoffman presents them with a plaque

the situation around, said that if anybody is to do any homecoming, it should be the parents and not they. So the youngsters proposed that their folks return to *their* homeland, Eretz Israel, the home of the Jewish people.

Sol and Ruth Goldberg had no choice, so in 1948 they went on aliyah, settling in Gesher Haziv, where they became integrated into kibbutz life and devoted all their energies to the development of the kibbutz, which is today magnificent to look at. It's for that reason that every time I visit Israel I stop by Gesher Haziv with ›gards from the Goldbergs in Brooklyn to the Goldbergs in Israel. Needless to say, I'm always received with open arms. During my visit in the summer of 1977, I found Gesher Haziv a booming tourist center, accomodating in season about 200 guests a day. I marvelled at the lovely dining room but the Goldbergs told me that for the following year they would erect a bigger and more commodious one.

Today Gesher Haziv has 800 adult residents and 250 children. The houses are modern and well-built. The guest rooms are comfortable, the food tasty and nourishing and the air has the Galilean mystery and charm. I walked into the school and saw happy faces full of strength and energy. As one who once dealt in cattle, I had the utmost admiration for and pride in their animal stock. There for all to see were full-bodied cows with udders bursting with milk and, in short, as Scripture has it, a land flowing with milk and honey.

From the fields one could hear the songs of proud farmworkers, true pioneers and sons of royalty. It was pure joy to see concretized the dream that I and my fellow pioneers in our home town sang about. I thought too of the well-known song which goes: "True prosperity comes from the plow."

My friendship with the Goldbergs also brought me into contact one afternoon with their sister in her house

in Tel Aviv. Her name is Rebecca and her husband deals in honey, a honey that I consider the best and tastiest in the world. All of us had a wonderful time together till the wee hours of the morning. When I told my hosts that I'm a neighbor of the Lubavitcher Rabbi in Brooklyn, they gave me a jar of honey for the rabbi to dip his challeh into in observing Rosh Hashanah. The honey was superb, but even without it the family in Israel left me with a sweet taste that remains fresh to this day.

With American Zionists in Jerusalem

My visit to Israel in the summer of 1977 was unusually interesting and inspiring. I was a delegate to the conference of the Zionist Organization of America, held in Israel in July. The conference was opened auspiciously in Jerusalem's Convention Center. It was the greatest and most impressive gathering I had ever experienced. There were about one thousand delegates and guests from America and thousands from Israel itself who had come to the opening.

It was a great evening because it was the occasion for an expression of the essential unity of all the Jewish people, not alone those from America and Israel. The American ambassador, Mr. Sam Lewis, had an opportunity to hear Rabbi Joseph Sternstein, President of the Zionist Organization of America, say that if President Carter was expecting a split in Jewish unity because of Mr. Begin's accession to power, he was greatly mistaken. "We are one people," Rabbi Sternstein declared, and the many thousands in the audience applauded him to the skies.

On the dais were President Ephraim Katzir, Premier Menachem Begin, Mayor Teddy Kolleck and ministers and leaders of the Jewish Agency. Jacques Torczyner, an important leader in the Zionist Organization of America, chaired the evening with great savoir-faire and an imposing display of Jewish pride. Mr. Torczyner recalled some memories Jews had of Europe during and after the war and how he himself, then in



Hoffman at the pulpit in the synagogue in Kfar Silver, where he contributed the pews and other facilities

France, witnessed the murderous indifference of the world to the destruction of European Jewry.

The American flavor of the meeting was demonstrated at the very beginning with a salute to the American flag, the singing of the Star Spangled Banner and the entrance of fifty pretty girls, each one bearing the flag of an American state. The guest speaker was Senator Dole from Kansas, the Republican candidate for vice-president in 1976. On this occasion he made a very strong pro-Israel speech.

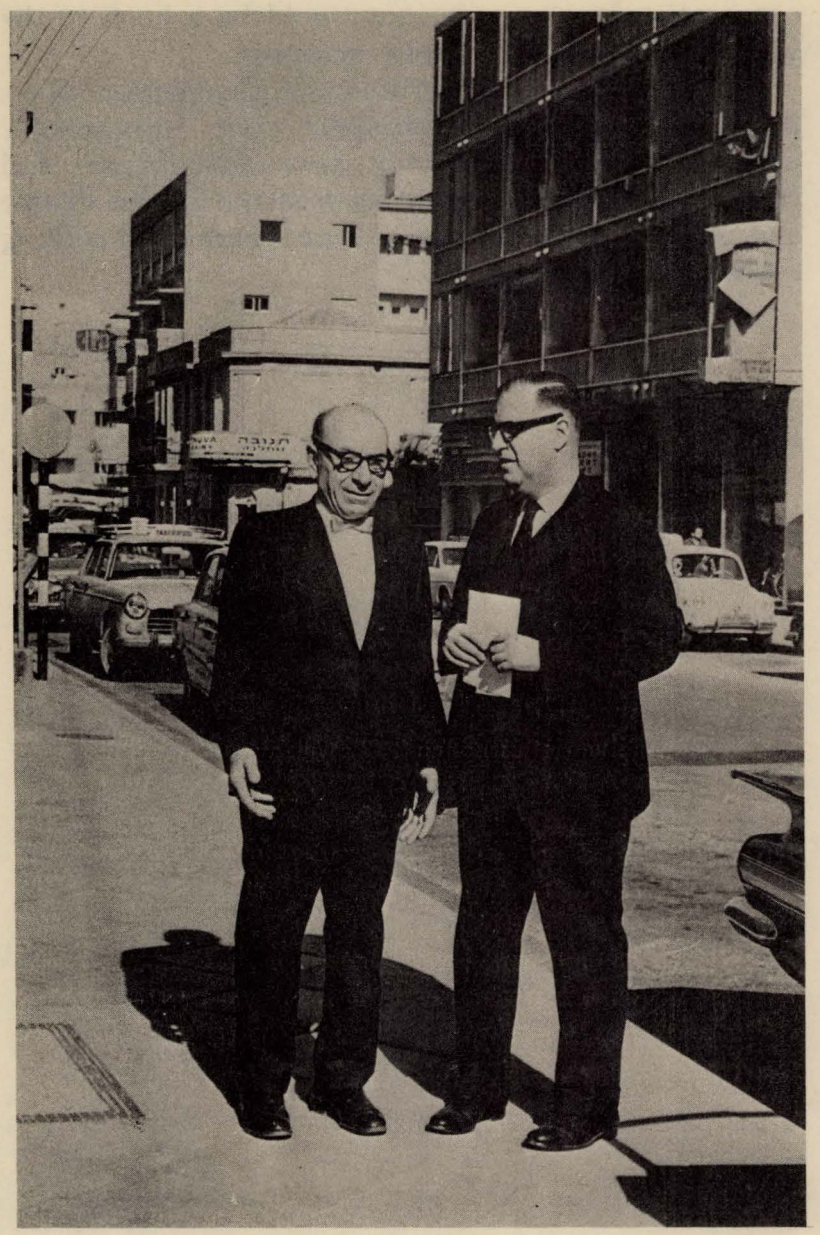
Rabbi Sternstein's talk, beginning in Hebrew and then in English, was listened to very attentively by the American ambassador, who sat pencil in hand and noted down key points. He no doubt reported to the White House that American Jews will not be dealt with cavalierly and insist that the President keep his campaign promises to them and to Israel about that country's security and sovereignty.

The most impressive part of the assemblage was the appearance of Prime Minister Begin. What he said was the very essence of deeply felt Jewish emotion, intimately bound up with Eretz Israel. He also expressed a willingness to meet with Arab leaders to conclude a peace that would put an end to all bloody hostilities and wars.

As one familiar with the world situation, he outlined how the Soviet Union had surrounded its vital center with territories designed to secure its heartland against enemy attacks. That same Russia now demands that tiny Israel give back everything to the Arabs and leave itself open to the hardly-concealed intentions of its neighbors. "All we want is to be able to defend our women and children in case of a new Arab attack, as was not the case during the holocaust, when our mothers, sisters and little children were defenseless," declared the Prime Minister. He stretched out a hand of peace to his neighbors and offered Israel's technical help and

cooperation in a gesture that would be a boon to the whole Middle East if it were accepted.

That evening in Jerusalem's Convention Hall, American Zionists celebrated their movement's eightieth anniversary. They also strengthened and cemented the eternal bond between the Jewish People and Zion, a bond as old as Israel and the far-flung Jewish nation itself.



Jacob Hoffman in a conversation with Abba Eban in front of the Dan Hotel in Tel Aviv

Under the Bridal Canopy with a Torah in Hebron

My friend Rabbi Weiss from Brooklyn, who is connected with the Mizrachi movement and made aliyah a few years ago, is active in the Yeshiva Bnei Akivah in Netanyah. During my visit to Israel in 1968, I met him several times and saw the beautiful yeshiva in that city.

But I'm especially thankful to Rabbi Weiss for giving me the opportunity to be a participant at a historical celebration during the intervening days of Passover. He phoned me and invited me to accompany him and his wife to Hebron, where they were to place four Torahs in the Machpelah Cave. It goes without saying that I accepted the invitation with great joy and gratitude.

One of the Torahs has attached to it a tragic but withal heroic tale that began in 1929 during the bloody Arab pogroms on the Jews of Hebron. It was told to me by Rabbi Joseph Bar-Gad, a former student of Bnei Akivah in Kfar Haro-eh and now rabbi and head of his own yeshivah in Nechalim.

The heinous Arab pogrom in 1929 began on Saturday morning, when a band of murderers ran into a synagogue brandishing knives and killed all the worshippers. In a pool of blood under the pile of corpses there lay, barely alive, an elderly Jew named Chaim Abraham Lerner. The Arabs set the synagogue on fire and left to seek more victims. When Chaim Abraham saw the mantle over the Holy Ark burning, he mustered his last ounce of strength and, crawling on his stomach, quickly opened the doors of the Holy Ark and saved the Torah, the only one there.

The blood streaming from him and his Sabbath clothes smouldering, he again crawled on his belly till he reached the outside with the Torah. He was brought, seriously injured, to the Bikkur Cholim Hospital in Jerusalem. There he suffered great pain for a few days and finally died.

That same Saturday another Arab group attacked the Jewish settlement Motzah near Jerusalem and killed many of its inhabitants. In the Maklef family's home, which was destroyed, a Jew named Yerachmiel Steinberg hid himself. He was severely wounded and they took him to the Bikkur Cholim Hospital in Jerusalem. By chance he was placed in a bed right next to Chaim Abraham's.

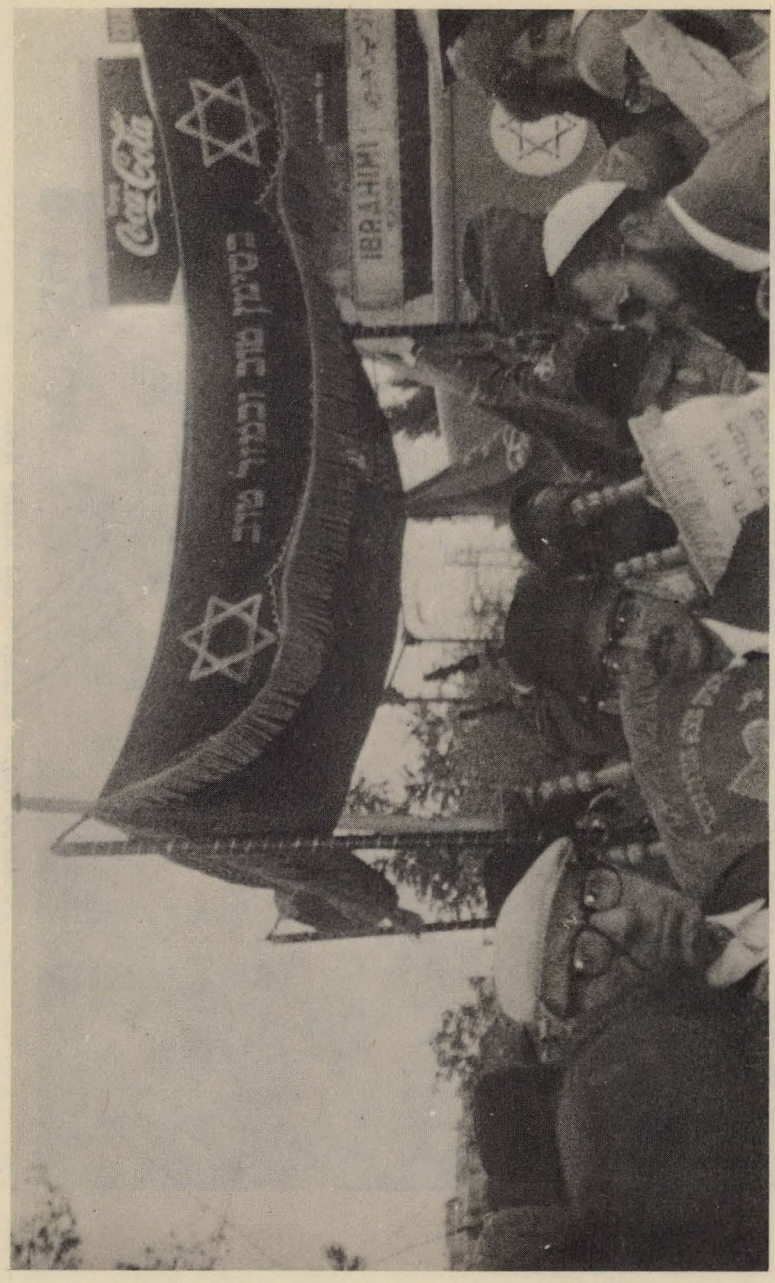
When Chaim Abraham felt he had only a few moments to live, he turned to Yerachmiel and said to him: "I see that my end is near, so I'm asking you to take charge of the Torah that I rescued in Hebron. I want you to promise me that you and your children will keep it till the day comes that Jews will return to Hebron. Then you'll bring it back there."

