PAGES OF MY LIFE




9 Wiżajny
Gulbieniszki 9
Suwałki 25

PAGES OF MY LIFE

AS A YOUTH IN THE SHTETL
AS A STUDENT IN YESHIVA
AS A SOLDIER IN PALESTINE
AS A RABBI IN AMERICA

RABBI HASKEL LINDENTHAL

1997
A LEGACY BOOK

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

When G-d created Adam, though the whole world belonged to him, he was very sad. So, He created Eve to be Adam's helpmate. From this story we learn that by himself, one man cannot achieve all that he sets out to do. I wrote *Pages of My Life,* but I wish to acknowledge several people who helped shape it into the book you are about to read: the typists Lisa Koplowitz and Charmaine Glew whose task of deciphering my often illegible handwriting was a difficult one; Elise Abel who not only typed, but encouraged me to continue writing when I might have given-up; Marion Kahn, who frequently graced our *Shabbos* table and read the typed pages aloud so I could verify the accuracy of the text. To all of you I say thank you and G-d bless you.

To my beloved wife Naomi, thank you for listening and for reading each chapter with such interest and enthusiasm. I hope you will forgive the many hours you were left alone while I was writing.

As I see the book in reality, I thank my children. . . Jacob, for your encouragement. . . Harold for the many hours you spent helping me see it to completion. . . and Rachel who did the editing and design, thank you for making my manuscript into a book of such beautiful form. In the Garden of Eden, Eve told Adam that the tree is not only good to eat but also pleasant to see. I hope you, dear readers, will appreciate the stories and the look of the book as well. The Almighty has been good to me and has showered me with great treasures.

INTRODUCTION

I am neither a writer nor a philosopher, but my wife and children and many friends have urged me to write about my life, my travels and my experiences. I had to give-in to their request. But, there is an even more important reason for me to write this book. I am, thank G-d, alive. Hundreds of my friends, my father, four of my sisters along with their husbands and children and my brother, did not escape the German Holocaust. They died *Al Kiddush Hashem.* I owe them this book, Pages of My Life, not to promote myself, but as a testimony to them.

I cannot explain rationally why my friends and family did not escape and I did. I do not think that running from one place to another was a product of my own volition. Rather, I believe that the *Unseen Hand* directed me to go here and there. I am grateful to the Almighty for sparing my life and enabling me to write this book.

The facts in this book are correct; some of the dates may not be. As we get older, the memory can get blurred. No members of my family in Europe are alive to correct me. We find in the TALMUD TRACTATE *P'SOCHIM, 'Ein mukdam um-uchar baTorah.'* (Even in the Torah the dates are not always in their proper order.) Often, I use relevant quotations from the *Talmud*, *Tanach* and *Siddur.* We find in ETHICS OF THE FATHERS, "Study the Torah again and again, for everything is contained in it." Also, I frequently make mention of great Jewish personalities and historical events. Why not inform my people of the great spiritual treasure that we have and the giants that we had?

The Hungarian Rabbi, R'Akivo Aiger *z"l*, (1761-1837) wrote, "It is worthy to write a whole book even if you (readers) find only one important chapter." I hope and pray that you will find something in this book worthwhile to read and remember. This will be my greatest reward.

H.L.

טייערע פריינד, איך האב געשריבן דעם בוך "בלעטער פין מיין לעבן" צוליב דעם דרוק פון מיין טייערע פרוי. אין ליבע קינדער. זיי אלע האבן געבעטן איך זאל פארצייכענען אוף אייביק מיינע זכרונות. זייער טענה איז גיוועז יי דו בינסט דאך דעו איינציקער וואס איז געבליבן לעבן פין אגרויסע משפחה. מיין פאטער, פיר שוועסטערס, דריי שוואגערס מיט זייערע קינדערלעך --א ברודער. אלע זיינען פארטיליקט געווארן דורך די דייטשע רוצחים י"ש. איך בין געקומען אוף דער וועלט צו טייערע עלטערן. אין א קליין שטעטעלע ויזאן לעבן סובאלקי. ביז צוואנציג יאהר האב איך געלערנט אין די ישיבות "גראדנע", "מיר", אין "ווילנא". אין ארץ ישראל בין איך גיוועז א חבר אין דער "הגנה" פאר דריי און האלב יאהר. און דא אין אמעריקא האב איך באדינט מיינע טייערע ברידער אין שוועסטער אלס רב, מוהל, און שוחט. פאר פיר אין פופציק יאהר.

איך דאנק דעם רבש"ע פאר לאזן מיר לעבן, ווייל איך האב זיך גערעטעלט מיטן "מלאך המות" עטליכע מאל. איך האב באשריבן מיין קליין שטעטעלע ויזאן איהרע מענשן די ארימקייט אין די שטארקע אמונה אין ג-ט. וואס זיי האבן געהאט, איך האב אויך פארצייכענט דעם אידישן לעבן אין דער פוילישע אנטיסעמיטישע מלוכה.

אלע מיינע חברים וואס מיר האבן געלערנט צוזאמען זיינען דער הרגט געווארן, און די עטליכע וואס האבן זיך געראטעוועט זיינען שוין אויך אוף דעם עולם האמת. איך האב באשריבן פערשידענע "עפי סאדן" אין מיין רבאנישע קאריר. ניט צוליב געלט צו ווערן רייך, אדער צוליב ווערן בא וואוסט האב איך געווידמעט דעם בוך ניין, חס ושלום. זאל דער רבש"ע, נעמען "ראכע" פין די דייטשישע רוצחים וואס האבן אומגעבראכט זעקס מיליאן אידן.

זייט אלע געבענטשט,

אייער פריינד יחזקאל לינדנטל

אשתי היקרה, וילדי הנחמדים והרבה ידידים שלי הפצירו בי לרשום את זכרונותי. הספר נקרא "קורות דפי חיי". דעו לכם ידידי שממשפחה גדולה בת שבעה ילדים אני היחידי שנשאר בחיים. אבי היקר, ארבע אחיותי עם בעליהן וילדיהן, ואחי היקר. כלם נספו בשואה על ידי הגרמנים הרוצחים ימח שמם. נולדתי בעירה קטנה ושמה וויזאן. לא רחוק מסובלק על יד הגבול של ליטא, ומזרח גרמניה.

שש שנים למדתי בישיבות "גרודנה", "מיר", "ווילנא". וארבע וחמשים שנה שרתתי את אחי ואחיותי כאן באמריקה בתור רב, מוהל, ושוחט. השתדלתי לתאר את חיי המשפחה שלי, את העוני ששרר בבית ואת אמונתם בשם שאף רגע לא התרופפה. שלש וחצי שנה הייתי חבר ב"הגנה" בהיותי בארץ ישראל. גם את חיי היהודים במדינת פולין, את התאבקותם עם האנטשמים, ואת כמה מגדולי ישראל שהיה לי הזכות להכירם. אני מודה להקב"ה על כל הטובה שעשה לי. עברתי שני נתוחים רצינים מאד ואני נשארתי בחיים. החברים שלי שלמדנו יחד בישיבות נהרגו, רק מספר קטן מאד נשארו, אבל גם הם כבר "בעולם האמת". לא למען הרווחת כסף, או לשם פרסום כתבתי את הספר לא, לא חס ושלום. יש לי תקוה שאתם הקוראים תמצאו ענין לקרא את הספר. הקב"ה יצרור בצרור החיים את הנשמות הקדושים ויקום נקמת דם אחינו השפוך.

באהבה ובידידות,

יחזקאל לינדנטל

As a Youth in the Shtetl

In the beginning . . .

My name is Haskel Lindenthal. My Hebrew name is *Yechezkel.* My father's name was *Yosel* and my mother's name was *Chaya.* I was born in 1916 after four girls. I am sure that my parents were happy. After all, every Jewish father and mother wished to have a son. For what reason? Simply to say *Kaddish* after them.

My paternal grandfather, *Tanchum* and maternal grandmother, *Golde Kaufman* lived with us and I remember them well. I had five sisters: *Chana Tzirl, Dvora, Sheine Rochel, Chashke* and the youngest, *Bashe Gitel* and I had a brother, *Dovid*, three years younger than I.

In the *shtetl,* my father was called *Yosel der Minister,* which translates roughly into 'Yosel the Diplomat.' He was extremely smart and people came to him for advice. My mother was not only the mother of seven, but was also known as the mother of our entire village. When she died, the Polish people cried, "*Nasha matka umarla.*" Our mother died. ◆



Yechezkel
'Best Dressed Yeshiva Bochur'



Mother and Father
welcomed Uncle Israel Harris (center)
husband of Tante Dobby.
With them are Bashe Gitele on Mother's lap,
Sheine Rochel, Dvor'ke and Dovid



Sheine Rochel and Chashke
1934
- Two Beautiful Girls -

Our House: Richness under Straw

My father was a tailor and my mother had a little bakery, yet there was hardly any bread in the house. I remember we lived in an old house, a very old house. The roof was made of straw and buckets were put out at night to collect the rain which seeped in anyway. There was no toilet, no electricity, not even a wooden floor. It was a dirt floor. On Friday, my mother sprinkled yellow sand on the floor to make it a little more festive for *Shabbos*.

The great German Jewish poet, Heinrich Heine (who later converted to Christianity) described the Jewish person on Friday before *Shabbos* as the dog that turns into a prince. This is what he meant: All week long the Jewish person runs around to earn a few *groshen* to bring food to the house. He hardly eats or sleeps. He is always perspiring. His only motive is to find enough money to prepare for the holy day of *Shabbos*. Thus he is compared to a dog who runs around trying to find a bone to satisfy his

hunger. However, as *Shabbos* approaches, the dog turns into a prince.

And so it was in my parents' house. All week long my father and mother worked to earn a few Polish *zlotys* in order to buy food, kerosene, salt, a pound of sugar, a bottle of saccharin, but on Friday before *Shabbos,* the house was transformed into a castle.

Friday afternoon everybody was preparing for *Shabbos* . . . the *cholent*, a pot filled with potatoes and fat was covered with paper, sealed with a kind of mud and placed in the oven to cook from Friday night to Saturday afternoon. The *kugel*, made of potatoes, fat, onions and flour was also put in the oven for almost twenty-four hours and was so rich that when you stuck a fork in it, the fat poured out. When all of this was served, it was delicious. We didn't know about cholesterol in those days, and even if we did, we were so hungry nobody would have cared.

Can you imagine eleven people being housed in three and a half rooms? Let me describe to you our sleeping arrangements. You will admit that despite our poverty, or perhaps because of it, we were ingenious. We had two beds, one for Mother and one for father. Until I left my parents' house, I slept with my father. The rest of the family slept in *shlof-banke* (sleeping benches). They actually looked like coffins; empty inside and covered with a flat top. Two people slept inside in opposite directions and the top was placed on two carpenter horses which made another bed. When not used as beds, the *shlof-banke* were used as benches to sit on. Wasn't that ingenious? Maybe Castro Convertible learned something from the *shtetl*! Mattresses we didn't have, so what was used to make sleeping a little more comfortable? Again - a big sack from salt was washed and filled with straw and that was the mattress. Many times during the night I remember being awakened by one or two straws 'trying to get out of the sack!'

In all honesty we experienced less back trouble by sleeping on those mattresses than the fancy ones we use here in America. But don't be

mistaken, I would not want to experience another night like the ones we had in Wyzan.

It is hard to describe the poverty that existed in our house. I remember when I was three or three and a half years old, right after WWI, we received a package of food from my Tante Aidel and her daughter Polly in America. It contained a bag of flour, a bag of sugar, a can of olive oil and a big salami marked 'kosher.' The first three items my father said were OK. However, he was in doubt about the salami. After all, it had come from *treif* America. While we prayed to the Lord, my father ran to the *Rov*, the salami in hand. The *Rov* inspected it and pronounced it 'kosher!' What a *simcha*! Every night at supper time my mother cut a piece of bread and a thin slice of salami, about a quarter of an inch for each of us. This package of food lasted for a long time, especially the salami. How fortunate we considered ourselves. May the souls of Tante Aidel and Cousin Polly rest among the holy and pure.

I don't remember having separate dishes for each one of us. We had one big wooden dish in which my mother put boiled potatoes and we used 'Adam's silverware.' For *Shabbos* we used wooden spoons and had a few knives for the table, but no forks. We owned a few glasses from which we drank tea, but many times we had to borrow a glass from a neighbor. Woe if a glass broke. A catastrophe!

While food was very scarce in the house, we did have nice clothes. Tante Aidel and Polly always gathered old clothes from family members and sent them to us in Europe. However, footwear was more of a problem. The old shoes that came from America were either too big or too small. During the week, we wore wooden shoes, but for *Shabbos* we wore leather shoes that my parents managed to have made for us by a local shoemaker.

It was a life full of struggle. We lacked food and sanitary conditions as well as other essential items in life. Despite this, we managed to find

happiness. I credit this to the atmosphere which existed in my parents' house. All of us were taught to be respectful. There was unity and laughter. People stood around the windows of our house listening to the beautiful melodies my father and mother taught us. My sisters and brother had beautiful voices. They say in Yiddish, *"Ven zingt a tzegeiner? Ven er iz hungerik!"* When does a Gypsy sing? When he is hungry!

For 36 hours, my father was a 'geveer' . . .

I am sure you realize that we depended on financial help from American relatives. We could not have survived without it. My mother had a second cousin, Michla Kaufman. Michla became an orphan at a very early age, so Bubbe cared for her until she went to America. For a few years, we hardly heard from her until one day, we received a letter. Usually, we received money from America in cash dollars. Michla's letter also contained money, but not dollars. It was a check. When my father opened the envelope, he read the figure *one thousand dollars.* Well, how can I describe to you the *simcha?* My father, mother and three older sisters sat down to make plans of how to use such an astronomical amount of money. First, my mother suggested the straw roof should be replaced with wooden shingles; second, one hundred dollars for each daughter should be put aside for *nadan* (dowry); for everybody in the *mishpocho-* new shoes, a big supply of sugar, salt, matches, flour and kerosene. Perhaps, we should buy an additional cow as well. And of course, ten or twenty dollars should be given to the *shul* to buy a full barrel of kerosene in memory of Michla's parents.

Father said it must be kept a secret. Bubbe, a very clever woman, wondered how he will explain all the richness that has come upon us. After all, everybody knows what's cooking in the next door neighbor's pot! Suddenly, Yosel became a millionaire!?

Mother agreed with Bubbe and said we will tell the people that this time, our relatives were extremely gracious and sent us more than usual. Nobody has to know that we will put away $400 for *nadan*. After we buy everything, at least $300-400 will remain which we will put into a copper pot and bury it in the yard. (Safe deposit boxes hadn't come to Wyzan yet.) A good suggestion indeed.

At this conversation, I was six years old. While they were talking, I made believe that I practiced reading in the *Siddur*. In ETHICS OF THE FATHERS 4:25, we find, "Elisha ben Avuyah said, 'If one learns while he is young, to what is it likened? To ink, written on new, clean paper. But, if one learns when he is old, to what is it likened? To ink written on blotted paper.'" So I remember this important session. The atmosphere was like *Purim* after Haman was hanged, "the Jews had light, gladness and joy." (BOOK OF ESTHER)

My father had never seen a check in his life. To exchange into *zlotys* the American dollars which we usually received, he had to visit a *Suvalker* gentleman who must have been in America to study finances. And this time too, my father, in high spirits, traveled to Suvalk to cash the check. While he was away, my mother promised that 'tomorrow, upon Father's return, we will have a good dinner.'

All of us ran to the window to see if Father is back. Lo and behold, the coach driver stopped near our house. With smiling faces, we were ready to greet Father, the *geveer*. In ISAIAH 50, it says, "The show of their countenance witnesses against them." We looked at our father. . . *oy*. . . not the same face. No smile, his eyes sunken deep in their holes; it was frightening. 'What happened? Are you sick? Did somebody take the money?' cried my mother.

'No, no,' said my father in a very sad voice. 'I am ok, nobody robbed me. It was just a mistake. It was not 1000^{00}; it was only 10^{00}. When I saw the *one* followed by three zeros, 1-0-0-0, I thought it was $1000.'

With this gloomy explanation, the straw roof remained, there was no *nadan* for the daughters and the supplies remained sparse. Yosel, the *geveer*, turned *kabtzon* again. But we did have a good dinner because Mother had gone yesterday and bought meat to be paid tomorrow. . . . Father did give 10% to the *shul*; after all, a *neder* (promise) is a *neder*.

We learned two good lessons. First, don't count the money until you have it in your hand. Second, be careful with the zeros. It is true that a zero by himself is nothing, but it depends where the zero is put. There are people who are 'zeros' and we have to know where they belong.

The mistake in reading the figure happened only once. But, our family was truly lucky to have had such devoted relatives in America. Twice a year, before *Pesach* and *Rosh Hashanah*, they sent money and my father would dictate thank-you letters to my sister *Dvor'ke* because her phrases were better and she had the nicest handwriting. Meanwhile, my mother sat by her side and added a few words to make the letter stronger. We always prayed for these people who kept us alive.

We had another source of sustenance. We had a cow. The cow gave us milk. Half of it we sold and with the other half we whitened our soup or the big pot of chicory. Coffee we could not afford. The cow also produced 'natural fertilizer,' which we gave to a Polish farmer who in return, allowed our cow to graze on his pasture. Sometimes sad things happened. While we were milking the cow, a spider or bee would bite her and she stepped backwards to chase it away and, *oy vey*, the milk spilled. With this went the soup, the chicory and the few pennies.

Once a year a big event took place. The cow gave birth to a calf. *Mazel tov!* What a *simcha*. Sometimes we kids took the calf into the house to kiss her and play with her. We didn't mind that she played us 'dirty.' After raising her for a couple of weeks, my father took the calf to the *shochet*. Hallelujah, we had meat! Most of it was sold for a few *groshen*. We gave the hindquarter to a non-Jew who gave us some fruit

or vegetables in return.

The day that my father took the calf to the *shochet* was like *Tisha B'Av* for us kids. Although we begged our father not to slaughter it, my father had more concern that his family have a piece of meat than he had sorrow for the calf.

I recall a story someone told me at the time, about a widow who had a son and a cow. The cow was central to survival. When the boy went to the yeshiva, he wrote his mother inquiring about the cow before asking about her. *"Vos macht de coo un vos macht du?"* (How is the cow and how are you?) Although there is humor to this story, it is not a complete exaggeration. We looked upon a cow as a source of survival. In India they don't kill a cow because it is considered sacred.

Despite the food shortage, we managed as long as we had *bulves*. I remember a song my mother used to sing,

Zuntag bulves, Montag bulves;
Deenstag un Mitvoch bulves;
Donershtag un Freitag bulves.
Shabbos, a nice bulvenem kugele; Zuntag veiter bulves.

"Sunday potatoes, Monday potatoes . . . *Shabbos* a potato kugel . . . "

As I said, my mother had a little bakery. I remember the big mixing bowl which we called Daisy. It held about seven or eight gallons and she filled it with flour, water and yeast and my mother mixed the entire batter by hand. Oh, how she labored. When the family was around, we would take over and we truly understood the verse from GENESIS III: 19, "With the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread."

My mother would put the first big loaf of bread on the wobbly table, cover it with a piece of linen, put the knife next to it and say, *"Kinderlach ere zeit hungerik, der broit is oef dem tish."* (Children, you are hungry, the bread is on the table.) The loaf of bread didn't last long. After all, eleven souls had to be fed.

For the main meal which we ate after midday, there was a big

wooden bowl filled with cooked potatoes. Sometimes, in the summer, we had a sour pickle. *Oy a mechayeh!* When Mother had a few extra *groshen*, she would purchase a herring in a lot of brine into which we dipped the potatoes. Mother then sliced the herring— You needed a magnifying glass to see it. But my heart cried. Mother had a piece of herring for everybody, but didn't leave any for herself.

How did we wash the few dishes and copper pots that we owned? There was no kosher soap. Again, we used the natural resources - sand and muscle - provided by the Lord and the pots shined.

Chanukah was a great time. My parents bought a goose right after *Succos* and it, too, was fed potatoes and small pieces of bread. When the goose was fat, we took it to the *shochet* for slaughter. The feathers were used for pillows. Mother rendered the goose fat and this *schmaltz* lasted for a long time. She used to *shmeer* some *schmaltz* with onion on a piece of bread and give it to us. It was good. Some of the *schmaltz* she put away for *Pesach* to be used for the *kneidlach*. The meat from the goose lasted for several *Shabbosim*. No refrigeration was necessary because the temperature outside was always below zero. I left home when I was ten and a half years old to go to the *Suvalker Talmud Torah*. Sometimes my mother sent me a container of *gribiness* and it was *a mechayeh.*

In preparation for *Pesach* another bird came into our lives, the turkey. For months the turkey didn't eat on her own. To fatten her up, my father forced her to eat more than she wanted. I am sure many times she felt that somebody was choking her, but it worked. So for *Pesach* we had small pieces of turkey. The bird lasted eight days for the eleven people in the family– Father, Mother, seven children, Bubbe and Zayde. Of course there also was always a stranger or a Jewish soldier who was stationed in Wyzan.