Reb Chaim finished talking and closed his eyes forever.

Reb Yerachmiel stayed in the hospital a long time before he got well and went back to his home in Motzah. He took with him the Torah from Hebron.

When the War of Independence broke out in 1948, Motzah was again attacked by Arabs and the Haganah commander ordered all civilians to leave the settlement. Reb Yerachmiel, however, remained in the Motzah synagogue, where the rescued Torah from Hebron rested in the Holy Ark.

In 1955, when Reb Yerachmiel was an old man of 95, he felt he hadn't much longer to live. He called his grandson, Joseph Bar-Gad, who at that time was among the best students in Kfar Haro-eh, and told him the



Jacob Hoffman, (left), under the canopy with the Scrolls of the Law.



Jacob Hoffman with Rabbi Moshe Weiss

story about the Hebron Torah, saying: "I have in my hands a treasure that I promised to return to Hebron . . . I hand it over to you and ask you to fulfill the pledge I made to Reb Chaim Abraham just before he died."

Joseph Bar-Gad, or Yusske, as he's known to his friends, took the Torah home with him and when he became head of the yeshivah in Nechalim, placed it in the Holy Ark there.

When the Israeli army captured Hebron in 1967, the students in Bnei Akivah asked permission of the Israeli commander in the city to bring the rescued Torah into the Machpelah Cave. He refused the request, using the pretext that it would inflame the Arabs.

In 1968 religious pioneers settled in Kiryat Arbah-Hebron and Rabbi Bar-Gad told them the history of the Torah he was holding in trust. The Kiryat Arbah pioneers decided on the spot to arrange a great celebration in honor of the Torah. Invitations were sent out for the 29th of Iyar, the anniversary of its liberation from Hebron. At the last moment, however, the celebration was cancelled by order of the Israeli commander. The mayor of Hebron, notorious, to our grief, as a most efficient participant in the pogroms, Ali Jabdi by name, had warned that it would harm the good relations between Jews and Arabs.

On Yom Kippur eve of 1976 some Arabs stormed into the Jewish part of the Machpelah Cave, tore up prayer books and desecrated the Torahs in the Holy Ark. In the large funeral organized for the desecrated holy objects, Menachem Begin, then the opposition leader, took part. He took an oath that he wouldn't rest till the honor of Jewish Hebron were restored and that the pledge given to the Jew who had sacrificed his life to save that Torah from the flaming Holy Ark would be fulfilled.

That is the story concerning the Hebron Torah under whose canopy I stood, together with Menachem Begin, today Israel's Prime Minister, on the intervening days of Passover 1978. I heard him give thanks to G-d for having afforded him the opportunity to keep the solemn promise made concerning that Torah — a promise to the Jews of Hebron uttered in the bloody year of 1929.

Just that day a pouring rain came down, together with heavy lightning and thunder and people wondered whether the Prime Minister would come. Come he did, and a thousand Jews, young and old, met him with joyous shouts. People danced and sang in the rain, accompanying the Torahs from Kiryat Arbah to the Machpelah Cave.

Reb Chaim Abraham's last wish came true. The Torah he had saved came back to the city of the patriarchs.

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The Maccabiad — Celebrating Jewish Skill and Spirit

I'm no stranger to Israel, but this is the first time I experienced a Maccabiad, (Olympics for Jewish athletes the world over), which takes place there every four years. The first Maccabiad was held in 1934. This was the tenth such event. Its imposing ceremonial opening engendered a feeling of uplift and inspiration, not only for the 50,000 people gathered in the Ramat Gan, (a suburb of Tel Aviv), Stadium but also the whole nation, which followed the event with great interest. The 3,000 athletes from thirty-four countries were dressed in clothing of various colors. Most of them were from lands with climates colder than that of Israel, so a great many wore jackets.

The proceedings began with parachutists dropping into the stadium from planes that had been circling overhead. They jumped from a very great height and maneuvered their cords so skillfully that they landed only a few yards from a pre-designated spot in the center of the stadium. Then Ephraim Katzir, Israel's President, officially opened the Maccabiad and the participants from thirty-four countries began their procession. Each group marched under its own banner and also carried the flag of Israel. You could sense that the marchers, all superbly conditioned men and women, felt very warmly toward Israel and its people.

Then 450 Israeli athletes marched in with their

country's blue-white flag. After each delegation had passed by the reviewing stand and respectfully dipped its banners to the President, the Prime Minister and the other dignitaries, it took its place on the immense field, creating a breathtaking panorama of colors and flags fluttering lightly in the breeze. There was also an impressive gymnastic spectacle of 1500 young men and women going through various movements and then forming a giant Magen David that took up almost the whole grounds. Within the Magen David there took shape a circle into whose center drove a vehicle bearing the colors and flags of all thirty-four delegations. The capacity crowd of 50,000 went wild when a group of children formed a living wreath. After the procession, Mickey Berkowitz, formerly of the United States, who had brought Israel victory over the Soviet Union in basketball and later in Europe won the basketball cup for Israel, was accorded the honor of running up the steps and lighting the Olympic flame with a torch that had been kindled in Modi'in, the birthplace of the Maccabees.

All 50,000 spectators and 3,000 athletes rose when the choir and the Haganah orchestra rendered the Hatikvah. Everyone sang along and a sudden hush descended when a cantor sang the K-l Maleh, (prayer for the departed), in memory of those who had perished in the holocaust and in Israel's wars and the eleven Israeli sportsmen who were killed in Munich. A choir of two hundred children with beautiful voices sang national and folk songs, accompanied by a civilian orchestra. You can imagine how enchanting a sight that was as evening descended over the field. At the conclusion of the opening ceremonies, hundreds of doves were released from cages. They rose like white clouds over the stadium and flew into the distance, as if to announce over the land that a joyful holiday was being celebrated.

At that moment the athletes changed from their national clothes and started the competitive events, vying for the gold medals. All of us felt indebted to the organizers of the Maccabiad who had arranged the sequence of events in so exemplary a fashion.

I've described the Maccabiad opening on July 22, 1977 in the Ramat Gan Stadium, giving the impression that all was serene. At the time, it certainly was. Yet it's interesting to contrast that scene with what went on in various parts of the stadium after the events had begun. The desire to win was fierce and engendered ferocious competition. The participants were from thirty-four lands and Jewish to the last man, but they strove for victory as though their common origin were completely irrelevant. All our young people, however, were gentlemanly in their efforts. We can be proud of them.

The American team won the greatest number of medals. All told, they took 82 gold and 64 silver awards. Israel was the second biggest winner, with 60 gold and 70 silver medals. In certain events, Israel won outstandingly.

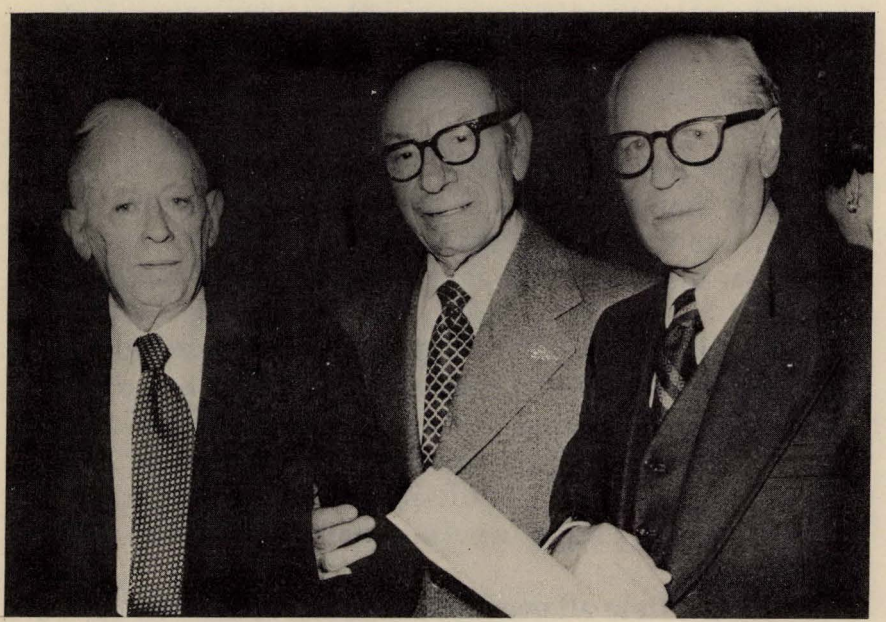
Eight days after the Maccabiad there was a farewell evening that took place at the Wall in Jerusalem. The athletes marched, holding their flags and wearing their national uniforms. The march began in the late afternoon at King George Street, went along Ben Yehudah Street, through the Jaffa Gate and other thoroughfares until they came to the Wall at 7:30 P.M. It was a great pleasure and a source of pride to experience all that; I felt grateful for the privilege of witnessing such memorable events in my lifetime. All Jews can be proud of their young people, whether they live in Israel or the diaspora.

People from all over Jerusalem and the surrounding areas came to the farewell evening. Crowds were everywhere; there wasn't a place left to stand on the

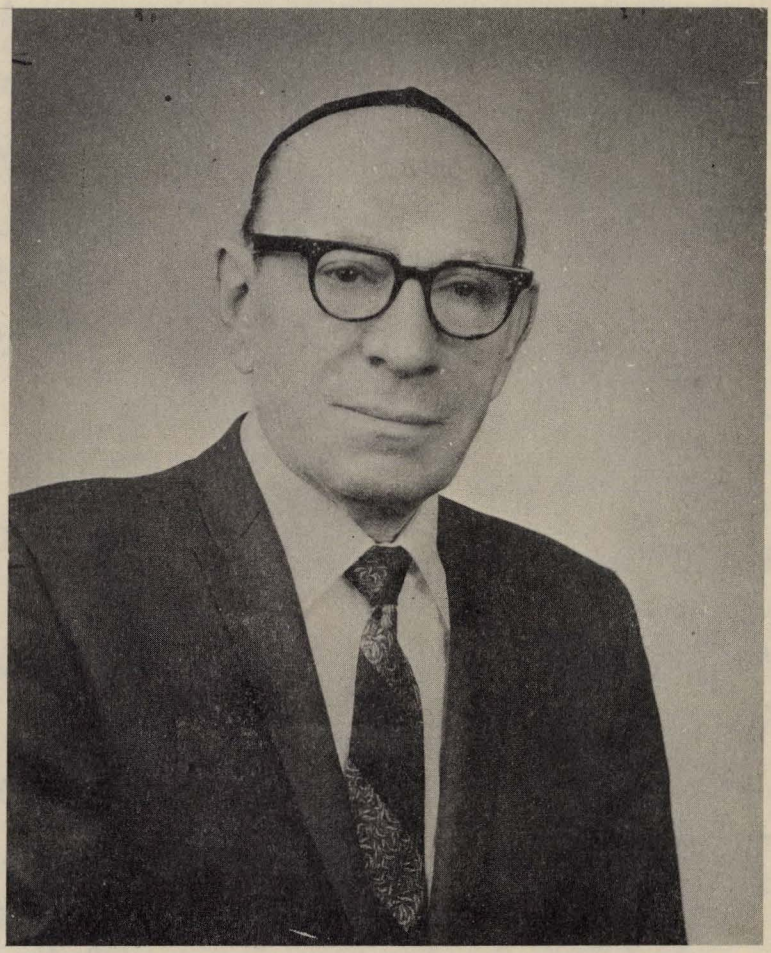
nearby hills. Everyone was anxious to see our heroes. Ephraim Katzir, Israel's president, the Mayor of Jerusalem and many diplomats from over the world occupied the places of honor. Music was played and all sang the traditional songs.

Suddenly there was silence. It was announced that all present, guests and athletes alike would have thirty minutes to say the minchah, (early evening) service. After that, planes flew over the Wall and released fireworks that lit up the whole area and gladdened our hearts at the same time. The evening ended with the singing of the Hatikvah.