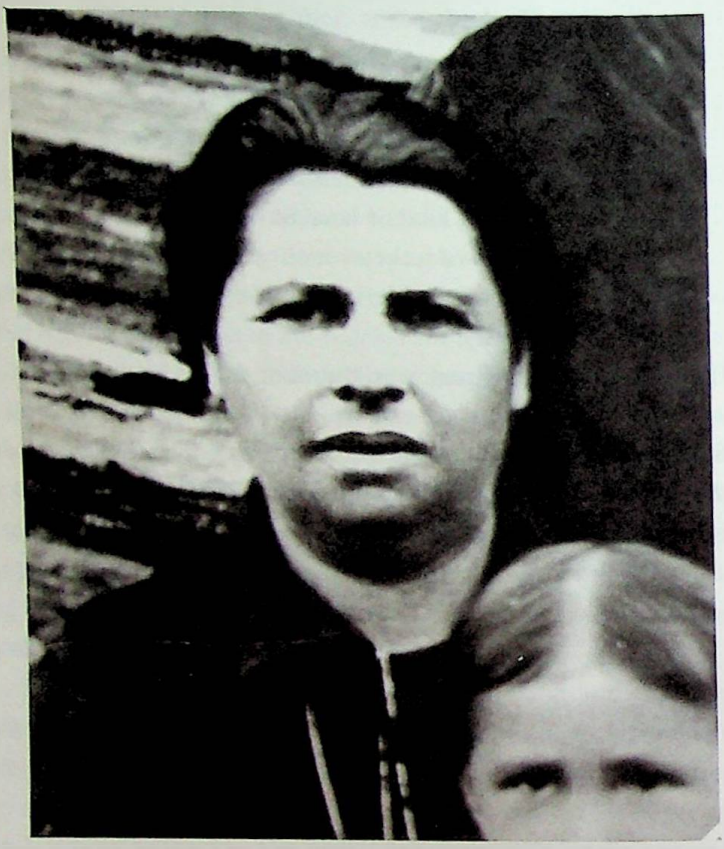
In my parents' house before *Pesach*, *matzah* was baked to be sold to the people in the *shtetl*. In addition to the people in the family who could

work, we employed another dozen people. For a day of work, six in the morning to six in the evening, they would earn one *zloty* which at the time was worth 20 cents. But, people were eager to earn the money and the atmosphere was happy.

Two days before *Pesach* every house was thoroughly cleaned. All the belongings were taken outside for air. We not only searched for *chometz*, we also searched for strange and very unwelcome 'guests.'

We couldn't afford wine so we drank *mead* which is made from hops. For soup we had a *rossel,* a kind of borscht. We ate homemade *matzah*, *schmaltz* and small pieces of turkey which you would have had to have a microscope to see, but we all felt fine. We were hungry all year but on *Pesach* we felt like royalty.

The most important part was the atmosphere in the house. We chanted the *Haggadah*, sang all the *Pesach* songs and had all the traditional items on the table. I must confess that I don't think the *morror* and the salt water were necessary to remind us of bitter times. It was bitter and salty all year round! ◆



Chaya Kaufman Lindenthal
- My Dear Mother -

My Mother's Sabbath Candles

Everybody tried to dress up for *Shabbos* as best as they could. An atmosphere of holiness descended upon the house. My mother prepared two candles for *Shabbos*. It is customary to light a candle for each living member of the family, but, she didn't have money for more than two. With her black shawl on her head and my sisters beside her, she lit the candles. She waved her hands in welcome to the angels, then covered her face and said the *brocho*. I felt a sense of awe and pride, a sense of the sublime when she *benched licht*. *". . .le-hadlik ner shel Shabbos."* My sisters answered, *Amen* as she continued silently in Yiddish, *G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; G-d of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, send Thy blessing upon this house. Protect my husband and mother. See that my children grow up dedicated to thy Torah. Oh G-d, send the angels of peace to guard us from evil.* Tearfully she kissed her daughters.

I find the following poem about the Sabbath candles, by P.M. Raskin, very beautiful:

From memory's spring flows a vision tonight,
My mother is kindling and blessing the light;
The light of Queen Sabbath, the heavenly flame,
That one day in seven quells hunger and shame.
My mother is praying and screening her face,
Too bashful to gaze at the Sabbath light's grace.
She murmurs devoutly, 'Almighty, be blessed,
For sending Thy angel of joy and of rest.
And may as the candles of Sabbath divine
The eyes of my son in Thy Law ever shine' . . .
Of childhood, fair childhood, the years are long fled:
Youth's candles are quenched, and my mother is dead.
And yet ev'ry Friday, when twilight arrives,
The face of my mother within me revives;
A prayer on her lips, 'O Almighty, be blessed,
For sending us Sabbath, the angel of rest.'
And some hidden feeling I cannot control
A Sabbath light kindles deep, deep in my soul.

My father put on his *Shabbos* jacket and a black hat which must have been at least 30 years old, yet, he looked like a prince. He took Dovid and me to *shul* and, upon returning home, took us by the hand and walked the length of the house singing, *Sholom Aleichem*, welcoming the Angels of Peace. He then recited PROVERBS 31:

A good wife who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband trusts in her, And he never lacks gain. She brings him good and not harm, All the days of her life. She seeks out wool and flax, And works with her willing hands. She is like a merchant ship - She brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night, And gives food to her household, And rations to her maids. She considers a field and buys it; With her earnings she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, And braces her arms for work. She finds that her trade is profitable; Her lamp goes not out at night. She sets her hands to the distaff; Her fingers hold the spindle. She stretches out her hand to the poor; She reaches out her arms to the needy. She is not

afraid of the snow for her household, For all her household is clad in scarlet wool. She makes her own tapestries; Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known at the gates, As he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen cloth and sells it; She supplies merchants with girdles. Dignity and honor are her garb; She smiles looking at the future. She opens her mouth with wisdom, And kindly counsel is on her tongue. She looks after her household; She never eats bread of idleness. Her children rise and bless her, And her husband praises her, saying; 'Many women do worthily, But you excel them all.' Charm is deceptive, and beauty is vain; Only a godfearing woman shall be praised. Give her due credit for achievement; Let her own works praise her at the gates.'

Mother's eyes shined like two diamonds. He then made *Kiddush* over two *challahs* - nobody had wine. Mother served the food, we sang *Shabbos z'miros* and chanted the *Birkas Hamazon*. Everyone was in high spirits and while Mom and Dad slept, friends visited.

Early *Shabbos* morning, I was always awakened by my father chanting *Tehillim* to a special melody which still rings in my ears. With this same melody, after *Shalosh Seudos* on Saturday at twilight, he chanted PSALM 119, consisting of 176 verses; eight verses for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

I recall an incident about my mother and the lighting of *Shabbos* candles - a painful one for which she never forgave herself. It is important first, though, to say that the *mitzvah* of lighting the candles was ordained by G-d. The *Talmud* tells us that it is one of the three greatest *mitzvos* to which a woman is obligated. The other two are 'purity of family life' and 'taking challah.'

Suvalk, the largest city near Wyzan, served as a center for the Polish Government. My mother had to appear in court as a witness on a Friday and the following evening was *Shavuos*. I asked the judge to have the case start early so we could get back to Wyzan before *Shabbos* began. Instead of starting early he kept postponing it until after midday. At that

time of year, it took six hours from Suvalk to Wyzan by horse and buggy. We could not remain in Suvalk for three days (*Shabbos* and two days of *Shavuos*) because we did not have a place to stay. However, the *baal agoloh* promised Mother that he would make it home before *Shabbos*.

We arrived in Wyzan 11 minutes late. According to *Halacha*, if you don't light the candles on time, it is better not to light them at all. I know that the Lord heard my mother's tears and sighing, but she never forgave herself. Because of this sad incident, I always tell my wife when it is ten minutes before candle-lighting. Naomi is a very pious woman and does not need my reminders, but it became a habit. To me, the *Shabbos* candles give off more light than a million light bulbs. I shall never forget my mother's sadness.

◆

My Father

I did not spend many years with my parents. I left them at age ten and a half to go to the Suvalker Talmud Torah. Nevertheless, I remember many beautiful things about them.

Though physically deformed from a childhood fall, my father was a beautiful man, not well educated, but a spiritual giant. His mother had died and his father had remarried. My father told me that his stepmother was a terrible woman and that his father almost lost his mind from grief.

My father held a number of positions in the community including that of *Gabai* for which his duties were numerous. He collected money each week to pay the *shochet* and teachers, and for orphans and the poor. He also gave out the honors at *shul* during services. In other words, he had authority. People listened to him respectfully and admired him.

Each year before the High Holy Days, money was sent from America to be divided among the needy in Wyzan. Generally, there was no

problem with the poor. They accepted it gladly and with thanks. The problem was with those who were poor, yet ashamed to take charity. On *erev Rosh Hashanah*, he recorded the distribution of the money, omitting the names of those who received it in secret. One day, a man with great *chutzpa* challenged my father to disclose the names. The implication was that he had taken the funds for himself. I was present at this particular scene and said to the *chutzpanik*, 'Sir, when you are *Gabai*, you will do as you wish. Now, my father is the *Gabai* and he does as he sees fit!' Strong words indeed. I hoped that my father would be proud and compliment me for defending him, but that wasn't the case. Said my father to me, 'Apologize to this man. It is not your business.' Years later, this incident would come up again.

His Siddur . . .

A *Siddur* is a book from which a Jewish person prays daily, on *Shabbos* and on holidays. It is a small encyclopedia where a Jew finds his spiritual sustenance as well as his comfort in time of trouble. It helps him celebrate, enables him to cope with tragedies and helps him communicate with his Maker. The *Siddur* also has instruction on how to prepare various *mitzvos*. In short, it is a spiritual treasury.

Here in the United States, whenever you enter the Synagogue, there are plenty of *Siddurim*, but a shortage of people to use them. In my *shtetl*, the trouble was a shortage of *Siddurim*. I can't recall anyone who did not come to daily services, but the *kehillah* was too poor to buy prayer books, so each person had to bring his own.

My darling father used his *Siddur* at all times. Even when he was working as a tailor, he would recite PSALMS by heart, but the *Siddur* was in front of him. Using the *Siddur* constantly, took its toll. It became so torn that my father had to keep all the pages together by tying them with a string. He poured out his heart to the Almighty and asked Him to make

life a little easier, to help him earn enough money for his family's sustenance and for *Klal Yisroel.* My father's *Siddur* pages were moist from tears. I believe that this *Siddur* became one of the holiest objects in our house.

My mother once went to Suvalk to see a doctor and when she came back, she brought me a small *Siddur* which has traveled with me all my life, as have the *tefillin* my father sent me for my Bar Mitzvah. My parents were not present on this occasion as I was then already in Grodno Yeshiva. Once our youngest son Harold, G-d bless him, said to me, 'Daddy, I need a gift from you.' For a while I thought he would ask for a car or a trip to Europe. How mistaken I was. He said, 'Daddy, I want this little *Siddur.*'

"*When thou liest down and when thou riseth up. . . .*"

My father was an extremely religious man and lived-up to 'the letter of the law.' He would say *Kre-as Shema* before falling asleep, understanding that he may not arise in the morning. Part of the text of this prayer is as follows:

> *Blessed are Thou, Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, who closest my eyes in sleep, my eyelids in slumber. May it be Thy will, Lord my G-d and G-d of my fathers, to grant that I lie down in peace and that I rise up in peace. Let not my thoughts upset me - nor evil dreams, nor sinful fancies. May my family ever be perfect in Thy sight. Grant me light, lest I sleep the sleep of death; for it is Thou who givest light to the eyes. Blessed are Thou, O Lord whose majesty gives light to the whole world. Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. . . .*
>
> *For Thy salvation I hope, O Lord. I hope, O Lord, for Thy salvation. O Lord, for Thy salvation I hope. In the name of the Lord G-d of Israel, may (the angel) Michael be at my right hand, and (the angel) Gabriel at my left; before me (the angel) Uriel; behind me (the angel) Raphael; and above my head the Divine Presence.*

He continued with PSALM 128,

A Pilgrim Song: Happy is everyone who reveres the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you eat of the toil of your hands, you shall be happy and at ease. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the interior of your house; your children like olive plants around your table. Behold, thus indeed shall the man be blessed who reveres the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion; may you see the welfare of Jerusalem all the days of your life; may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

and concluded with, *"Tremble, and do not sin; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still."* With those words he fell asleep.

The first words on his lips as he arose early morning were, *Modeh Ani. "I render thanks to Thee, everlasting King, Who hast mercifully restored my soul within me; Thy faithfulness is great."* As I advanced in the Hebrew language, I had a more profound understanding of this morning prayer. The TALMUD TRACTATE *BROCHOS*, PAGE 57, says that sleep is one-sixtieth of death. If we are fortunate enough to awaken, we thank G-d for the return of our souls. My father's prayer upon arising was actually an expression of gratitude to G-d for answering the prayer he said before going to sleep.

The Psychologist . . .

I mentioned several times that my father was very clever, a man with little education but much common sense. He was something special. Besides being a good husband, father, father-in-law and proud Jew, he was a great psychologist. He understood children and the world in general.

One day I came home from *cheder* with my face scratched (I was no *tzadik* either). My father sat me down and I had to tell him the entire story of what happened. In our school there was one boy approximately my age who was known as not the nicest of the boys. He personified Ishmael, Abraham's son, about whom the Bible says, "*Yodo bakol v'yad kol bo.*" GENESIS XV:12 He was a bully who fought everybody and

everybody reciprocated. I reported what happened.

I did expect my father would get angry but he became particularly stern and gave me a strict warning, 'No more shall I see you in the company of this boy. As of now you have to choose only good friends, good boys.' I wanted to find grace in my father's eyes. It pleased him when I told a similar story from GENESIS XXI: 12, about Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Ishmael. When Sarah saw that Isaac kept company with Ishmael, she said to her husband Abraham, "Chase out this slave, Hagar and her son. I do not want that my beloved son should find himself in the company of Ishmael." Although Abraham was reluctant to do it, he heard G-d's voice saying to him, "Whatever Sarah tells you to do, do it. Because the seeds of Isaac will be the Jewish nation."

I was pleased to see that my father's anger had subsided. Later in life, when I studied the Book of PSALMS, I read in the first chapter exactly what my father had said to me.

Happy is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord; And in His law doth he meditate day and night. PSALMS I: 1-2

In the Grodno Yeshiva, which I will describe later, we were not allowed to *lern* by ourselves, but always with a friend. It helped to fathom the real meaning of the subject. One teacher said to us many times, 'Boys, try to be in good company.' The teacher told a story from the *Talmud* about the sage, *Choni Hamagol*, who slept for 70 years. When he woke up, he looked around and could not find his friends and associates. He lifted his hands towards heaven, "*o chavrusa o misusa*," (Give me friends or give me death). What a great lesson.

All my life, I have tried to be in good company and always learned something from them. It pleases me that my children have chosen good company. The Hebrew word for 'parents' is *horim*; the word for 'teachers' is *morim*, two quite similar words. I was fortunate to have had many good teachers, but my parents were the real teachers who gave me

direction in life.

When I look around, here in the United States, I frequently see how children have not been taught respect for their teachers and parents. 'Get off my back' is a common response when parents ask children to do something. Sometimes I blame the parents for not spending enough time with them or not setting a good example. I can never forget a particular scene - a father lying on the floor and a youngster riding on his back. The father is the horse and the child is the rider. You would never have seen this in Europe.

The Lie Detector . . .

Any European child of age seven or eight knew already how to *daven*. My father took me to *shul* three times a day where there was a *Beis Medrash*, a large sanctuary and a little *shtibl* (small *minyan* room).

One day my father came home and said, 'I didn't see you tonight at *Mincha*. Where were you?' I wanted to outsmart my father and told him that I had *davened* in the *shtibl*. 'You are lying. I was there,' said my dad. Can you imagine my downfall?! He didn't punish me, but said in a very strong voice, 'This is your first lie. Let it be the last.' I learned at that moment that it pays much more to do the correct thing– to be honest not only to others, but to yourself. In LEVITICUS 19:11 we find, "You shall not steal. Neither deal falsely. Neither lie to one another." Many times you can recognize a liar by looking in his face. ISAIAH 3:9 says, "their faces give testimony." The face of the liar is the real lie detector. ◆

Hob nit kein moro far de toyteh . . .

My father was head of the *Chevra Kadisha,* the group that prepares the dead for burial. I was only seven years old when he took me to watch them prepare a body by washing it, dressing it in shrouds, etc. I was terrified and pale as a ghost. My father noticed my fear. '*Mein kind, hob nit kein moro far de toyteh; hob moro far de lebedikeh'* (My child, don't fear the dead, fear the living). How right he was. It was the Germans who exterminated six million Jews.

While I am on the subject of shrouds, I would like to share with you a humorous story that happened in Wyzan. There was a man, Eizik der Volak Macher who made winter shoes. He was very poor and very pious. He knew PIRKE AVOS from which he used to quote two famous verses, "Prepare thyself in the vestibule in order that you will be worthy to enter the big hall" (IV:21) and

Akavya, the son of Mahalel said, 'Reflect upon three things and you will

not come into the grip of sin; know whence you came, whither thou art going; and before whom you are destined to give a strict account. Whence you came - from a malodorous drop; whither you are going - to a place of dust and worms and moths; and before Whom you are destined to give a strict account - before the Supreme King of Kings the Holy One, blessed be He. (III)

In order to live a life of humility and to remind himself that he is on earth for only a short period, Eizik from time to time, would put on *tachrichim*, his eternal clothes. His wife and children objected vigorously as it was very frightening. It so happened one *Shabbos* that he ate very greasy kugel. The leftover kugel, filled with *schmaltz*, he ate on Sunday and Monday. He took sick and felt death approaching. He summoned his wife and children for the last time and instructed them how to handle his funeral. Towards the end he managed to remark, 'You see my wife and children, you can't die from *tachrichim*, but you can die from eating old *kugel!*' ◆

My Bubbe

My bubbe, Mother's mother, was eighty-six years old when she died. My mother and father loved her dearly and we respected her greatly. Bubbe Golde Kaufman was a *goote neshomeh*. She used to tell us stories about her youth, how she got married and about the birth of her two sons and four daughters. Her sons and three of her daughters went to America, while she remained with us in Europe. Bubbe was an extremely smart person.

I sensed that she loved me more than any of her grandchildren; not that I was any prettier or smarter. The real reason was that I was named after her husband who had been a fisherman. Wyzan did not have a doctor, so he was rushed to Zitkin, a small town in East Prussia after becoming ill with pneumonia. According to Jewish Law, a person must be buried where he dies unless he is buried in Israel, so he was buried in Zitkin.

Bubbe's greatest pleasure was to go to *shul* on *Shabbos* morning. When she became old and frail I helped her walk there. One *Shabbos* she said to me, '*Mein kind*, open the door.' I did. '*Mein kind*, close the door.' I did that also. She repeated this several times. I was confused and thought Bubbe was losing her mind. She noticed my inquisitive look and said, '*Chatzkele*, you think that I'm *oever-botel*. No, my child, I'm very much alert. I just want to tell you that my 86 years of life flew by as fast as it took you to open and close the door several times.'

A *Miracle Postpones Bubbe's Death . . .*

I mentioned before that three of Bubbe's daughters and two sons lived in America while she lived with my mother and the rest of us. One day we received a letter from Tante Aidel that she and her husband were coming from America to visit. Can you imagine the excitement! A committee from the *shtetl* was formed to plan the visit. We were all in a state of excitement. The *Americaners* are coming! The committee planned to discuss the needs of our community with them. The roofs of the *shulen* needed repair, the fence around the cemetery needed to be completed and more money was needed in the treasury! In my father's house, our happiness was beyond comprehension. But as the Yiddish saying goes, '*A mensch tracht un G-t lacht*' (A person plans and G-d laughs).

Two weeks after receiving the letter from America, Bubbe became gravely ill. What a disappointment! The people in town gathered in the *shul* to *daven* and recite *Tehillim*. Our prayers were answered in a miraculous way. A troop of soldiers was in Wyzan to guard the Polish - Lithuanian border. Among them was a Jewish physician named Dr. Rosenberg. Our town never had doctors or dentists or pharmacists. Suddenly, a doctor appeared just as Bubbe took sick! Dr. Rosenberg heard about the excitement and offered to help. I remember a man

galloping on horseback to Suvalk to fill Dr. Rosenberg's prescription.

Sure enough, Bubbe got better. Her daughter and son-in-law arrived from America and the people of Wyzan were happy and celebrated like the Jews after the defeat of Haman. Bubbe and Tante Aidel were together, kissing and hugging every minute of the day. They had not seen each other for sixty years. It was a mixture of sadness and gladness. Tante Aidel brought gifts for all of us. We arranged comfortable beds for our distinguished guests, while we slept on the floor. We managed to feed them eggs and a little chicken while the children had bread and sweet peas. Tante Aidel observed the poverty in the house and promised that when she returned to America, financial help would come.

We had a great time during those three weeks! We sang, we danced, we laughed, but towards the end of the visit, our joy was taken away. Two days before my aunt and uncle had to leave, Bubbe took a turn for the worse. The doctor told us there was nothing he could do and that the end was coming in a day or two. Tante Aidel was a pious woman. When she heard the terrible news, she went to the *Rov* and asked if it was all right for her to return to America. In doing so, she would be unable to sit *Shiva*. The *Rov* permitted her to return, understanding that the alternative meant she would have to wait very long for another boat. The day after her conversation with the *Rov*, she, her husband and my father went to Zitkin, East Prussia to visit her father's grave. Unknown to them, we in Wyzan were burying her mother at approximately the same time.

There is a saying in the *Talmud* that seeing things is different from hearing about them. Because she had seen the level of poverty Tante Aidel made sure that substantial aid flowed into Wyzan. Our financial situation improved greatly after her visit. Later in this book you will read about a coat that made history. For now, I will say that, as a yeshiva student, I was one of the best dressed young men, outfitted in the used clothes sent by my American cousins. ◆



- Tante Aidel -

Life in Poland

Winters were harsh. It was usually thirty or forty degrees below zero. The most difficult time was in the morning because the ashes from the oven had to be taken outside and the cow had to be milked and fed. The house was very cold and the dirt floor was frozen. Boiling a pot of water to make tea for breakfast required a lot of effort. The firewood was damp and we had to blow and blow with our mouths to make it ignite. Matches were expensive so we split them in half to save money. But we made it.

Summer was nice. The fields were green, the pine trees smelled wonderful and the singing of the birds delighted us. However, the summer brought a new set of problems— flies and mosquitoes and worse, the lightening which often ignited the straw roof. We prayed for G-d's protection.

Life in Poland was more or less normal but included a small outburst

of anti-Semitism every so often. For example: It was compulsory to go to school until the age of thirteen; we went to the Wyzan public school. We were young and many Gentile children were cruel to us. Sometimes, for amusement, they pushed pork into our mouths knowing that we could not eat it and a number of times we came to blows. Even if we were right, in the eyes of the Polish teachers, we were wrong. But, the Jewish children, *Yiddishe kep,* were outstanding students and the teachers could not help but compliment us on our scholastic achievements. And life continued.