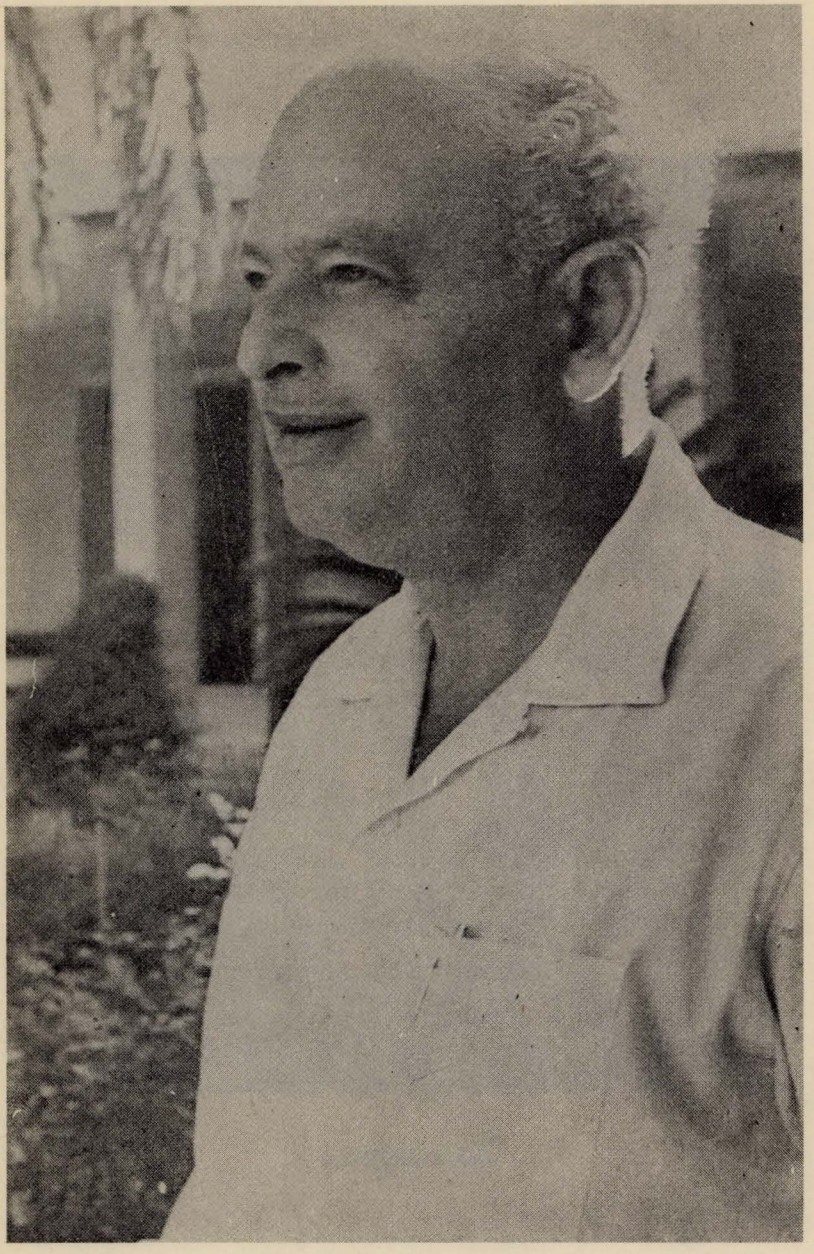
It would take a pen far more eloquent than mine to adequately describe that unforgettable scene. I can only say that I left it spiritually enriched and determined to redouble my efforts on behalf of Israel and all Jewish causes.



David Epstein, (right), Director of the Histadrut Ivrit, and Professor Saul Liberman, (left), with Jacob Hoffman at a Histadrut dinner.



Jacob Hoffman



Joseph Burstein OBM

A Missed Airplane and a Funeral

A 6 A.M. on Wednesday, October 30, 1968, I was standing with my luggage in front of the Dan Hotel in Tel Aviv. I was on my way back to the United States, waiting for the car that would take me to Lod Airport.

I stood for what seemed like ages, but no car. The usual thoughts about a flat tire, traffic accident, misdirections, et cetera, crossed my mind but were driven out when I heard over the morning news that Joseph Burstein, the Deputy Mayor of Tel Aviv and a close friend of mine for many years had died of a heart attack at age fifty-eight.

Only two days before I had been in his office in the Municipal Hall, discussing a number of important projects. We agreed to meet during his next visit to new York. He also presented me with a book entitled "Tel Aviv-Jaffa", which tells the heroic saga of a wilderness turned into a beautiful city by Jewish brains and brawn. The book is still ensconced on my book shelf. It contains the following inscription on the frontispiece: "To Mr. Hoffman of the United States, in remembrance of his visit to Tel Aviv's Municipal Hall, October 28, 1968. Signed, Joseph Burstein." He also gave me the key to the city and we took leave of each other like two blood brothers.

Joseph Burstein was a wonderful Jew, having managed a series of departments in Tel Aviv and occupied a number of important posts in Mapai as well as the National Radio and Television Authority. He served

in the Haganah as the director of the radio station. He also represented the Histadrut at a series of international conferences and carried out other important tasks abroad.

And now suddenly I heard the tragic news of his passing. I was terribly sorry that I couldn't be at the funeral because it was very doubtful that I'd be able to exchange my ticket for another day. Having no other choice, I hired a taxi and went to Lod, praying silently that I'd miss the plane.

And that's what happened. The plane had already taken off. After a long discussion with my travel agency, we arrived at a financial arrangement and I got a ticket for some time later.

Within a few minutes I was in a cab on the way back to Tel Aviv. At the Municipal Hall I joined a big crowd that had come to pay its last respects to Joseph Burstein. I walked by the Histadrut Executive Board on Arlosoroff Street, where friends eulogized him and mourned the great loss we had sustained.

Joseph Burstein was born in Parishek, Poland and came to Israel in 1936. In Poland he received university degrees in pedagogy and history. He devoted his life, however, to Zionism and the new Jewish State.

All honor to the departed.

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Hoffman makes the blessing over the bread at a Histadrut convention. Among the participants are such prominent Jewish labor leaders as (from the right), David Dubinsky, Sol Chaikin and Louis Stolberg

The U.S.S. Nimitz

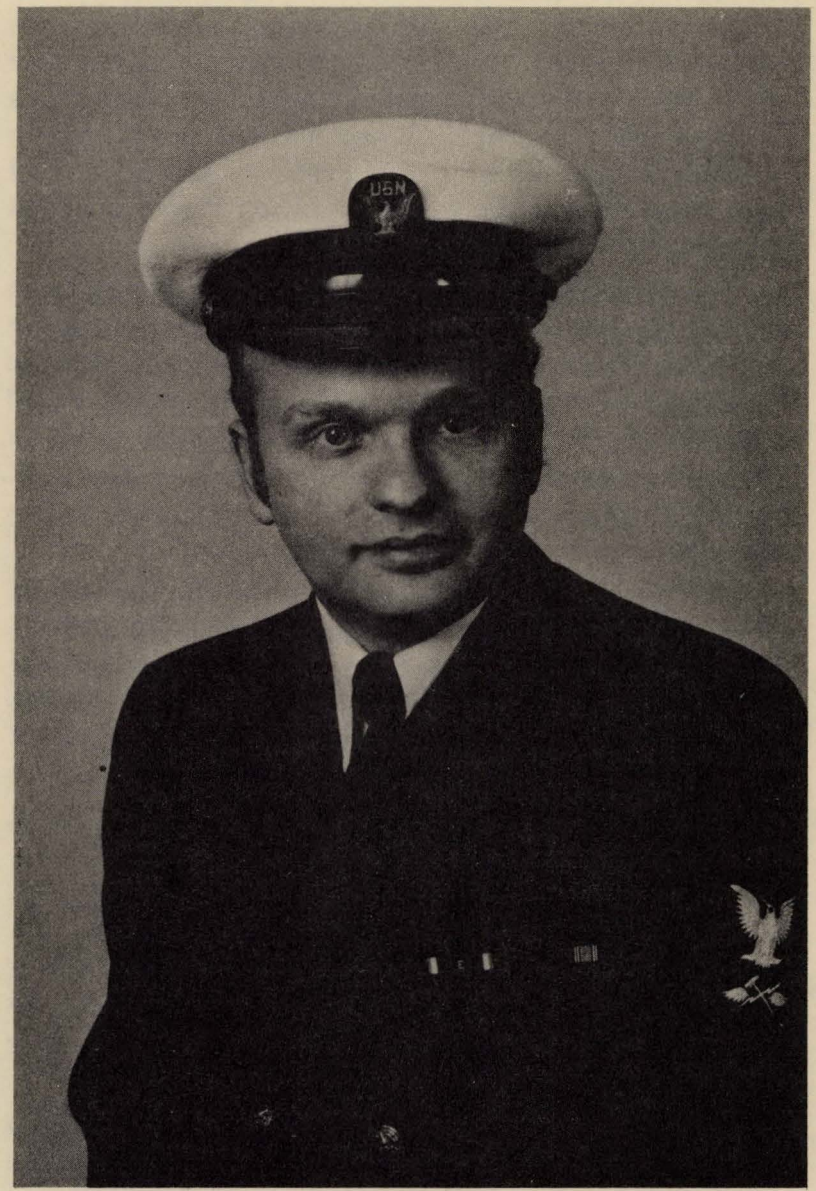
Chance plays an extraordinarily important role in the life of everyone, at times on the most casual level and at others on the most significant. I would reckon the following episode as among the more unusual events in my life, though it was largely the result of happenstance.

As trustee of the Brooklyn Jewish Center I was presented with an opportunity to do something quite significant in Jewish terms. I discovered that an Eternal Light was needed in the recently-dedicated synagogue on the biggest warship in the world, the U.S.S. Nimitz. When I learned all the details of the situation I felt a great sense of urgency to resolve it, so I undertook the task of providing an Eternal Light esthetically appropriate for such a synagogue. With that resolution I became a participant in a great historic event in the life of the Jews in America and the world as well.

To begin with, this was the first time in the history of the United States Navy that a permanent synagogue had been built on an American ship. The naval command made special note of the occasion by observing that such an event had occurred on no other ship in the world.

The story begins with a young man called Irving Bernhart, whose sense of tradition and persistence made the historic event happen. Without him, or someone like him, a unique opportunity would have slipped through our fingers.

This is what happened: Irving Bernhart was graduated from college. Like a great many of our young people, he couldn't decide what to do next. After some



Irving Bernhart, thanks to whose inquiry the Brooklyn Jewish Center contributed a Torah Scroll to the USS Nimitz

deliberation he enlisted in the Navy, in great measure because he had a chance to become a member of the crew on the biggest nuclear aircraft carrier afloat, the U.S.S. Nimitz. An additional attraction, of course, was the opportunity to travel abroad and see the world. So the ship became Irving's home and he joined several thousand young people whose ambition it was to range the oceans and fly the skies.

The first Friday night aboard the vessel Irving went to the synagogue to participate in the prayers welcoming the Sabbath. He also attended services on Saturday morning. But when it came to that part of the ritual when the Torah Scroll was to be taken from the Holy Ark, Irving saw that there was no Scroll of the Law. Imagine — the very heart and soul of the synagogue was missing.

To our young man that lack made the whole proceeding a mockery. He grew up under the aegis of the Brooklyn Jewish Center and as a result of his training knew precisely what the ritual requirements were. He had been one of the most talented students in the day-school and could act as cantor.

Shortly after the incident described, Irving came home on leave and stayed with his mother for a few days. When he came to the synagogue with her on Saturday, he was asked to officiate as cantor. After the services, Irving told the ritual committee about the lack of a Torah Scroll aboard the Nimitz and the fact that he simply couldn't get used to prayers conducted under those circumstances.

Emanual Kohn, the President, and Benjamin Markow, the Vice-President, immediately relayed the information to Rabbis Israel H. Levinthal and David Haymovitz. All were in agreement that the situation had to be remedied. Thereupon the rabbis and the ritual



Jacob Hoffman, (second from the left), and other leading figures in the Brooklyn Jewish Center, carrying under the canopy the Scroll of the Law they donated for the sailors of the USS Nimitz in Norfolk, Virginia.

committee decided to donate a Torah Scroll to the synagogue on the Nimitz.

The Center immediately consulted with Captain Brian W. Compton, Jr. the Nimitz' commander, and Rabbi Eric Silver, Chaplain of the Norfolk base and Robert Beddingfield, Chaplain on board the Nimitz. The Center's proposal to send a Torah was accepted. What had to be determined was when the ship was due at its home base in Norfolk.

The Brooklyn Jewish Center began to arrange the presentation ceremony. At first we thought a small committee would go to Norfolk and that would be it. Then we found out that a great many Center members wanted to be present at such a momentous occasion. All of them sensed that their institution would be making a significant mark in American-Jewish history.

We found places for only forty-five people, and that because of the direct intervention of Rabbi Silver and Chaplain Beddingfield. Through their good offices National Airlines, which flies to Norfolk, gave tickets to forty-five people. We were able to take care of the participants' special dietary needs through Rabbi Silver, who contacted a kosher caterer that would undertake the preparation of lunch for the committee and the other invited guests.

The sun shone brightly for us all that beautiful morning. A special place on the plane was set aside for the Torah by the stewardess. When we arrived in Norfolk, we found Irving Bernhart and several Navy officers waiting to welcome us. As the group stepped up on the deck of the Nimitz, the Commander's ceremonial band was already in place. One of the highest officers of the US Atlantic Fleet had prepared the band to play Jewish melodies. The deck was filled with members of the local Jewish community and the invitees from our synagogue. We began a slow march as the Torah was carried under a

canopy. Nearby there stood a new Holy Ark, built by the Navy under the supervision of Rabbi Silver.

The rabbi opened the ceremony with a prayer. Irving had the honor of opening the ark and Emanuel Kohn removed the Torah cover donated by Irving's mother. Emanuel Kohn and his wife had contributed a new Torah crown. Benjamin Markow, the President of the Brooklyn Jewish Center, handed the Torah to the ship's captain, who received it with great respect. While Captain Compton held the Torah, Rabbi Haymovitz spoke briefly about the Bible and its spiritual concepts and expressed the hope that the Scroll of the Law would help bring peace to the world.