General Marshall Joseph Pilsutzky, head of the Polish Army who had liberated Poland from the Russians, kept things fairly safe for us. Pilsutzky liked the Jews. There was a story told that during the war, the Russians encircled his army and he almost fell into their hands. He escaped and a Jewish family hid him. How authentic the story is, I do not know, but one thing I am sure of: as long as he lived, the Jews lived a relatively normal life.

Things changed when Pilsutzky died. The people said to the Jews, *"Vasha oychetz umar"* (Your father is dead). Then, the Polish Government's encouragement of anti-Semitism became very strong. I remember very well when Pilsutzky died. It was just before *Shavuos* and I was in Vilna. There was a *pogrom* on *Shavuos* and thugs ran around like crazy, attacking Jews in the streets. One Polish peasant lifted his axe to attack my friend with whom I was walking. Had he been successful he would have split my friend's head in half. G-d was with me. I jumped up, knocked the axe from his hand and punched him in his face. Blood gushed from him. We ran away. My friend was safe. We came to a synagogue and found a large group of Jews gathered. I thanked G-d for giving me the strength to save my friend's life and to teach this shameful Pole that Jewish blood is not cheap. How wonderful it was to be young and strong.

The really big change in Poland took place when Hitler came to power. The change in attitude of the Poles toward the Jewish people was enormous and horrible. Once, when I was in Wyzan for a few days, I was walking from our house to my sister's, a distance of about 100 yards; a Polish boy that I had known since childhood came by and hit me on my head with a pipe. I was covered in blood.

In the city of Pshitic, there was a terrible *pogrom*. The people went on a rampage killing Jews, destroying homes and businesses. This happened all over and all the time.

Blind anti-Semitism dominated not only the Polish population, but the official Government as well. The majority of the members of the Polish *Seim* (Senate) were anti-Jewish. Two senators were the most vicious - one, Father Chachick and the other Mrs. Pristova. Among the things they did was to propose a decree forbidding *shechita,* the kosher slaughter of animals. The Jews tried to fight back, but the Senate passed a law that only a minimum number of animals be allowed for kosher slaughter. In order to enforce the law, the *chalef* (special knife) had to be kept in the Polish police stations. This decree and a boycott of Jewish merchants caused bankruptcy for many. The Polish anti-Semites promoted the slogan, *Svoy do S'vego* (Recognize Your Own). A Pole should buy only from a Polish merchant.

The editor of a Jewish daily newspaper put a caricature in his paper of a Polish merchant hugging a pig with the caption, *Svoy do S'vego*. The editor was put in jail for six months. Later, he wrote an editorial in which he said that printing the caricature was worth the six months in jail.

In the Bible, Samson said, *"Tomes nafshi im Plishtim"* (I will die, but I will take with me the Philistines). In 1943, the Germans destroyed the Ghetto of Warsaw. While the Nazis were burning the ghetto, the Jews inside fought bravely and killed many Nazis, but while raging flames engulfed the brave Jews— old, young, adults, children— the Poles

shouted, 'Burn Jew. Burn!'

Some tried to escape; little Jewish children tried to climb over the wall that surrounded the ghetto, searching for a few potatoes or an onion for their starving parents. Most didn't make it. No food or water was allowed to be brought into the ghetto. The Polish people were promised a pound of sugar or salt for every Jew they identified. These collaborators, called *schmaltzovniks* by the Jews, were very successful. G-d, how could people stoop so low. No wonder Hitler chose Poland to erect the crematoriums and concentration camps. He knew he would receive the cooperation of the populace.

In 1946, after the war in which millions of Jewish lives were destroyed, some survivors returned to their city, Kieltz. The Poles were surprised to see them alive. Right away they concocted the old accusation that a Jew had killed a Christian child to use its blood for *matzah* and sure enough, 46 Jews were decapitated. A Polish *pogrom* after the Holocaust! The Poles went to church every Sunday and were supposed to be religious people.

Poland was in ruins. Their army was beaten. Cities, including the capital, Warsaw, were destroyed. Polish women were raped by the German soldiers. Yet, they rejoiced seeing the Jews being beaten and burned. They deserved the punishment from G-d.

> *And it came to pass that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon. . .*
>
> EXODUS 12:29

The question is asked why the slaves in the dungeon should suffer? The answer is given by Rashi: 'It is true that the slaves in the dungeon did not participate in the enslavement of the Jews. They were slaves themselves; yet they rejoiced seeing the Jews being beaten and enslaved. That is why their firstborn also died.'

I know that if some Polish non-Jews will read this chapter, they may

say that I made-up the stories myself. No, these stories are true. Shame on them, those Poles who acted worse than animals.

To say that all the Polish people were cruel would be untrue. There were fine, godfearing Poles, some who endangered their lives to save Jews. *Yad Vashem*, the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, perpetuates the names of these Righteous Gentiles.

My dear readers, Polish Jewry was something special. Here in America, we are blessed with wealthy individuals whose generosity makes possible hospitals, universities, *yeshivos,* homes for the aged, etc. Polish Jewry was poor, yet it supported many institutions. Thousands of *yeshiva bochurim* and children in Talmud Torahs survived because of these poor but generous Jews. Thousands of Jewish families welcomed children into their homes and shared with them. I was a recipient of this generosity. I ate all my meals in different homes while in Suvalk and for six years in Grodno. Sustenance, given by these poor Jews, was their contribution without which most of us couldn't have dreamed of *lerning*.

Polish Jewry produced great people: rabbis, scholars, poets, writers, physicians. The Poles, not unlike other peoples of the world, did not appreciate the contribution of the Jews.

May the merciful Father who dwells on high, in His infinite mercy, remember those saintly, upright and blameless souls, the holy communities who offered their lives for the sanctification of the Divine Name. They were lovely and amiable in their life, and were not parted in their death. They were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions to do the will of their Master and the desire of their Stronghold. May our G-d remember them favorably among the other righteous of the world; may He avenge the blood of His servants which has been shed, as it is written in the Torah of Moses, the man of G-d: 'O nations, make his people joyful! He avenges the blood of his servants, renders retribution to his foes, and provides atonement for his land and his people.' And by Thy servants, the prophets, it is written: 'I will avenge their blood which I have not

avenged; the Lord dwells in Zion.' And in the holy writing it is said: 'Why should the nations say, Where then is their G-d? Let the vengeance for thy servants' blood that is shed be made known among the nations in our sight.' And it is said: 'The avenger of bloodshed remembers them; he does not forget the cry of the humble.' And it is further said: 'He will execute judgment upon the nations and fill [enemy's] head over all the wide earth. From the brook by the wayside he will drink; then he will lift up his head triumphantly.' MEMORIAL PRAYER TO VICTIMS OF THE CRUSADERS RECITED *SHABBOS* MORNING

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Wyzan

This tiny *shtetl* Wyzan where I was born, was in northeast Poland. The Polish people called it *Wyzany*. In my time about 50 Jewish families lived there. Wyzan was an old village founded in 1559 and Jews lived there since 1646. In the year 1766, there were 306 Jews living there. Wyzan played a very important role in the religious life of early Jewish settlers. To the west was Koenigsberg, the capital of East Prussia. Jews were forbidden to bury their dead there. Because Wyzan was the first town across the border, the Jews of Koenigsberg brought their dead to Wyzan for burial. I remember a section of the Wyzan Jewish cemetery where no burials took place because we were not sure if bodies were already there. My mother is buried in the Wyzan cemetery.

Wyzan was 30 miles north of the city of Suvalk which had a large Jewish community. The area was referred to as "the triangle" because Wyzan was in Poland, two miles north was East Prussia and two miles

east was Lithuania. If you took a chance and climbed onto the fragile roof of my father's house, you could see three countries.

Winters were very cold and very bad. When the sun went down, it was *choshech mitzrayim*, total darkness. There were neither electric nor kerosene lamps outside. The first half of the month was livable because the moon shined, but the second half of the month was awful. If you entered Wyzan at night and saw light in a house, you immediately knew that either somebody was very sick or a woman was in labor. In our houses, we congregated around the oven telling stories and trying to keep warm, using peat moss for fuel. The snow began in October, a little after *Succos*, and lasted almost to the middle of April.

The winter brought more economic hardship because the neighboring farmers could not come into the *shtetl* even by sled, to make their purchases at the little stores. The snow was so deep that it was a problem for us to get out of the house to milk the cow or to go to the outhouse. We never shoveled the snow; it melted. Afterward, there was mud. It was terrible – useless to polish our shoes.

The house was small and in the summer, the windows had to be open for ventilation. There were no screens for doors and windows. The flies and mosquitoes almost tore us apart, yet, we had an even more severe problem. Because the houses had straw roofs, lightening frequently ignited the straw and *poof!* Entire houses burned down. I remember that when there was thunder and lightening, the whole family prayed, 'Almighty G-d, save us,' and were delighted when it rained.

Wyzan had a big lake that bordered these three countries. In winter when it was frozen, we would skate its length and walk on the ice unafraid. This lake had a tremendous amount of fish. On Fridays, the gentile fishermen, knowing that the Jews were preparing for *Shabbos*, brought large and small fish to the marketplace which was in the center of the *shtetl.* Those who could afford it, bought pike and carp and those

who could not, bought the small fish called *yezgarkes* and *plotkes*. For obvious reasons, my mother bought the small fish from which she made gefilte fish. The taste is hard to describe. She put in bread, onions, eggs and some other ingredients. It was *tam Gan Eden*, a taste of the Garden of Eden. Maybe that's where gefilte fish originated. I believe that the best hotels in the Catskill Mountains cannot match the taste. Perhaps it was so good because we were so hungry.

Wyzan had a lot of thick woods with many tall trees. Often we would hear owls and the sounds of animals roaming there. We did not have running water. There were two wells on two different sides of the *shtetl*. Each family went out before dark to fetch a pail of water which we used to wash our hands and faces as well as for drinking and cooking. In order to get water, you had to lower the bucket which was attached by a rope and many times the rope would break. *Oy vey*! We treated the bucket very carefully and at night it was covered with a *shmatte* to protect it from insects. The fetching of water at the well always reminded me of the story of how Eliezer, Abraham's servant, went looking for a bride for his master's son, Isaac. He met Rebecca at twilight, the time when the girls went to fill their buckets with water. This same task of fetching water at the well was done by the personalities in the Bible thousands of years ago and also in my little *shtetl*.

Despite the difficulties, we managed to stay clean. Every Thursday evening in the cold months, my mother warmed up water and, using soap that she had made, each of us washed and changed our underwear. In the summer, we went bathing in the lake – men in an area separated from the women. We did not know about bathing suits so we were as naked as Adam and Eve before they ate from the forbidden fruit. As it is written in GENESIS 2:7, "After they ate, they opened their eyes and saw that they were naked." Also, we had a *mikveh* which the women would visit once a month in accordance with the laws of *taharas hamishpocho*, family

purity. The men would go to the *mikveh* before the High Holidays.

Wyzan was surrounded by even smaller villages where Gentile and some Jewish farmers lived. On Sundays, the Christians came to Wyzan to the *Koshchol*, the Catholic church, to pray. Mother would bake rye bread and *challahs* for them to buy. Of course, on Easter Sunday, we stayed home. It was a dangerous time for the Jews. I must say that the priest was friendly with my father. Why, you ask? Because my father, a tailor, always saw to it that his garments were in good shape and never charged him for it. So, we were more or less secure.

My kind of town . . .

The fifty or sixty Jewish families in Wyzan supported a *Beis Medrash*, a *shul* and a *kloiz*. The *shul* was used only for *Shabbos* in summer, but not in winter because it wasn't heated. Next to the *shul* was the *kloiz*. I began *cheder* there and remember the wooden tables and benches- not polished mahogany. We had to be careful not to injure our hands because of the splinters! At night nobody dared enter the *shul*. Legends were spread that the dead came to the *shul* at night. I still remember my fear.

How did people make a living? There were grocery stores, a hardware store, two bars for the peasants who came to sell their produce, three butcher shops, three tailors, three bakeries and of course, *luft menschen*, people who lived by purchasing a chicken, an animal skin or a little calf from a farmer and then selling it for a small profit. But mostly, people were hungry.

The *shtetl* came alive when there was a *yarid*, a farmers market. We bought from the farmers and in return they bought from our merchants. Of course my mother was up all night baking rye bread, pumpernickel and bagels. Sometimes a gentile farmer got wild from having had too many drinks and then we would have to take cover.

We did have friendly Polish neighbors. We grew up together. My mother, befriended a poor Polish widow named Kalushe whose son had died. She was a beautiful person who learned to speak Yiddish. In the morning, when my father was in *shul davening* and my mother was busy taking the ashes from the oven that kept us warm and the stove on which we cooked, Kalushe would say to me, *"Nu Chatzkele, zog 'modeh ani'"* (So, little Haskel, say your morning prayer).

To say that all the people in the town were *tzadikkim*, would not be telling the truth. There were some selfish people whose main objective was to better themselves, even at the expense of someone else, but they were very much in the minority. I even could defend them because it was such a harsh life. Nobody was secure with even the most basic necessities. However, we didn't have thieves and we didn't have murderers. On the contrary, when somebody was in trouble, everybody tried to be of help.

A popular Yiddish song with the lyrics *Mein Shtetele Belz*, for me, is *Mein Shtetele Wyzan.*

A model community . . .

Wyzan was a very well organized community. We had a *groshen bibliotec*, a library where books of all sorts were bought with pennies. Many were on historical themes ranging from Columbus to the French and Russian revolutions, all of which were translated into Yiddish. The library also had a large collection of Hebrew and Yiddish books on Zionism, poetry and the *aggadot* from the Talmud.

In Warsaw, there were a number of daily newspapers published including *Der Heint* (Today) and *Der Moment*. No one in Wyzan could afford individual subscriptions so three or four people subscribed to the paper and each had two hours to read. After everyone was finished reading, it was sold to the bakers to wrap bread or to the fish man to

wrap herring. We read the papers not only to get the news, but to read the works of outstanding writers as well. Zev Jabotinsky, Meyer Grossman, Yoshua Ton, Noach Prilutzky and Hillel Tzeitlin were but a few of these outstanding writers. We were thirsty for their writing and we benefited from their knowledge.

In 1933, after Hitler had already come to power, I remember an article in *Der Moment* written by the great Zionist leader Zev Jabotinsky, in which he warned the Jews that trouble was coming and they should learn how to defend themselves. *"Kinderlach, ler'nt zich shisen. . . ."* Oh, how I wish my people would have harkened to his plea.

Several organizations were established which helped us survive. Among them were the *Gemillus Chesed*, a free loan society and the *Linas Ha-tzedek* that loaned medical supplies such as thermometers, hot water bottles and other essentials. Above all, though, it was a group of people who volunteered to stay with the sick during the night in order to give relief to the sick person's family.

Once a group of religious *chalutzim* came to town to study plowing, planting and harvesting in preparation for going to Palestine. They gave us a new spirit as they sang and danced to the songs of the Zionist dream which I still recall and we joined them in debates about the big issues of the day. We were happy to have them with us. They injected us with a love for Israel and a willingness to work and even die for her. I give credit to these *chalutzim* who learned how to work with their hands and after settling in Palestine, joined the *Haganah* and defended the country.

Our community also had a number of Zionist political organizations including the right-wing *Beitar*, the leftist-labor *Hapoel* and the religious *Mizrachi*. One of the most heated debates among these groups revolved around what was known as the Arlozorov Case. Chaim Arlozorov, an officer of the Labor Party, was shot and killed on the beach in Tel Aviv. The English, in an attempt to divide the Jews, accused the *Beitar* of

shooting him. Three members of *Beitar,* Avi Achimeier, Avraham Stavsky and Zvi Rosenblatt were arrested and put on trial. The left wing, convinced of their guilt, hoped for a conviction and a death sentence while the right wing felt that they were 100% innocent. The late Chief Rabbi of Israel, HaRav Kook said under oath, 'I am 100 percent sure that those three Jews are innocent. Jews do not kill Jews.' After a long judicial process, thank G-d, they were freed.

I am certain that the late Chief Rabbi would have been horrified by the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. While we can no longer say that Jews do not kill Jews, I am nevertheless convinced that those men did not kill Chaim Arlozorov.

The Rov of Wyzan . . .

The *Rov* of Wyzan's name was Wizansky, coincidentally similar to the name of our *shtetl.* He was a great *Talmudic* and *Kabbalistic* scholar. He didn't take wages from the community. His daughter had a little store where she sold sugar, salt, candles, kerosene, etc. and from that he lived. His authority was great and he inspired the town's people by his conduct and learning. Even the non-Jews respected him highly. When they saw him leave his house to go to the *Beis Medrash*, they would say, '*Oh rabbin chodge*' (The rabbi is coming). The Gentile farmers believed that he had supernatural powers and frequently asked him to walk and bless their fields.

The duties of the *Rov* were primarily to answer *sha'alos* pertaining to religious life and to settle disputes. He would be called upon to answer questions regarding *kashrus* and *taharas hamishpocho*, to settle monetary disputes or to assure that someone's misbehavior didn't repeat itself. Above all, he was a man of peace.

The *Rov* delivered sermons twice a year. On *Shabbos Shuva*, between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, he would call on the people

to repent and on *Shabbos Hagadol*, before Passover, he would explain the numerous and complicated laws of *Pesach*. These were not just sermons; rather, they were lectures of the highest quality.

Let me add a funny story. Every year, two or three weeks before *Pesach*, the *Rov* made an appeal for *ma-os chitim* so *matzah* and other provisions would be available for the poor. Almost everybody gave as much as they could and more. The result was that nobody went hungry on this holiday. Sholom Boruch, a Wyzaner, used to receive money from America but he gave very little for *ma-os chitim*. *Leitzim*, jokers, had a meeting and decided to teach him a lesson. On the evening of the first *Seder*, when Sholom's wife opened the door for Elijah to enter, they pushed in a calf! The calf got wild, jumped on the table, 'deposited *charoseth*' and broke some of the dishes. I believe Sholom Boruch learned his lesson the hard way. When the *Rov* heard about it, he reprimanded the pranksters and they had to pay for the damage.

On the subject of *maos-chitim*, there is a tale about a *rebbetzin* who asked her husband if his appeal was successful. 'Half and half,' he replied. 'The poor agreed to receive but the rich did not agree to give!'

Every morning after *davening*, the *Rov* sat at the head of the table surrounded by a group of scholars and explained the most complicated subjects in the *Talmud*. The rest of the time he studied by himself. This was a European rabbi.

The Shamash . . .

The *shamash* in our *shul* was an old man. He served the *kehillah* well, but did not receive any wages. On *Succos*, the *shtetl*, unable to afford more, bought one *esrog* and *lulav* and the *shamash* would go from house to house so people could *bench esrog*. Naturally, people paid him a few *groshen*. On *Purim*, he would bring *shalach manos*, in fulfillment of the law of exchanging food and this too, was a source of a few pennies

for him. In winter, he removed the ashes and started a new fire in the *shul's* oven and also lit the kerosene lamps. He swept the floors and emptied the spittoons. When we came to *shul* in the morning, the books were already on the table, opened to the page for the Talmudic lesson of the day. A week before *Rosh Hashanah*, *Slichos* was recited an hour before sunrise. The poor *shamash* walked from house to house, knocking on windows singing, *'Yidden, shteit oof tzu Slichos la-avodas Haboray,'* (People, get up for *Slichos* to serve The Creator.)

Yours truly, being a very young boy, used to imitate my mischievous friends. We would go to the *shul*, find the *shofar* and try to blow it. The *shamash* would get very angry and chase after us. Now, as the years have flown by, I say to the dear *shamash*, Please forgive me. I know I was wrong. Tears come to my eyes whenever I am reminded of this beautiful poor man who gave so much of himself. I know that when my time comes, I will have to give a reckoning for my sins, and my behavior towards the *shamash* will be one of those sins.

Curiously, taking the *shofar* without permission and aggravating the *shamash* by blowing it, also brought good results in my life. I became a good *baal tokeah* and here in America, I used to blow the *shofar* at the homes of sick people who were unable to hear its sounds in *shul*.

The Pushke and the Pinkos . . .

We had a paper *pushke* in which we put our pennies for *Keren Kayemet L'Yisroel*, the Jewish National Fund, to redeem land in Israel. We didn't spend our few pennies to buy candy or chocolate (ice cream was not known to us then). How proud I am of Wyzan.

Wyzan had a *pinkos*, a ledger in which all significant events were recorded. If a Jew didn't behave e.g. if he was an informer to the police, or if a girl went astray, this was recorded. All important events of the *shtetl* were recorded for posterity. The *pinkos* was kept by the *kehillah*.

One purpose of the *pinkos* was to record judgments that were settled by the *Rov* and *Beis Din*. The *kehillah* always discouraged Jews from settling their disputes in non-Jewish courts. A decision was binding and if one of the interested parties did not honor a decision, he was severely admonished and even punished. It would be recorded in the *pinkos* that "so and so" had disobeyed the court. Merchants were also warned not to raise prices for essential commodities especially before *Pesach* or other holidays. A possible punishment for this kind of conduct consisted of not being counted in the *minyan*. In very severe cases such as when a man was a traitor, he could only be buried near the gate of the cemetery when he died. Believe me, dear readers, it worked. If a married woman or a married man committed adultery, that too, was recorded. If a girl lost the sign of her virginity accidentally and not through sexual behavior, it was recorded so that the groom should not accuse his bride of not being a virgin. He would be notified of this before the wedding.

Historical events such as *pogroms*, in which Jews were killed, raped and looted as well as other anti-Semitic activities were faithfully recorded. So were weddings, the infrequent *gittin*, the hiring of a *shochet* and the functions of the *Chevra Kadisha*.

The *Chevra Kadisha* was empowered to charge a fee for its services. They didn't take the money for themselves. Rather, they turned it over to the *kehillah* to be used for religious education of orphans, aid to widows, the purchase of books, kerosene lamps and firewood for the *shul* and payment of the *Rov's* salary. Our *Rov* did not accept money for his services but in other places the *Rov* was paid. Sometimes the family of the deceased thought it was overcharged and this caused heated arguments which were settled by the *Beis Din* and recorded.