The Torah was put back into the Ark. All present sang the prayer: "It is a Tree of Life to those who uphold it" with great fervor. A CBS television crew recorded the scene for posterity. At the ceremony we had a surprise guest — Rear Admiral John J. O'Connor, Chief of Navy Chaplains. He announced that the occasion would serve as a precedent during his incumbency, namely that the Jewish Chaplain's flag, with its design of the Star of David and the Ten Commandments would fly aboard all Navy ships during Jewish holidays. This is very significant, because the chaplain's flag is the only one that may fly above the Stars and Stripes.

There is no need to elaborate as to why we felt so proud that day. After all, one of our Center graduates had brought about two changes in the Navy's religious practices that resulted in added dignity and honor to our faith. Irving Bernhart is a model worthy of everyone's emulation.

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ALGEMEINER JOURNAL FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 1978

American Jew Kindles U.S.S. Nimitz' Eternal Light in Haifa

Tel Aviv — Last Sunday Jacob Hoffman, well-known Zionist activist and yeshivah benefactor from Brooklyn, who came to Israel for Passover, kindled the Eternal Light in the Jewish chapel on the USS Nimitz, now on a friendly visit in Haifa Harbor. In honor of the occasion Rabbi She'ar Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa conducted a very impressive prayer service with songs and readings from appropriate chapters from the Psalms.

Mr. Hoffman, who donated the Eternal Light to the ship, was honored by being asked to chant Psalm 24, ("The earth is G-d's and the fullness thereof"). He sang it tastefully and with great depth of feeling.

Mr. Hoffman described his connection with the USS Nimitz to the newsmen aboard. He said that it came about because he is a trustee in the Brooklyn Jewish Center at 667 Eastern Parkway. He was a member of the group of close to fifty leading members of the Center who brought a Scroll of the Law into the chapel of the greatest American battleship in a moving ceremony while it was at anchor in Norfolk, Virginia. The request for the Scroll came from Irving Bernhart, a Jewish sailor then serving on the Nimitz and formerly a student in the Center's day school.

Deeply touched by that historic moment in his life, Mr. Hoffman explained to the Captain and many other high-ranking officers of the American fleet that his greatest aspiration in life is to see a strong United States at the side of Israel, with both of them serving as an example of democracy and freedom for all the nations of the Middle East.

(Jacob Hoffman is well known to the readers of the Algemeiner Journal through his interesting life-story, which appeared under the title: "Cantor Isaac's Youngest Son.")

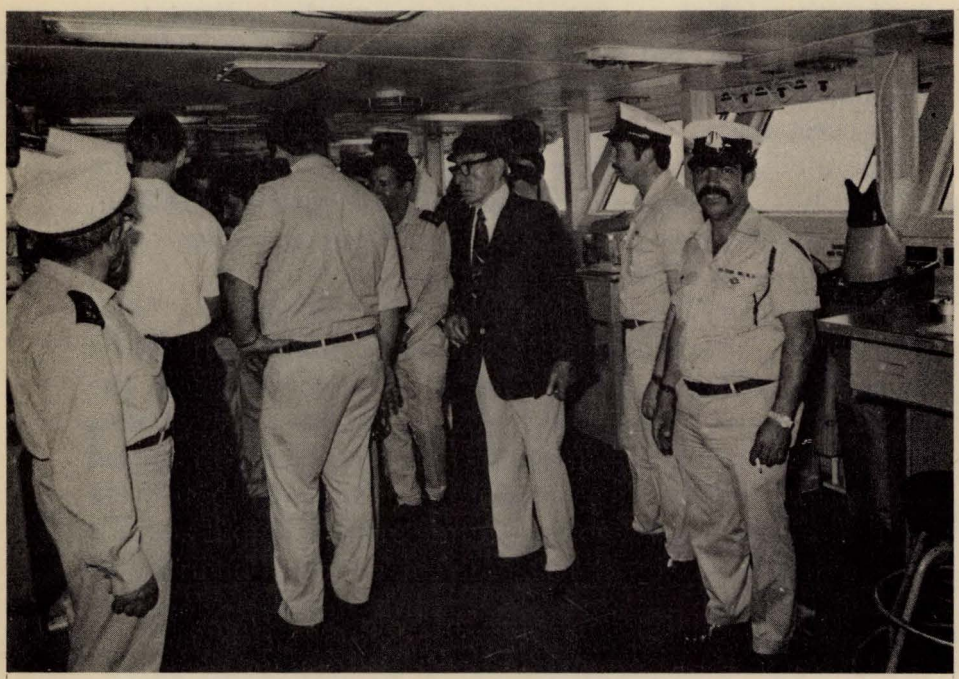
Jacob Hoffman Describes Activating the Nimitz' Eternal Light

Many people now know Jacob Hoffman, the warm-hearted and beneficent Jew from Ostrove-Mazvietsk and Rutke. He will be recognized by the readers of the *Algemeiner Journal* as Cantor Isaac's Youngest Son, since that was the title of the fascinating life-story he presented in our periodical. He recently returned from yet another visit to Israel, where he spent Purim and Pesach and had the privilege of marking the thirtieth anniversary of the birth of the State. Added to that joy was his participation in a ceremony most appropriate to the historic nature of the occasion. It was quite characteristic of the once-poor immigrant boy whom success and wealth in his new country had bound even more closely to a whole array of Jewish causes: helping his less fortunate brothers, the Jewish Homeland, Jewish education, synagogues, yeshivahs and everything else close to his faith and his people.

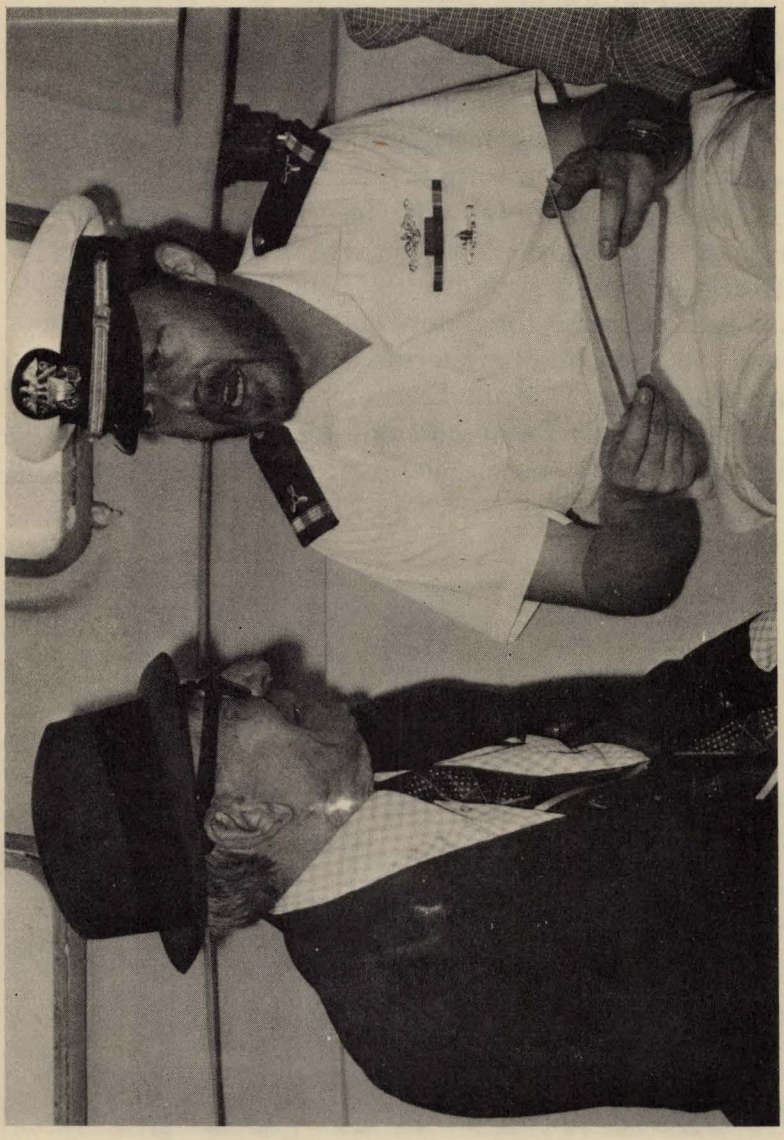
On Sunday, April 9th last, the second day of Nissan, Jacob Hoffman activated the Eternal Light that he had dedicated on America's biggest nuclear warship, the S.S. Nimitz, as it lay in the port of Haifa. He had been brought on a smaller boat to the giant ship anchored about five kilometers from the harbor. With him were some high-ranking officers from the Israeli navy, Haifa's Chief Rabbi, She'ar Yashuv Cohen, a brother-in-law of Chief Rabbi Goren and son of the illustrious Jerusalem rabbi Nazir, (OBM).



Hoffman at the Wall with the Nazirite, (center), and his son Rabbi Sh'ar Yashuv Cohen, (left)



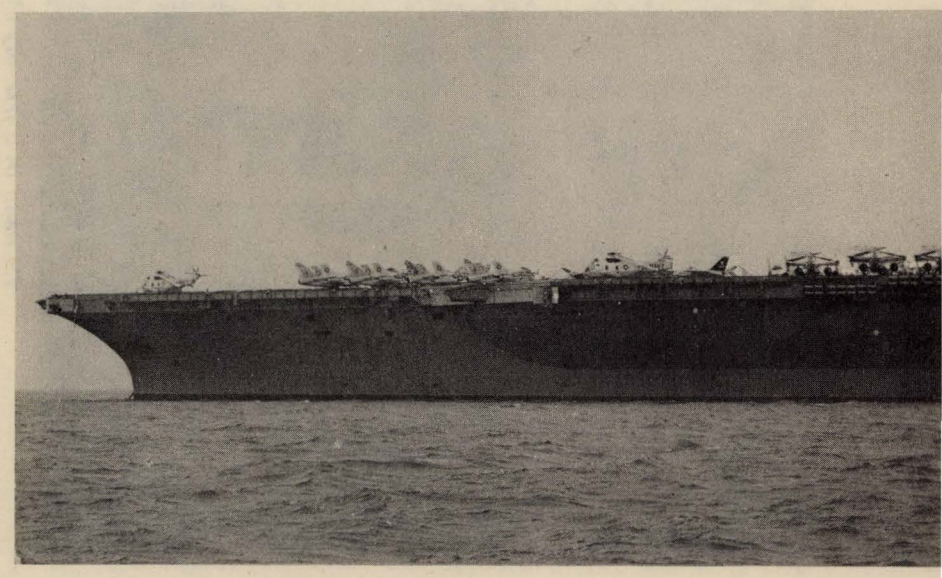
Aboard the American battleship USS Nimitz



Hoffman in a friendly chat with the ship's captain

Rabbi Cohen read a chapter from the Psalms and some touching words about the Jewish chapel on the Nimitz and the friendship between America and Israel. Mr. Hoffman, who, in addition to his other attributes, is a skillful cantor — a talent inherited from his father (OBM), chanted Psalm 24: "A Psalm to David — the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," using the melody to which this particular chapter is sung on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur after the evening service.

When Mr. Hoffman now describes that moment on the Nimitz, he does so in that deep bass voice of his, a reflection of inner strength and confidence. He declares that it's symbolic for a Jew coming from "the vale of tears" to turn on the Eternal Light aboard a nuclear warship. "The Eternal Light is *our* nuclear weapon. Through its holy flame and radiance the Jewish people will, with G-d's help, overcome all its enemies and

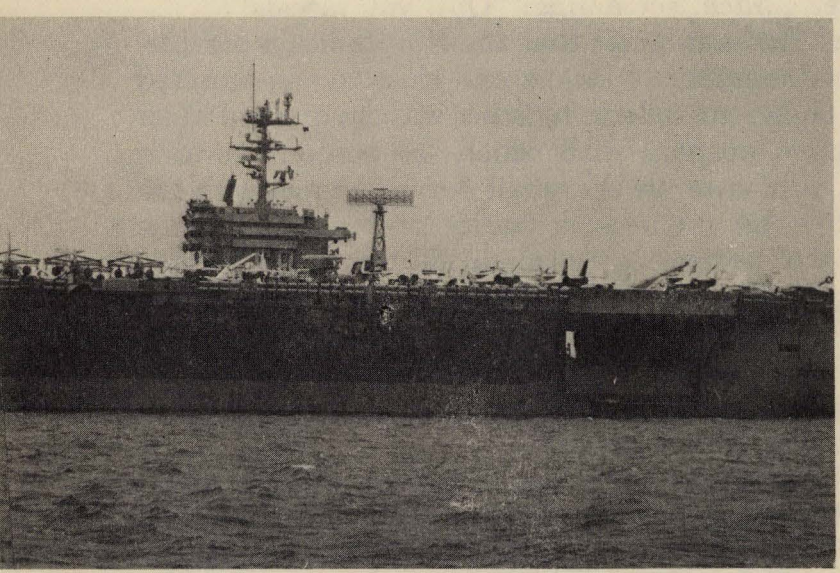


The USS Nimitz, the bigges

pretended friends," says Mr. Hoffman with calm assurance.

How did he happen to be on the S.S. Nimitz? Mr. Hoffman responds to that question with an interesting story connected with the Eastern Parkway Jewish Center at 667 Eastern Parkway, where he is a trustee and prominent congregant, both as cantor and private worshipper. Last summer he and a group of fifty members of the Center brought a Torah Scroll into the chapel of the Nimitz in Norfolk, Virginia — its home base. The request for a Torah came from a Jewish sailor, Irving Bernhart, a former student of the Center's day-school. Mr. Bernhart, who was serving on the ship, had written to Rabbis Leventhal and Haymovitz of that institution that a synagogue without a Torah lacks a heart and a soul.

While aboard ship in Norfolk, Mr. Hoffman



battleship in the world.

pledged an Eternal Light for its chapel. He couldn't carry out his pledge immediately because shortly after the ceremony the warship left on a cruise. When he heard that the Nimitz would be in Haifa, he thought it an opportune moment to keep his promise, since he had planned on being in Israel for Passover.

Receiving permission to hold the dedication in Haifa wasn't particularly easy. The American embassy was very strict about allowing people on the ship and only Premier Begin and other high-ranking government officials were among the invited guests. But the wall of red tape was finally broken with the help of a young Jewish woman — Rinah Levy — a lieutenant colonel in the Israeli Navy. Mr. Hoffman met her through Engineer Aaron Butzer, a granchild of a fellow townswoman from Ostrove-Mazavietsk, who was connected with Israel's naval forces. The engineer's grandmother was the woman who — Mr. Hoffman writes in his memoirs — used to chase him and his schoolmates from her garden, screaming: "Out, you rascals!"

Mr. Hoffman notes that the Nimitz has a complement of thousands of sailors and close to one hundred planes on her main deck, together with an array of other destructive weapons with which the modern world is graced. And here, in the small Jewish chapel with the little Holy Ark and its swaying Star of David, he had the privilege of dedicating our mightiest weapon, the Eternal Light. He said: "I believe that this tiny light will outlive and ultimately overcome the mighty flames emanating from the Arab oil fields, which have unfortunately befogged the thinking processes of the occupants of the White House."

When Premier Begin was on the S.S. Nimitz, he expressed great satisfaction upon looking at the Jewish chapel. "I hope and pray," says Mr. Hoffman, "that the Eternal Light over the Holy Ark inspired him with the



Jacob Hoffman with Rinah Levy, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Israeli Navy, who arranged the dedication on the USS Nimitz.



Jacob Hoffman at a reception in the Tel Aviv Hilton after the festive ceremony in Haifa

Left from Mr. Hoffman is Lt. Colonel Rinah Levy of the Israeli Navy. On the right is the wife of Hoffman's nephew, Z'ev, (standing, right). The others are high-ranking officers in Israel's navy.



Hoffman with Reena Levy

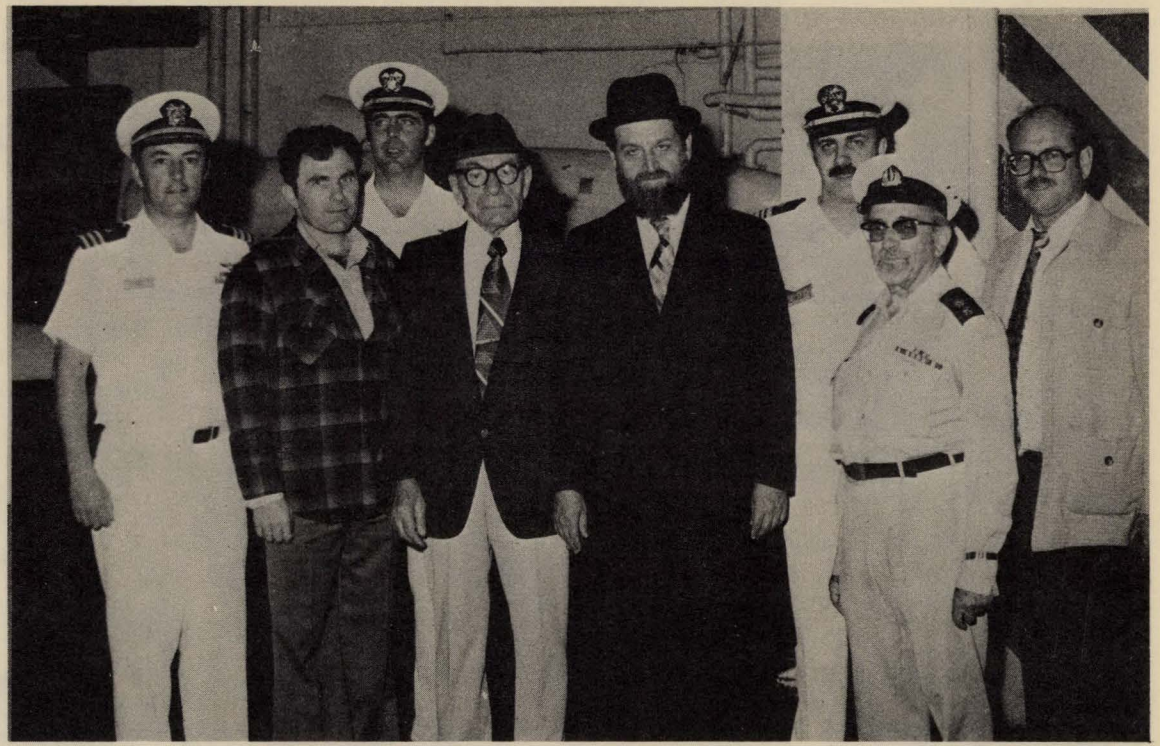


Hoffman and the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, Rabbi Sh'ar Yashuv Cohen and high-ranking officers in the United States and Israeli Navies.

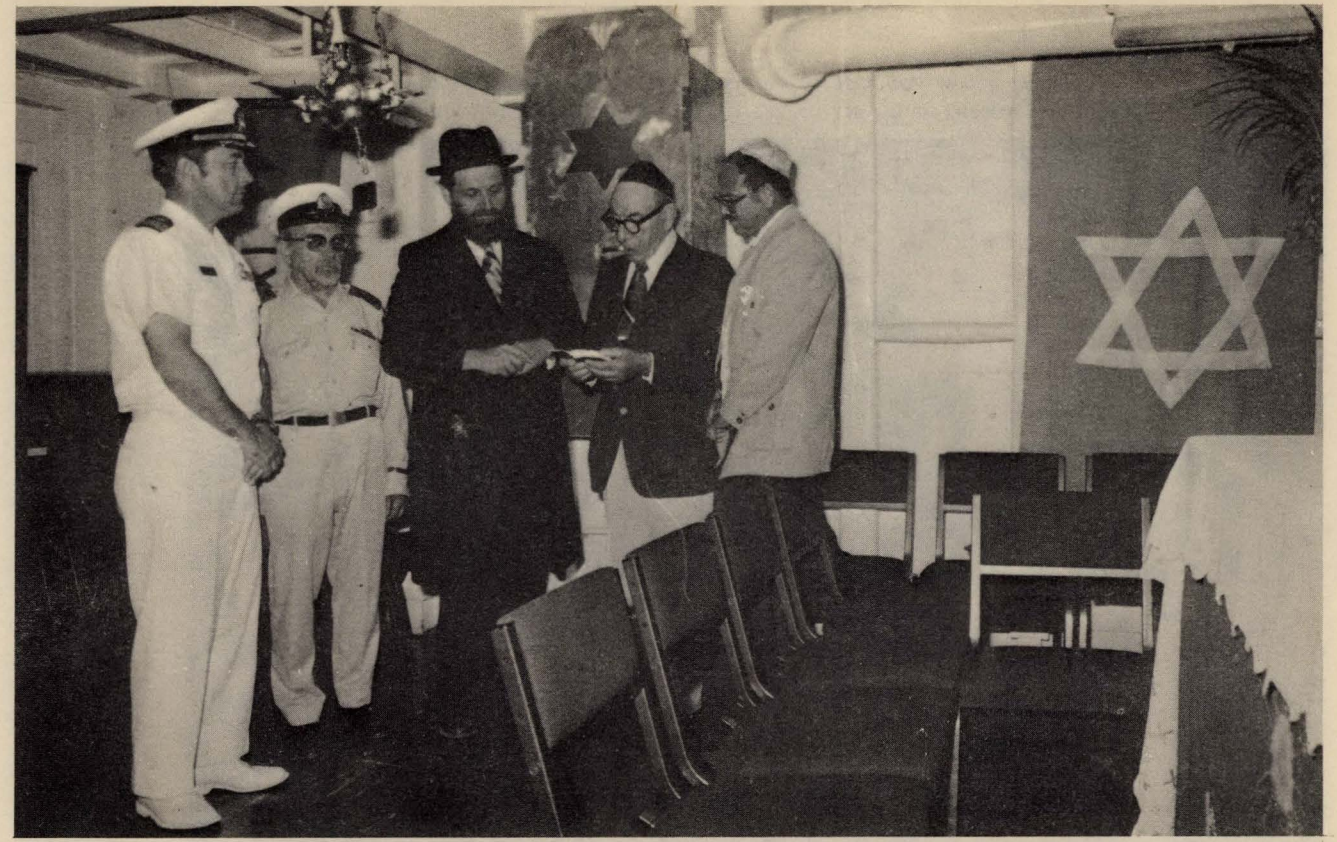
strength and the energy to withstand the assaults of our enemies. I trust too that Mr. Begin's belief and confidence in the Eternal's promise to safeguard Israel's existence will be fulfilled. Indeed, we are witness to His salvation even in our day."



Hoffman aboard the USS Nimitz with two of its officers



Hoffman and the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, Rabbi Sh'ar Yashuv Cohen and high-ranking officers in the United States and Israeli Navies.



Jacob Hoffman, (second from right), recites a chapter from the Psalms at the dedication of the Eternal Light. The others are, (from right to left), Engineer Aaron Butzer, a grandson of one of Hoffman's townswomen from Ostrove-Mazavietsk, Rabbi Sh'ar Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa, an Israeli chaplain and a command officer of the USS Nimitz.



Jacob Hoffman, (standing center), on the tender that brought him and a group of Israeli sailors from the harbor of Haifa to the American ship.



Jacob Hoffman on the deck of the USS Nimitz, world's biggest battleship.

The Voice of a Compatriot

Cantor Ze'ev Goldberg, a leading figure in the American Cantor's association, is a compatriot of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Hoffman from Rutke, their common hometown. They have maintained their friendship on a very intimate basis in the course of all the years they have lived in America.

The article about Cantor Goldberg appeared in the Algemeiner Journal of January 16, 1976, on the eve of a Cantor's Association concert in the Brooklyn Jewish Center, where Mr. Hoffman has been a trustee for many years. At the concert Mr. Hoffman was honored as man of the year.

A Well-Deserved Tribute

The Cantor's Association of American and Canada, located at 236 Second Avenue, Manhattan, is now preparing an outstanding concert in which the greatest cantors of our time will appear. In addition to the soloists, the sensational Schola Cantorum, under the direction of the distinguished director Oscar Julius, will present representative works from the liturgical repertoire.

The concert will be held on February 15th at 3 P.M. in the Brooklyn Jewish Center, 667 Eastern Parkway. The occasion will also be used to honor the widely acknowledged benefactor and philanthropist, Jacob Hoffman, who will be named 'man of the year' for his achievements and good works on behalf of Torah institutions both here and in Israel. It will be the biggest concert of the year and many lovers of liturgical music are expected to attend.

Jacob Hoffman has had an interesting and successful career as a businessman, public figure and generous supporter of Jewish causes. He was born and raised in the Polish city of Ostrove-Mazavietsk by his father, Reb Yitzchak, (OBM), a gifted cantor and talented musician, from whom Mr. Hoffman inherited his own bent for cantorial and traditional Jewish music. From his earliest childhood Jacob Hoffman was drawn to the great world, and while quite young he left Ostrove and went to Rutke, a neighboring town. There he had wider opportunities in terms of business and communal activity. It was there too that he met his life's companion, the valorous and cultured Beile, whom he later married

in America and with whom he raised a family everyone could be proud of.

Drawn to cultural activities as a young man, he acted in historical Bible dramas like The Sale of Joseph, The Sacrifice of Isaac, etc., that made a big hit with all the Jews in town, and even won the approval of the local rabbi, an accolade not so easily come by in those days.

At age nineteen Mr. Hoffman came to America with little money but a lot of energy and trust in G-d. There he found a broad field for his business activities and entrepreneurial talents. Right after he came to this country he started a grocery business and other commercial endeavors, succeeding in them all. When fortune smiled on him and he improved his lot, he immediately took up communal activities and became a leading figure in various Torah and charitable institutions, to which he contributed significant sums of money. Jacob Hoffman was particularly active in the Brooklyn Jewish Center, serving in key posts like trustee over many years.

Located near the Brooklyn Jewish Center is the Lubavitcher Yeshivah, where Mr. Hoffman plays an important role both in administrative terms and the financial aid he gives to its educational institutions. The Lubavitcher esteems him for his good works and welcomes his presence in all their endeavors.

Israel has a special place in the constellation of Jacob Hoffman's activities and you will find him there on visits several times a year. Everything Israeli captures his interest, so you'd be just as likely to find him involved in helping to establish an industry as you would an academic institution for the furtherance of Torah study.