The names were recorded of Jews held hostage for ransom by government authorities. In Hebrew this is called *pidyon shvuyim*, redemption of the hostage. There were many such sad entries in the

pinkos.

The word *pinkos* is mentioned in the ETHICS OF THE FATHERS 3:20, *". . . v'ha-pinkos pasu-ach . . ."* which refers to G-d's ledger being open. Access to the *pinkos* required permission from the head of the *kehillah.* The person selected to make entries in the *pinkos* had to be a man of integrity, fluent in Hebrew and Yiddish, with a nice handwriting— and capable of keeping a secret.

The Cheder . . .

As I said, it was compulsory to go to public school until the age of thirteen. We also went to *cheder.* After the age of thirteen, my sisters helped my parents and worked at jobs outside the house. They were very talented - one a journalist; another a photographer. Whatever they earned, they gave to my father.

I started *cheder* at age five. My first teacher, Reb Dovid Michel, taught me to read Hebrew from a *Siddur.* He was mild mannered and gentle. My next teacher was R'Avraham Gordon, extremely knowledgeable but very high strung. When I was nine years-old, he introduced me to the *Gemoro*, the *Talmud.* He was impatient and always angry. Now I understand him. He was very poor and lived in a two-room house which included the *cheder.* Worse than the poverty was the fact that there did not appear to be much love between him and his wife and they would argue frequently in our presence. Nevertheless, we studied.

One of the first and most beautiful songs we learned, was the very famous *Oef'n Pripichak*, which we sang in both Yiddish and Hebrew:

Oef'n pripichak brent a firel un in shtub is hase,
Un der rebbe ler'nt klayneh kinderlach dem ***alef beis.***
Az yir vet, kinder, elter veren vet yir alane farshtane,
Vifel treren ligen in di osyos un vifel gevain.

On the little stove burns a small flame and the house is very warm,

And the rabbi teaches the little children the ABC's.
When you, children, will become older, you will understand,
How many tears and how many cries the letters contain.

It is true that as a child I did not fully understand the meaning of those words. As I became older and learned Jewish history, I realized how powerful words can be . . . . The *Bible*, the *Talmud* and the *Zohar* were frequently burned publicly. In 1553 the *Talmud* was burned in Rome by the Catholic Church. In 1559, the Talmud was burned in Holland. In 1757, the Talmud was burned in Poland. The non-Jewish world realized the power that lies in our holy writings. There is a saying in the Book of *Sifri* that when G-d created the world, the sword and book came down together from heaven. The Jewish People chose the book. Not only the Jews refer to themselves as *Am HaSefer*; also the Arabs called the Jews the 'People of the Book.'

The Jews were persecuted because of The Book. In 1492, in Spain and Portugal, the Catholic Church, through the Inquisition, burned thousands of Jews to death and expelled the rest. But it was not only the Catholics who have a history of persecuting Jews. The Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther (1483-1546) wrote several essays including the 1543 tract, About the Jews and Their Lies, in which he condemned the Jews for not converting to Christianity. He advocated that synagogues be burned, Jewish books be confiscated and that Jews be forbidden from teaching. 'If they still refuse to convert,' Luther wrote, 'then we must drive them out like mad dogs, lest we partake in their abominable blasphemy and vices, deserving G-d's wrath and being damned along with them.' Luther's teachings have been quoted by anti-Semites throughout history, including Adolf Hitler.

The liturgy of *Yom Kippur* includes a story of the Ten Martyrs who were executed by the Romans. One of them, Rabbi Akiva, was skinned alive. His last words were, *Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokaynu, Hashem*

Echod. (Hear O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is One.) R'Chanina ben Tradyun was wrapped in a Torah by the Romans and lit on fire. His disciples who witnessed this, cried and asked their teacher, 'Is this the reward from heaven for being such a great scholar and teacher, for being so pious and devoted to G-d?' He asked them, 'My dear children, what do you see?' and they replied, 'We see you and the Torah burning.' He said, 'You see the parchment of the Torah burning, but the letters and words are flying upward and they cannot be burned.' This is the power of the *Alef Beis.*

Chaim Nachman Bialik, the great Hebrew poet, wrote a poem called *Hatayda Me-ayin?* (Do You Know From Where?) In this poem he describes how the Jewish people survived. It says go to the synagogues, pick up the old books soaked in tears and then you will know how the Jewish people got their strength to overcome *pogroms* and slaughter. We Jews have been shamed, spat upon and subjected to all kinds of defamation. The sacred *Alef Beis* is what saved us.

The Teacher . . .

Although my father was not well educated, his thirst for knowledge was unquenchable and he wanted more and better for the children. He went from house to house speaking to parents of school-aged children and persuaded them to bring a more modern teacher from Suvalk to our little *shtetl.*

The teacher who came was Yechiel Kaufman. He was wonderful. The arrangement for his stay was that each week he would eat in a different place and he would receive a small salary which supported his wife and children in Suvalk. We loved him dearly. He was a real teacher and a great psychologist who never got angry with us. He always had a smile and words of encouragement. When we became a little unruly, he never yelled. Instead, he would say, 'Children, let us sing a song!' Oh we

loved to sing! The song, *A Shira Nah L'dodi* is from ISAIAH 2:1-4.

Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song concerning his vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he dug it, and cleared away its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a wine vat in it: and he looked that it should bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth bad grapes.

Why did he choose this song? He explained that our parents were hardworking people. They denied themselves the most essential things in life and pinched pennies to pay him. He left his family in Suvalk to be with us. 'I do hope that my labor will produce good results.'

To this day, that song penetrates my soul. I used to hum it when I studied in the *yeshivos* and I hum it when I study today. I believe you, too will benefit from its beautiful words which come from the BOOK OF ISAIAH.

Mr. Kaufman introduced us to the writings of the great poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik. We learned his first poem, *El Ha-Tzipor* (To the Bird), the one that made Bialik very famous in which he describes a bird that has just returned from Israel.

El Ha-Tzipor

Thy voice so gentle; I am sad that you left me.
Sing, tell me dear bird, what is happening in Eretz Israel?
Is there trouble in the beautiful land also?

Bialik describes the panorama of the Land of Israel; the Emek, Mount Lebanon, the Sharon, the Jordan, etc. This poem captured our fantasy and because of that, our hearts and souls became connected to the land of Israel. This is not the place to describe all the beautiful poems that Bialik wrote, but I believe he was the greatest Hebrew poet of the 20th Century.

What a wonderful teacher Mr. Kaufman was to us. He molded our

character, sharpened our minds and infused us with a desire to learn. I am so indebted to this great teacher.

A Wedding in Wyzan . . .

A wedding in Wyzan was a *simcha* for everybody. No engraved invitations were necessary. The *shamash* went from house to house inviting people to the *chasuna.* Three weeks before the wedding, on *Shabbos* morning, the *shamash* would bang on the reader's table in *shul* and announce publicly that this bride and this groom would be married. The reason for this was that perhaps, someone knew if one of them was already married. Most people from the *shtetl* attended the wedding and participated in the preparations beforehand.

We didn't know about caterers! *Challahs*, cakes, meats and other foods were prepared by neighbors and friends. The wedding ceremony always took place outside near the *shul.* While music played, the groom's parents, with tall candles in hand, accompanied their son to the *chupah* and then the bride's parents did the same for her. The *Rov* was dressed in fine *Shabbos* clothing, the *choson* wore a *kittel,* and the bride wore a wedding gown.

Before the ceremony, a *badchon* addressed the bride in the presence of the entire assembly. His duty was to remind her of the difficulties that faced her in life which extracted tears not only from her, but from all the women around her. After the *badchon* came the *badekung* when the groom placed a veil over the bride's face. This custom is based on the story in GENESIS, when Rebecca, riding on a camel, saw a man from afar. She asked Eliezar who the man was and he replied that he was her future husband, Isaac. She then covered her face with a veil. This may have been out of modesty. In the wedding ceremony, when the groom covers his bride with a veil, he is assuring himself in the presence of the parents, that this woman, and not another, is the young lady he has chosen to be

his partner for life. After the *bedekung*, the wedding ceremony began.

The bride and groom didn't go on a honeymoon. Instead, friends invited the couple to their homes each night for a week of *Sheva Brochos* and festivities. This kind of wedding was always a welcome occasion and is still practiced today among Orthodox Jews.

For the most part, boys and girls from Wyzan married one another. Three of my sisters married boys from Wyzan. None of them are alive; they were all killed by the Nazis.

A magid comes to town . . .

There was neither radio, telephone nor theater in the *shtetl*, so how were we entertained? Every once in a while a *magid* showed up in our town. A *magid* is an itinerant preacher who learned a few sermons by heart. That was his merchandise and he traveled from town to town and village to village chanting these sermons with a sad melody. People flocked to listen to his stories which portrayed the agony and plight of the Jews and the audience was able to '*arop rayden foon hartzen*' (unload their aching hearts). This was particularly appealing to the women. I would say he was a good psychologist.

In the history of the Jewish people there were *magidim* of great fame with extraordinary talent. One of the best known was the *Dubner Magid*. On one occasion, he arrived in a little town late at night, saw light in a house and rushed to see if somebody was sick. He knocked on the door and saw the town's shoemaker bent over his worktable. 'My friend, it's so late, why are you still working?' The shoemaker raised his head for a moment, '*Rebbe, vi lang de lichtele brent. . .* (as long as the candle burns) you can fix a lot.' The *magid* understood.

People welcomed the *magid* and he welcomed the few *zlotys* for his family, which was in the same desperate situation as the characters he portrayed in his stories. After he finished and the collection was made,

he went off to the next town singing his stories.

The twelfth of the *Thirteen Principles of Faith* formulated by Maimonides reads: *'I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. Although he tarries, I wait every day for his coming.'* Faith in the coming of the *Moshiach* has always given Jews the determination to live with the hope that they would be redeemed from misery. The *magid* always closed his presentation with, *"U-vo l'Zion Go-el"* (A Redeemer shall come to Zion).

Contribution of the little towns to Jewish Life . . .

Where did the youth learn Hebrew? In the Hebrew schools of the little towns. Where did they learn to speak Yiddish? In the little towns. Yiddish, *mammeh loshon* (Mother Tongue), was called this because a child's first word was *Mama.* The *Yiddishe Mammeh* was (and is) the doctor, the lawyer, the one who kept you clean, the one who kissed your wounds and made the hurt stop. She was rooted in the small towns; she was the first teacher and thus, was the first Yiddish teacher, too.

Yiddish was a unifying force for the Jews of the world. Zionism was first promoted in Yiddish and it was a success; evidence is the existence of Israel today. Israel's foundation was laid by great Zionists who wrote in Yiddish. The great European scholars of the *Talmud* were Yiddish speaking. When they came to the United States, they became teachers in the most prominent *yeshivos* including Yeshiva University. One of the most illustrious examples was R'Dovid Lifschutz from Suvalk.