In 1965, for example, they were building the synagogue "Zichron K'doshim", (Martyrs' Memorial), in Maoz Aviv to immortalize the memory of the Jews who



Jacob Hoffman as a cantor and musician



Jacob Hoffman with Cantor Joseph Malovani

had been slaughtered by Hitler's hordes. He gave a large sum of money to the synagogue so that it could be completed, equipped and properly maintained.

Mr. Hoffman helps keep up other synagogues in Israel as well, but Zichron K'doshim is his favorite. Every time he comes to visit there is an occasion for a celebration both for him and the congregants.

As mentioned earlier, Jacob Hoffman inherited from his father a love for cantorial and traditional Jewish music. Another part of the inheritance was a fine voice and artistic musical sense. He is a very competent chanter of the prayers and musician and often officiates at services in the Brooklyn Jewish Center. When he comes to Israel, he leads the services at the Martyrs' Synagogue and other houses of worship.

When the leaders of the Cantors' Association decided to honor Mr. Hoffman at a concert in the Brooklyn Jewish Center, they didn't do it perfunctorily; they felt that they were paying tribute to a pleasant person. Beyond that, however, they knew they were welcoming one of their own, someone as close to the cantorate as they were themselves. There was no doubt that the honor bestowed was fully merited.

As noted above, the concert at the Brooklyn Jewish Center will be the biggest of the year and there will undoubtedly be a large attendance. It is therefore advisable to get tickets early, because it will be first come first served. Tickets are $5 and $7.50, obtainable at the Cantors' Association office and the Brooklyn Jewish Center.

●

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Mr. Jacob Hoffman

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Eliezer Schulman

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at
BROOKLYN JEWISH CENTER, 667 EASTERN PARKWAY, BROOKLYN, N.Y.

FOR RESERVATIONS:
Brooklyn Jewish Center – (212) 493-8800
Jewish Ministers Cantors Assoc. – (212) 475-0505

DONATIONS: $5.00 – $7.50

The program of the Cantors Association concert at the Brooklyn Jewish Center in honor of Jacob Hoffman

Remarks as Guest of Honor at a Lubavitch Dinner

Rabbi Gurary', Distinguished Rabbis, Prominent Government Officials, Community Leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Although we are gathered here this evening to participate in the festive 31st Annual Dinner of the Lubavitcher Yeshivahs, we know that all is not well throughout the world.

Our youth, and particularly our Jewish youth is not sheltered from the moral collapse of our society. We live in a stormy world, full of acts of terrorism, contention and murder. And we can't still our conscience by taking a quiet, romantic stroll into the past, counting contentedly the glorious accomplishments of the human fruits of the Lower East Side and reveling in how many of them became doctors, lawyers, political luminaries, statesmen, rabbis and community leaders.

We're living in a new world, a new society permeated with a "new morality" that spares no neighborhood, city or environment. "We're living in the 70's", say these young people as they ask questions, demand answers and challenge our values. Our youth, which is the future of our people, is also caught up in this web, and today there is no Lower East Side to escape to.

The danger signal is unfortunately all too clear, especially when one sees what is happening on the campuses of our most illustrious universities. The most pernicious problem is the use of narcotics, and when you

take account of the fact that 80 percent of Jewish youth attend college, you realize how great the potential harm is to us as well as to them.

Throughout history, when great thinkers and philosophers saw that their society was about to crumble and disintegrate, they sought remedies in the past and used history and tradition as guides. They also took their morals and ethics from the past.

So it's clear that we too must derive our ethics and morals from our eternal sources, our forefathers and their teachings. The tradition with which we grew up, the respect we had for our teachers and parents, the love and devotion we bore the synagogue and the House of Study are traits, ladies and gentlemen, that have withstood the test of time for over two thousand years



Hoffman with Rabbi Gurary', (left). Isaac Faigenbaum, (left), Rabbi Haymovitz.

and stood up to all our enemies and their pogroms since we became a people.

And today, when we consider the path we should take with regard to our American-Jewish youth so that the chain of continuity shall not be broken, the only way I see is pure, simple, uncompromising education in the study of Torah. There must be no watering down of standards and educational opportunity should be available to all Jewish children, whoever and wherever they may be.

It's on this last point that I wish to express my gratitude to the Lubavitch Yeshivahs, because they are the providers of educational opportunities par excellence. I'm proud of the fact that I was chosen as guest of honor this evening. But you can rest assured that though



At a dinner of the Lubavitcher Yeshivahs *(From right to left): Hoffman, a guest from Israel, (a surviving member of the family), Mayor Abe Beame, Gladys Silber, (Hoffman's daughter).*

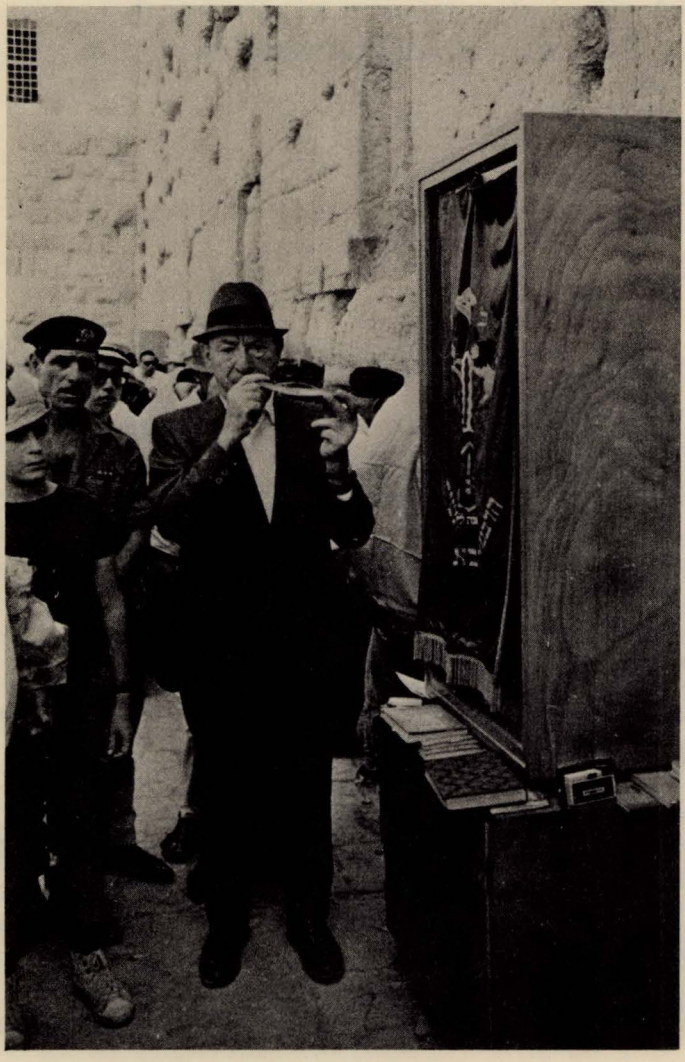
I'm only a guest here today, I'll not continue to be one in the future. I'll be a steady participant in your holy work on behalf of Torah, Judaism and morality.

I look forward with pleasure to the privilege of working with all of you, and I know that together we'll be able to help the Lubavitcher go from strength to strength. Doing that, we shall all be blessed by the Giver of Life with all good things.

Many thanks!



Hoffman is presented with a plaque by Rabbi Gurary'. On the left is Comptroller Howard Golden.



Jacob Hoffman blows the shofar at the Western Wall



Hoffman arrives in Madrid, Spain on one of his trips.



Jacob Hoffman with his wife, children and grandchildren

Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Hoffman, (center), photographed with their whole family at an Israeli Bond dinner in their honor on March 1, 1964 at the Brooklyn Jewish Center. From right to left: David and Gladys, (Gittl), son-in-law and daughter of the Hoffmans and their children — little Amy, (in her mother's arms), today a student in the Midwood Day School in Flatbush and Ary', (Larry), today a student in the Yeshivah of Flatbush High School. From left to right: Irma and Herbert, (Hersh Ber), Hoffman, daughter-in-law and son of the Hoffmans and their children Pinchos, (Paul), a Yeshivah of Flatbush graduate and Robin, now a student in the Ramaz Yeshivah

Selma Kaye — Singer in the Grand Tradition

I'm an ardent devotee of classical orchestral and operatic music, so every time I go to Israel you're sure to find me attending the opera in Tel Aviv. Among the works I've heard are Offenbach's "Tales of Hoffman", "Carmen", and "Samson and Delilah." While it's not my purpose here to evaluate the performances critically, I can say that generally speaking they match in quality similar offerings anywhere in the world.

The above is by way of explaining the omission in the Yiddish version of my book of a fascinating story about a young lady and my part in her musical development. I believe you'll agree that it's an episode worth recounting.

Up until recently even the worthiest of young operatic talents in America would not be accepted initially into a prestigious house in their own country. They would have to go to Europe to establish a reputation and only then be considered for roles here. I'm happy to say that Israel has now become a training ground for beginning artists. It has some of the top music teachers in the world, and after a two-year regimen with them, most trainees can begin their climb up the artistic ladder with confidence and reasonable prospects for success.

Now to my story.

Some years ago a family named Kaminkowitz lived on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. They were religious

people, so their two children, a boy and a girl, went to the Brownsville Yeshivah.

After a while they moved from Brownsville to Eastern Parkway, where they used to buy groceries in my store on Troy Avenue. Mrs. Kaminkowitz would often come with pretty little Selma and tell me that the girl plays the piano, has a beautiful voice, and would like to take lessons so as to become an opera singer. In order to provide opportunities for her to appear before live audiences, I used to take her with me when I attended meetings of various kinds. She sang and accompanied herself on the piano. However, the family was in difficult financial straits — to the point that she would have to give up her music and voice studies. I understood the parents' sorrow at such a prospect, so I helped them to continue their daughter's training.

As her picture will testify, Selma grew up to be a beautiful young lady with a splendid voice. She was so good that Radio City engaged her when Jan Peerce left them for the Metropolitan Opera. She called herself Selma Kaye because the theater's management made her change it, feeling that Kaminkowitz was hardly a suitable stage name.

Selma sang at Radio City for several months. I often visited her backstage. Her mother stayed with her all day and brought food in from the outside because Selma had to sing three or four times a day. It wasn't very pleasant for me to see the young artist shed bitter tears because she was afraid that such frequent performances would ruin her voice and thus make her advancement to the opera impossible. She therefore left Radio City and sang in various opera houses in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Milan and Paris. All the newspapers gave her superb reviews.

One Sunday Selma and another young singer were invited to try out for a place at the Metropolitan Opera.

After she sang an aria from Carmen, my wife and I and all those present were convinced that Selma was the better of the two, but the management apparently didn't agree with us because she never heard from them. Rudolph Bing was the manager at the time. In our view the Met lost a singer who would have added great luster to its name.

Selma Kaye now lives in Brooklyn with the fine family that she has raised.



Selma Kaye

Safed Enhanced — With a New Synagogue

The reader will recall an earlier chapter in which I described the mystical connection established by my first schoolteachers between their students and the holy city of Safed. The feeling of reverence I have for that charismatic city increases every time I visit there, and it's the rare trip to Israel that doesn't see me trodding its hallowed streets.

After being wrested from the Arabs in the 1948 War of Independence, Safed again became a Jewish city. A rapid increase in the Jewish population brought about geographic expansion and increased needs, both material and spiritual. Among those needs was a synagogue for a newly-established part of town.

The idea to erect a synagogue in that expansion area was broached to me by the Histadrut. On my next visit I went to the Municipal Hall and began negotiations first with the Deputy Mayor and then the Mayor himself. Naturally there were differences between us with regard to design, size, materials, etc. and at one point we were at an impasse that threatened the whole project.

When the Histadrut learned of the stalemate, it took a hand in an effort to resolve our conflicting stands. Not too long after the resumption of our discussions, all outstanding issues were settled. Construction was started and the synagogue building, dedicated to the memory of my wife Bella, was finished in relatively short order.

Today the synagogue, which uses the Sephardic ritual, serves the community as a house of worship and an esthetic landmark that adds to the beauty of the surrounding area.

I can think of no more appropriate tribute to Bella, OBM, than that elegant new synagogue in Safed.



The Safed Synagogue
Top: *Jacob Hoffman*
Bottom: *From right to left — Mayor Nachmuds, Jacob Hoffman and the Deputy Mayor*

The Alan King Medical Center

When Jerusalem was liberated in the Six-Day War, joy throughout the Jewish world knew no bounds. First there was exultation at the unrestrained access to the Old City and its hallowed Jewish landmarks, walled off by Jordan since 1948. Then there was the feeling that at last all of Jerusalem would be open to Jewish settlement and that it would speedily be re-established as Israel's capital in every sense of the word.

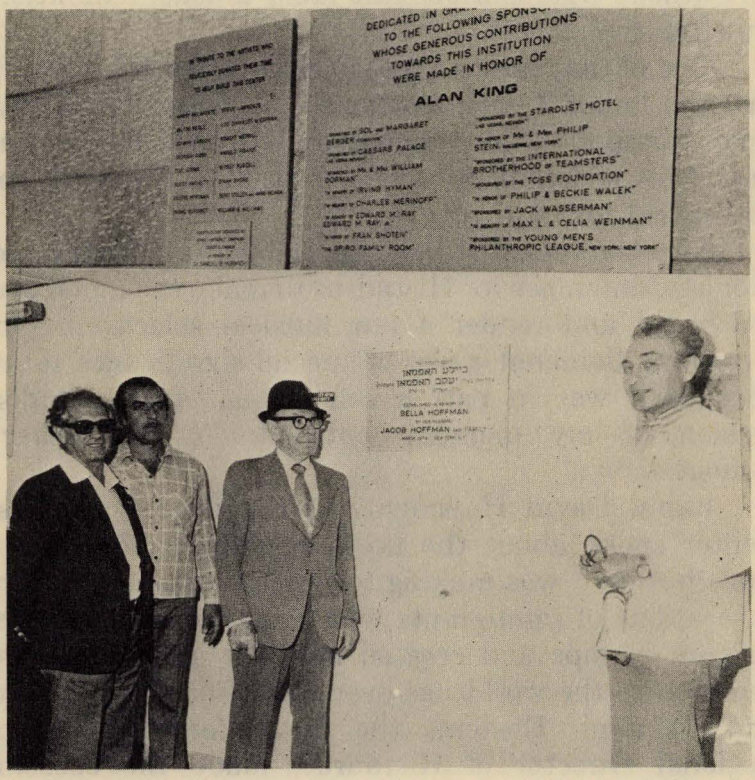
It wasn't too long before the housing stock in the inner city and the established suburbs became inadequate to meet the demand placed on them by ever-increasing numbers of people who wanted to make Jerusalem their home. To meet that demand, housing developments began springing up on the surrounding hills, bringing satisfaction at the Judaizing of the area, but creating all the problems attendant on rapid urban expansion while the services needed to make it viable lagged dangerously behind.

Health being a high priority in the Israeli value system, when the Ramat Eshkol and Sanhedrin Murchevet neighborhoods in North Jerusalem found their Kupat Cholim clinic insufficient to their needs, a plan for expansion developed into what is now the Alan King Medical Center. It provides general clinical services as well as specialty departments like urology and orthopedics, assuring the local population high quality medical care.

Some members of the Labor Zionist Movement

have sponsored whole wings as well as individual rooms in the King Center. I decided to participate in that support by dedicating the pharmacy to the remembrance of my departed wife Bella OBM. Whenever I visit the pharmacy and see the important role it plays in maintaining the health of the surrounding community, I feel that my contribution is generating dividends tenfold.

The Alan King Medical Center is now an important link in Israel's Kupat Cholim network.



The Pharmacy Dedication at the Alan King Medical Center
From Right to left: A Center Doctor, Jacob Hoffman, a Pharmacist and a local photographer

Hoffman Honored at the Forty-First Histadrut Conference

The Histadrut derives its support from many constituent organizations like labor unions, federations and fraternal orders.

One of the reasons I feel so close to the Histadrut is that the Labor Zionist Movement, of which I'm a long-time member, is its founder and to this day a very important source of its strength in both financial and ideological terms.

Over the years I've been invited to the annual Labor Zionist Conference for Histadrut to make the motsi over the bread and render a few musical selections. The forty-first Conference was of special significance to me because it was in part a celebration of the Yiddish version of my memoirs entitled: "Cantor Isaac's Youngest Son."

Rabbi David Haymovitz of the Brooklyn Jewish Center spoke about the book, explaining the unique contribution it was making to the understanding of the generations of immigrants who came to America from Eastern Europe and created here the greatest Jewish community the world has ever seen. Rabbi Haymovitz and Yehudah Ebstein, the New York-New Jersey Regional Director of Histadrut, made the occasion especially festive when they presented me with the first Peace Medal, issued by the Histadrut for outstanding achievement.

For the multifarious benefits it provides our beloved State of Israel, I salute the Histadrut and hope to participate in its activities for many years to come.



From left to right: Matthew Schoenwald, Rabbi David Haymovitz, Bernard Jacobson, Jacob Hoffman, I.K. Goldstein, Yehudah Epstein, Paul Schochet, Isaac Feigenbaum, Manny Freedman, Jacob Nebrasky

The Jewish Theological Seminary A Seminal Institution

The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York is one of the most prestigious centers of Jewish education in the United States. Since its founding in 1897 it has produced a great many illustrious rabbis and teachers who have served the Jewish people here and abroad with distinction.

The Seminary is known as the wellspring of Conservative Judaism, a doctrine often criticized by Orthodox circles as deviating from tradition in certain respects, such as seating men and women together in the synagogue. So it may be a little surprising to most people to learn that the Seminary was originally designed to preserve traditional Jewish values against radical reformers, such as the Reform promulgation of the Pittsburgh Platform, which among other things denied the need for kashrut and a national homeland.

In the course of time the Seminary expanded its activities to such areas as the Eternal Light program, Camp Ramah and a cantorial school. It also carries on joint scholarship projects wih education elements in Israel.

What endears the Seminary to me on the personal level is the fact that Rabbi Israel H. Levinthal, my spiritual leader, is one of its graduates. Can you imagine, therefore, how thrilled I was when I was proposed as guest of honor at a brunch on behalf of that



From right to left: ***Rabbi David Haymovitz, Chancellor Stanley J. Schachter, Jacob Hoffman.***

institution at the Brooklyn Jewish Center? It really was a momentous occasion in my private as well as communal life and I'm happy to report that a considerable sum of money was raised on the spot.

To give you a sense of what the evening was like, I reprint below the testimonial letter written to me by Dr. Stanley J. Schachter, Chancellor of the Seminary.

March 29, 1977

Dear Mr. Hoffman,

It was a delight and a pleasure for me to have the privilege of serving as guest speaker at the Brooklyn Jewish Center's testimonial occasion in your honor and on behalf of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. I was especially pleased that the arrangements committee arranged for me to sit at your side. I learned a great deal that was inspiring about your early life and your many current contributions to the upbuilding of Jewish expression in many different ways.

Naturally, I am most pleased that you number the Seminary among your important causes. It is my hope that this relationship will grow and continue for many years to come and that God will grant you good health and continuing energy to involve yourself in the vital work of building the Jewish community.

We would consider it a great honor at the Seminary to have the opportunity to have you visit with us here and in particular to see the great treasures of the Manuscript Room of the Seminary's world renowned library.

Wishing you and your lovely family a happy Pesach, I am

Sincerely yours,
Stanley J. Schachter

A Histadrut Evening at the Brooklyn Jewish Center

By now the reader is abundantly aware that the Histadrut and the Brooklyn Jewish Center are two of the central concerns of my life. Each of these institutions has in its own way enriched me beyond recompense.

The Histadrut afforded me the opportunity to meet with the giants who served at its helm and in so doing forged Israel into a viable entity, able to withstand all the economic pressures exerted against that young state by its enemies. Through the Histadrut too I was able to enrich the spiritual life of our Homeland by providing synagogues that sustain the religious fabric so intimately intertwined with the Jewish State throughout its history.

The Brooklyn Jewish Center too was a source of fruitful contacts for me. There I met spiritual, academic, literary and political luminaries of such magnitude as to invite comparison with those of any other era of the Jewish past. It was that Center that enabled me to make history with the dedication of the Eternal Light in the Jewish Chapel on the USS Nimitz.

Imagine my joy, therefore, when it was proposed that the Center's Men's Club sponsor a Histadrut evening in our sanctuary. That two institutions so dear to me were meeting under one roof, so to speak, would have been sufficient to elate me. The frosting on the cake, however, was the suggestion that I be the honoree of the evening.

In due course June 23, 1976 arrived and a sizable



From right to left: ***Ephraim Fogel, Mrs. Bresnick, Stanley Bresnick, Jacob Hoffman, Rabbi David Haymovitz, Mrs. Haymovitz, Isaac Feigenbaum.***

audience gathered around tastefully decorated tables under the chairmanship of Stanley Bresnick, Men's Club chairman.

In keeping with the nature of the evening, Ephraim Fogel of the Labor Zionist Alliance, Isaac Feigenbaum of the Histadrut and Rabbi David Haymovitz commented on my communal activities. After their remarks, the three speakers jointly presented me with a Histadrut plaque inscribed with a message appropriate to the occasion.

In his talk, Chaver Feigenbaum informed those present that I had already sponsored two synagogues in my name and that of my family — one in Maoz Aviv and the other in Kiryat Segal, where I had recently arranged for the rebuilding of the Holy Ark.

Not too long before that evening I had read several reports about the lack of cultural and recreational centers for Israeli youth and the harmful social consequences of that lack in terms of vandalism and hooliganism. Feeling quite distressed at the situation, I decided to sponsor a youth center in Israel in memory of my wife Bella, OBM, since we would frequently discuss the beneficial influence on our youthful lives exercised by the dramatic and communal activities we shared.

So for me the highlight of the evening was the announcement of my youth center sponsorship. I can't recall any announcement in my long career that evoked so much applause.

When the proceedings concluded we all left spiritually uplifted at having participated in so worthy an occasion.

●

The Central Synagogue in Tel Aviv

When I reflect on that far-away time when I as a youth in Rutke was seized with the idea of the return to Zion and observe the current scene in an Israel that is the living embodiment of my dreams, I see how great has been the victory of the Jewish people over its enemies. By now I've lost track of the number of visits I've made to Eretz Israel, and yet every time I go and see the pace of new construction and the care being given in restoring old and venerable buildings to their former beauty, I act like a veritable naif and go wild with joy.

And if such is my reaction when I see an ordinary building in the reconstruction process, you can imagine my happiness when I viewed the refurbishing of the Central Synagogue in Tel Aviv, since the reader will remember my partiality to houses of worship and the support I give to their maintenance and improvement. I asked one of the workers who the synagogue representative was and he said that the president was in the office and would tell me what was going on.

I went into the office and made the acquaintance of Abraham Chatzroni. I chatted with him and learned of all the financial difficulties he was encountering in completing the planned reconstruction of the synagogue. At the same time he interested me in making a contribution that would eternalize my family's name. I liked the proposal because, aside from the personal consideration, I recognized that what he was doing merited my sup-

port. When I visited the synagogue at a later date, I was happy to note that it was getting more beautiful all the time and that the president's worries were gradually diminishing.

Mr. Chatzroni is a very energetic individual and does his work with extraordinary skill. After I became quite friendly with him, he invited me to act as cantor and conduct morning and afternoon services on Shabbat. After prayers a beautiful kiddush was served, and as a sort of "extra" I sang "Jerusalem of Gold", winning the applause of all those present.

By now almost every trip I make to Israel includes a visit to the Central Synagogue. On June 26th last when I stopped by there the president was away. He called me the following day. After congratulating me on the publication of my book, which he found of excellent quality, he invited me to his son's wedding. I'd already made the acquaintance of the young man, who is a prominent personality in Israel. I extended my felicitations and promised to come to the affair.

On Sunday, June 29th at 8 P.M. I entered the synagogue where the ceremony was taking place and was surprised to see the sanctuary already filled with people. Then in a sudden rush of excitement they brought in the beautiful bride to seat her on the traditional nuptial chair. Men and women stood about her in a circle, anxious to get a good look at her.

Then the groom was escorted in to place the veil on his future wife. So far — one could say — nothing unusual and hardly worthy of mention, since Jewish grooms have been following that procedure for centuries. What made the situation extraordinary was that the groom was accompanied by his friend Assad Morlada, the Egyptian Consul. Surely that has to be one of the nicer fruits of the Camp David agreement, since before that time one could hardly imagine an Egyptian

dignitary of that rank gracing a Jewish occasion of any kind.

On the synagogue platform a number of rabbis shared in conducting the wedding ceremony. Standing right by the groom was his Egyptian friend. Afterwards all joined in song and had a glorious time.

Ever conscious of Jewish tradition and the importance of its transmission from generation to generation, I take this opportunity to salute Abraham Chatzroni, who, in edifying the Central Synagogue in Tel Aviv has provided a milieu that will outstandingly serve the spiritual future of our people.

Part Four

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Preface

In his archives Jacob Hoffman has many letters from prominent personalities in Jewish life. They range from expressions of appreciation for his activities to condolences on the tragic loss of his wife Bella.

The number of such communications precludes encompassing them all in one volume. On the advice of some friends, therefore, Mr. Hoffman has selected as prototypes a few written by Rabbi Israel H. Levinthal, his spiritual leader, to whom he feels especially close. In that way, it was felt, the public would have a sense of the special nature of the relationship between Rabbi Levinthal and his distinguished congregant.

Herewith are some of Rabbi Levinthal's remarks:

At a Jewish Theological Seminary Brunch

3/27/77

Dear friends,

I need hardly tell you how keenly I regret that I cannot personally be present at this very important function. First, because of the cause. Next to the influence of my beloved parents, of blessed memory, I owe all that I am and all that I strive to be, culturally and spiritually, to the Seminary and to the intellectual giants at whose feet I was privileged to study. Secondly, I would have wanted to be present to add my personal tribute to your guest of honor, Mr. Jacob Hoffman, a unique personality in our community, who well deserves this tribute which is being paid him.

My stay in Florida would have had to be shortened a number of days in order to arrive in time to attend the affair. My physician here in Miami kept insisting that every day of my stay is very important for my health, and that I should remain as long as possible — advice which I feel necessary to take.

Although I have known Mr. Hoffman for many years, I must confess that I really did not fully know him — what an interesting Jew he is. For many months now he is writing his autobiography in the Yiddish weekly, Der Algemeiner Journal. About twenty-five installments have already appeared, and I am thankful to be able to say that I read and enjoyed every one of them. It is a true Horatio Alger story "From rags to riches." It portrays the struggles of Jewish every-day life in the East European "Shtetel," and above all, what sustained these people, their ideals and love for Jewish learning.

Mr. Hoffman did not have the opportunity — that some Jewish lads had — to spend his early years studying in a Yeshivah. His father, of blessed memory, died while Jacob was very young, and the young lad had to go to work to help support his widowed mother and her children. But while he had to give up his formal studies, he had inherited from his father a great appreciation and love for Jewish learning and the need to support it. It is significant to note that as soon as G-d blessed him in his business efforts in America, he began to share his income with Torah institutions and Synagogues in America and Israel. Early in his career he joined our Brooklyn Jewish Center, giving practical reverence for the cultural and spiritual work it is doing. He is non-partisan in his support for Jewish learning. He rallies lavishly to the Torah institutions of Lubavitch, and at the same time appreciates the educational work of the Histadrut labor movement in Israel. No wonder that he has a high regard for the Seminary, and the varied programs of Jewish learning it sponsors. Mr. Hoffman was very fortunate in that his wife, of blessed memory, shared his love for Torah and always encouraged him in his support.

I could go on and on describing the fine support Mr. Hoffman has given to Torah institutions, but I realize that my time is limited. I do want to express my fervent prayer that our Heavenly Father will continue to shower upon Mr. Hoffman and all the members of his family the gifts of life, health and strength, so that he may be able to continue to uphold the spiritual and cultural forces of our people for many, many years to come.

I do not need to speak about the work of the Seminary. You are very fortunate to have as your guest speaker one of the younger scholars who has already achieved a fine reputation in the leadership of Conservative Judaism in America, Vice Chancellor of the

Seminary, Rabbi Stanley J. Schacter. He is most capable to tell you of the great and important work that the Seminary is doing for the strengthening of our spiritual and cultural life here in America and throughout the world.

I want to close with a beautiful comment of the Rabbis about the important role that men and women who support institutions and students of Torah play in Jewish life. You are all familiar with the Biblical verse which we chant when the Torah is replaced in the Ark — after it is read at the services: *Etz chayim hi,* "It is a tree of life to those who take hold of it, *vesomchecha* and those who support it are made happy." The Rabbis note that the Bible does not say *velomdeha, they who study it,* are made happy, but *vesomcheha,* they who *support it* are made happy. Mr. Hoffman is a living example of the happiness that one acquires in supporting the study of Torah.

I am confident that all attending this function will want to be *somchim,* supporters of the Seminary, the great and world-famed institution of Jewish learning and scholarship, so that *lomdeha,* they who devote their lives to the study of Troah, may be able to continue to be a tree of life to the hearts and minds of our people for years and years to come.

With all good wishes for a happy and blessed Passover to all present, I am

Faithfully yours,
Israel H. Levinthal

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At a Solomon Schechter Hebrew High School Dinner

4/18/77

My Dear Rabbi Lewittes,

I would so want to be with you at the dinner of the Solomon Schechter Hebrew High School this coming Sunday, at which you will honor the dedicated worker for, and patron of, Hebrew education, my very good friend, Mr. Jacob Hoffman. To my great regret, it will be impossible for me to do so. Because of my age and health, my physician has limited me from attending more than a small number of affairs, which I have already long exceeded.

I recall when the Solomon Schechter Hebrew High School was organized and how its founder, my revered colleague, Rabbi Abraham Heller, OBM, worked to establish it. It is a living monument to his memory as it is a beautiful memorial to the unforgettable leader in American Jewry, Professor Solomon Schechter OBM.

It is good to pay tribute to a Jew like Mr. Hoffman, who is one of the most devoted workers and supporters of Hebrew education in America. Mr. Hoffman is especially wise in that he realized the great importance of secondary Hebrew education. The danger in having a child getting only an elementary education and stopping his or her learning at Bar or Bat Mitzvah is that the child soon forgets what he or she had learned, and worse, the child leaves the Hebrew studies just at the time when the mind is ripest to grasp the real values and beauty of our faith and our ideals. Mr. Hoffman realizes this fact, and that is why he supports financially, and takes an active interest in so many yeshivot, high schools, and

many other advanced schools. As I had occasion to say of him recently, Mr. Hoffman himself, as he told us in his very interesting autobiography, which was recently published in the Yiddishe Algemeiner Journal, was denied the opportunity of getting a Yeshivah education. His father, of blessed memory, died when Jacob was very young, and the lad had to go to work to help his mother support the family. But he did inherit from his father two great loves — the love for Eretz Israel and the love for Torah, especially the importance of imparting these loves in the hearts and minds of our young. To his honor it must be said that as soon as he started to reap the fruits of his labor, Mr. Hoffman immediately began to share his earnings with Torah institutions both here and in Eretz Yisrael. I know from personal experience how he helped the education work of our Brooklyn Jewish center and other educational institutions of our community.

I must mention the fact that his beloved wife, Beile, OBM, with whom he fell in love when they were both young, shared his ideals, and was proud of the role he played in promoting Hebrew learning in America.

I fervently pray that our Heavenly Father may shower the blessings of life, health and strength upon him, his children and grandchildren — all of whom are also trying to live up to his ideals — so that he may be able to continue his splendid service in behalf of our people, our people's land, our people's Torah for many, many more years to come.

Appreciating also the splendid work you are doing as the Educational Head of the school, and with all good wishes to all assembled, I am

Faithfully yours,
Israel H. Levinthal

At a UJA Dinner

12/4/77

Mr. Chairman, Rabbi Haymovitz and distinguished guests on the dais:

Dear friends, I must perform my first duty, which is to thank G-d for having granted me the privilege of being here this morning to join with you in this important function. I want also to convey my blessing and greeting to each and every one of you for a very blessed and happy Chanukah. May it mark again the victory of peace over war, of good will and justice over hatred and contention.

I am here to speak on the subject that brought us together. But I am leaving this to the guest speaker, who I understand is an expert on the subject: the problems that are facing our State of Israel. I shall limit myself in the few remarks I'll make to my tribute to our guest of honor, Mr. Jacob Hoffman.

I had numerous occasions to pay tribute to him and every time I was reminded of the warning of our rabbis that we should only say *miktsat shivcho l'fanav*. When we give credit to a man in his presence, it should be only a little bit of the praise that is due, and I want to assure you that wherever I spoke in tribute to him it was only *miktsat shivcho.*

I want to do this in a unique fashion. I want to pose a question to you: "Who would you say is a rich man?" It would seem like a childish question. Every child can answer that. The man who has a lot of money is a rich man. Not at all; that is not the answer I expect. The Talmud tells us that Rabbi Judah Hanassi *hayah m'chabed et ha-ashirim.* It doesn't mean that he honored the men who have money. Not at all, if you knew the life of Rabbi Judah. Rabbi Akivah *hayah m'chabed et ha-ashirim,* and the greatest of our sages

honored rich men. That doesn't mean that they honored a Jew who has a lot of money. There is a certain quality about the man we call *ashir,* the Jewish rich man.

Now I am not the first to ask that question. Those of you who are familiar with the Ethics of the Fathers know that Ben Zomah asked the same question. *Eizehu ashir?,* whom would you call a rich man, especially a rich Jew, and he gives the answer in two words: *"Hasame-ach b'chelko."*

These two words mean: "He who is satisfied, happy with what he has." Again I know a man could never be satisfied with what he has, if he has nothing. If that is the real meaning, the wording would be different: *Hasame-ach b'ma sheyesh lo,* he rejoices with what he has. It doesn't say that. Instead it says: *Hasame-ach b'chelko.* The key word is *b'chelko.* The real rich man, no matter whether he has very much or not, is one who recognizes that of what he has, only a *chelek,* a part, belongs to him and a *chelek,* a part, belongs to the community of which he is a part. The great Rabbis I mentioned honored *ashirim,* they honored those who had money, but they knew that only a *chelek* belongs to them and a *chelek* belongs to the community for its needs. By the way, when I gave the first translation, the obvious one: "He who is satisfied with what he has" I said it wasn't the Jewish translation. That's exactly what the communists say about religion. Their argument against religion is that religion is the opiate capitalists use to tell the mass of people they should be satisfied with what they have. That the poor, if they just have work, be satisfied. But that is not the Jewish conception. The Jewish tradition says that if you have a little, try to make more — in an honest way, of course. Try to get more for the comfort of your wife and your children. But the real rich man is *hasame-ach b'chelko,* who recognizes that only a *chelek* belongs to him and a

chelek belongs to the others, and who is satisfied with only his *chelek*. He doesn't want the *chelek* that belongs to others.

And we pay tribute to our guest of honor, Mr. Jacob Hoffman, because he is an *ashir* in the Jewish tradition of the word. I don't know how much money he has, but I know that he can be called an *ashir* because he shares and recognizes that only a *chelek* of what G-d gave him belongs to him. Those of you who read Mr. Hoffman's biography in the *Allgemeiner Journal* must have been astounded as I was, that when he came as a very young man to America and got his first job and made a few dollars, he understood the true meaning of *hasame-ach b'chelko.* He immediately took a part of his meagre earnings to help bring his family to America. And later, when G-d blessed him and he made a little more, the *chelek* was a little more. The *chelek* for himself and the *chelek* for the community. When he saw a Talmud Torah or he saw a yeshiva or a tzedakah, a charity, he shared and he knew that a *chelek* belongs to them. And today he continues to be an *ashir* in that sense of the word. And he takes a *chelek* of what he has to help build Eretz Yisroel, physically and spiritually. Building a synagogue here and a yeshiva there, and helping the workingman in Eretz Yisroel.

And so, my friends, I join with you in offering an ardent prayer to our Father in Heaven that He continue to bless Mr. Hoffman and his children and his family that they should all be *ashirim,* rich in the true Jewish sense of that term. And I want to say this too — that he challenges all of us. We too must be *ashirim.* It doesn't mean that we have to have lots of money. Whatever we have, we must realize that a *chelek* belongs to the Jewish people. Today especially, in its hour of need. Doing that, we will all be *ashirim* and set an example. Then we will add glory to our people and honor to our faith.

At a Lubavitcher Yeshivah Dinner

12/7/70

My dear Mr. Frankel:

I have learned with great pleasure that this year's Annual Dinner of the Lubavitch Yeshiva will pay tribute to our mutual friend, Mr. Jacob Hoffman. It is to my greatest regret that I personally cannot attend the dinner but I want to assure you that I will be with you in spirit. Mr. Hoffman has won the esteem and the respect of all the members of our Brooklyn Jewish Center who have come in contact with him. I and they have admired him because of his character and Jewish ideals. Outside of his great love for his family, he has two other great loves — the love of Eretz Israel and the love of Torah. In our own Center he is always interested in the spreading of Jewish learning, among both the young and the old and he is every ready to give of his means and of his work to every institution that spreads the knowledge of Torah. I know how devoted he is to the work of the Lubavitch Yeshivah and how interested he is in the new building that you have been successful in erecting.

I want to join with you in this deserved tribute to him. I join with you in the hope and prayer that Heaven's Blessings may shower upon him, his dear wife and family the gifts of good health and strength so that he may continue to be a supporter of Torah and of Israel for many, many years to come. My sincere greetings to your venerable spiritual leader, the great Rabbi of Lubavitch and also to all participating in this work.

With all my good wishes,

Faithfully yours,
Israel H. Levinthal

On the passing of Bella Hoffman

June 17, 1977
Rosh Chodesh Tammuz 5737

My dear Mr. Hoffman,

May I add a brief word of personal tribute to the cherished memory of your beloved wife, Bella, OBM, whose tombstone will be dedicated on Sunday, June 19th.

I was privileged to have known her in life through the many years of your and her affiliation with the Brooklyn Jewish Center. I have learned much about her younger years in the home in which she was raised in the little town in Poland, when you first met her and fell in love with her, which you described so beautifully in your published autobiography. I can attest to the lofty ideals of our glorious faith by which she moulded her life — her great love for her G-d, her Torah, her people and her people's land — the Land of Israel.

She was a true *Aishes Chayil* "woman of valor", whose praises were sung by King Solomon. If I may analyze that word, *Chayil* "valor," I would say that its three letters symbolize three fundamental ideals which marked your beloved Bella's life:

The letter *cheth* stands for *chesed,* kindliness — a quality which marked every action of her life, kindliness to her people, and indeed to every human being who needed help.

The letter "*yud*" stands for *yirah* — fear or respect for G-d. That quality, too, she possessed and marked all the years of her life. She loved G-d, her faith, her Torah with all her heart, soul and mind.

The last letter of that word, the *lamed,* stands for a

very beautiful quality which she possessed; *lekach* "instruction." She not only lived by the rules of our Torah herself, but she succeeded in instructing her children — yes, even her grandchildren — to make the Torah their guide in life. That was her greatest happiness — that her children, her children-in-law and her grandchildren follow her teachings by living the life of our people's ideals.

Even your own many deeds of kindness to the important institutions of learning in Israel and here in America were encouraged by Bella's influence.

The ancient Rabbis wisely tell us:

"The righteous need no monuments, their deeds, these are their monuments." The reason we set a monument is not so much for the dead as it is for us the living. It is to point out to the living the ideals that were hers in life — and which we should resolve to make the pattern of our lives — so that we may always be able to say, whenever her name will come upon our lips: "May her memory ever be for a blessing!"

May you and your loved ones be spared from all further sorrow for many, many years to come!

Faithfully yours,
Rabbi Israel H. Levinthal

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