Wyzan and the towns and villages around it, gave the world very learned people, leaders in Jewish life. The great Rabbi Rafalin who settled in Mexico, came from Punsk near Wyzan . . . . His sister, Mrs. Sarah Lainer of Los Angeles, is the author of a book in Yiddish called, *Days of Yom Tov and Remembrance.* She too, came from the small town and today, this well-educated and generous woman is known all over the

world for her support of Jewish institutions . . . . Rabbi Yisroel Gustman, one of the last outstanding rabbis in Vilna, had been 'right hand' to the luminary, Rabbi Chayim Ozer Grodiensky. He escaped the Holocaust, settled in Israel and re-established the Netzach Yisroel Yeshiva . . . . Rabbi Shraga Feivel Grosbard who became the head of *Chinuch Atzmoee,* Israel's renowned religious school system, was from my little town, Wyzan. We were born the same week . . . . The distinguished Dr. Chaim Weizmann, first President of the State of Israel, came from a very small town called Motele.

There are so many more— too many to mention all. It is enough to say that the contribution of the little towns was immense. They remind me of R'Yochanan ben Zachai who, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, asked the Roman authorities to give him Yavneh, just a small village. It was this tiny village that played a central role in the survival of Jewish intellectual life during the Roman occupation. ◆

A Fire Burns Down Our House

As poor as we were, we still loved life. We played and sang; our parents loved and guided us. Wyzan was a small village and horribly, a fire broke out and two-thirds of the *shtetl's* houses went up in flames. Only what we had on our backs was left. Those families who lived a little bit further from the fire were spared and they showed real brotherly love. Each family became two or three families. It was very tragic and my family was divided into three groups. But even in that most tragic moment, there was a little humor.

In Wyzan lived a gentleman, a master of all trades, who organized a fire department, but to buy fire equipment we didn't have the money. So the first order was given that each family must have a large barrel of water next to the house with a small bucket. He managed to scrape up a few *zlotys* and bought a trumpet. That was very wise. When the fire



- Sheine Rochel by the lake -



- HaRav HaGaon R'Dovid Lifschitz z"l -
I knew him from his lectures in Grodno
and as the last Suvalker Rov
and was privileged to visit this eminent Rosh Yeshiva at Y.U.

broke out during the night, he started to blow the trumpet and people woke up. That's how they came out alive. My teacher's wife who was not too educated and perhaps not too smart, remembered that her husband once told her that when Elijah will announce that the Messiah is about to arrive, the world will be engulfed in flames and you will hear the blowing of the *shofar*. She woke up in the middle of the night, saw the flames and upon hearing the trumpet, she started to shout to her husband, 'Avrom! Avrom! Get up. The Messiah is here!'

It was a very bad time for us. No place to sleep; no food to eat; no underwear to change. How terrible it was. My father, G-d bless his soul, lost neither his faith nor his wits. He immediately wrote a letter to his sister and brother-in-law in Rochester, New York and to my mother's three sisters and two brothers in Brooklyn. Within a few weeks, thirty packages of old clothes and food arrived. It was distributed evenly among all families. A few months later, Tante Aidel and Polly summoned all our relatives and sent money to my father to build a new house. And so did other families for other people of the town. Little by little, the village came back to life.

I must add that, a month before the fire, a scarlet fever epidemic broke out. There was not a house in Wyzan where a child did not die. And so it happened in our house as well. I had a little sister, *Tziporaleh*, twelve months old, a most beautiful child in the world. My father came home from the cemetery and said, 'I would rather have my house burn down and my child alive.'

There is a saying, '*al tiftach peh l'soton*' (do not put words in the mouth of Satan). Exactly thirty days later, after my parents buried their child, the house burned down. So we lost the house and the child. For months and months my father and mother who had six living children and enough love for all of them, could not forget this beautiful child who passed away.

After a period of deep mourning, my father said, "*Hashem nosan v'Hashem lokach. Ye-hi Shem Hashem m'voroch*" (G-d gave and G-d took away. The Name of the Lord be blessed forever). My parents did not blame G-d. Nor did they try to divorce themselves from the Almighty.

This spirit of deep faith prevailed for all of Jewish history. Take all the exiles - Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and even the Holocaust in our time - there were almost no suicides among religious people. Their faith was not shaken. Other nations who have experienced deep trouble vanished from the world and only archeological findings give testimony that they once existed.

Tante Aidel and Polly again summoned the *lans-leit* and sent money - this time, to erect a fence around the cemetery. It helped to secure the sanctity of the cemetery while it gave some people the opportunity to work, to earn a few 'dollars.' My aunt also sent a visa to my oldest sister, Chana Tzirl, to come to the United States. That was too much for my mother. Although I was only eight years old, I will never forget the day my sister said goodbye. Tears were flowing like water; the kissing and hugging took hours.

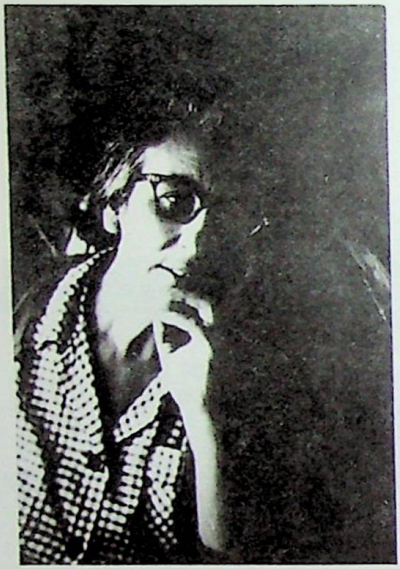
Things became more livable when we received the first letter from my sister. They say that time is the greatest healer, so little by little, life became normal once again. Things were put in their proper perspective. A new small house was built and G-d was good to Wyzan. During the fire, the three places of worship had not been touched. People could continue to attend daily services and the spiritual life of Wyzan was re-established. ◆



- We had nothing left but ourselves -
(Right to left)
Chana Tzirl, Bubbe Golde, Mother, (myself), Father,
Sheine Rochel, D'vorke, Chashke and Dovid



- Our House: rebuilt with money from America -
Dovid and Bashe Gitele
Father, Chashke and Mother
Sheine Rochel with Aron Wartelsky whom she later married;
D'vorke with her husband Isaac Baronofsky;
Uncle Israel's niece visiting from Punsk and I



- Chana Tzirl -
My oldest sister went to work in America after the house fire and was my only sibling who died of natural causes.

AS A STUDENT IN YESHIVA

. . . to Suvalk

G-d said to Abraham, "Go thee; leave your land, leave your birthplace and your father's house . . . ." GENESIS 12:1 The *Midrash* says that whatever happened to Abraham, happened to his children. All descendants of Abraham share in the experience of "Go thee . . . ."

At the age of ten, I had outgrown the *cheder* in Wyzan. My father and mother decided that for me to further my Jewish education, they would send me to Suvalk, a big city with a well-known *Talmud Torah.* Since you know by now of my parents' financial situation, there was only one way for me to go to *lern* in Suvalk and that was by *essen teg.* Every day of the week for the one and a half years, I ate in the home of a different family. Each Sunday I would eat at the Goldbergs, Monday at the Shapiros and so on, through the week.

In Poland, thousands of Jewish families welcomed poor children into

their homes and shared with them. I was one of the recipients of this generosity. I ate all my meals in different homes while in Suvalk and for six years in Grodno.

The City of Suvalk . . .

Suvalk was founded in 1386. By the end of the 18th Century, the city had three factories producing *taleisim*. Suvalk served as the center for all of the little towns and villages that surrounded it. While each town had its own rabbi, when very serious religious issues were in question, all turned to Suvalker Rov.

In addition to my little *shtetl* of Wyzan, Suvalk was also close to Baklerovy, Punsk, Filipove, Ratzk, Yelenevi and P'shlroshlee which were similar in size to my town. The description of Wyzan applies to these other towns. The institutions, commerce, life style and poverty, as well as the hopes and dreams were the same. All these beautiful little places were destroyed by the Nazis. The people were killed and the synagogues and Torahs burned. G-d Almighty, avenge their blood. Suvalk, unlike the little *shtetlach*, was a modern city with a large Jewish community.

The Jewish community of Suvalk was well developed. Many organizations existed there such as Beitar, Hashomer Ha-tza-ir, Maccabi, Bikur Cholim, Linas Ha-tzedek and Hechalutz. Many great rabbis served in Suvalk throughout the years.

The Talmud Torah where I studied, was built in 1851 and became a very well-known institution, with as many as 250 students. The faculty consisted of very learned teachers. At the age of 11 or 12, we learned the PROPHETS and our teacher demanded that we learn many chapters by heart. We also learned to speak Hebrew with its very difficult grammar and to read the great Hebrew poetry of Chaim Nachman Bialik and Shaul Chernichovsky.

An outstanding Mizrachi Zionist leader, R'Shmuel Moliver, was the

Suvalker Rov. He was a great scholar and orator who inspired Jews to go to Israel and work the land.

Suvalk had a *shul* where a thousand people could *daven*. It also had an academy which went a little past high school, a home for the aged and a 50-bed Jewish hospital, which was one of the ten Jewish hospitals in all of Poland.

Going to Suvalk was very difficult. It was so hard to say goodbye to my mother, sisters and brother. I will never forget this. At midnight the *baal agoloh* stopped near my house. It was a week after all the holidays, just before winter and it was raining and very cold. My mother gave me a glass of hot milk and a piece of bread. They dressed me in warm clothes. After almost seventy years, I still feel the warm tears on my cheek that flooded from my mother's eyes. Eight hours in a wagon pulled by a poor horse and we finally arrived in Suvalk.

I was surprised to see sidewalks, tall buildings, broad streets, electric lights and big stores. It was a beautiful city, but my heart was in Wyzan. Yudah Halevi, the great 12th Century poet from Spain, said in reference to Jerusalem, "I am in the west but my heart is in the east." I was in Suvalk but my heart was in Wyzan. I loved my little town despite the mud, poverty, cold of winter and summer mosquitoes. All the beauty of Suvalk didn't entice me. I missed my friends. We sang together and at times we even argued, but it was great and I missed them.

My father, who accompanied me to Suvalk, found a place for me to sleep in the small apartment of an old widow. The room where I slept added to my gloom. My father arranged seven days of meals for me in seven different homes. This was difficult for me because I didn't know my way around the city. Days were not bad because I was busy studying. I had to do well. The teachers were extremely harsh with us, but I managed. The nights were terrible for me. I longed to be home. I wanted to see my mother, father, sisters and brother. For months I cried myself to sleep. The whole first year was very hard for me.

The second year was much easier. Once in a while a member of the family came to Suvalk and that was a great day for me. My greatest consolation was that Mrs. Mata Grosbard and her three sons moved to Suvalk from Wyzan. The oldest of the three was born the same week as I was. I knew this family well. Mrs. Grosbard had lost her husband and raised her sons on her own. Fortunately, the brother of her deceased husband lived in America and sent her money regularly. Those three boys grew up to be great *Talmudic* scholars. As a matter of fact, the oldest, R'Shraga Feivel was President of the *Chinuch Atzmo-ee,* the religious educational system in Israel. The Grosbard boys were my friends and studied with me at the *Talmud Torah.* Mrs. Grosbard, Mother's friend, was extremely nice to me. She had traveled with her children like the Jews in the wilderness who followed the *Anan*, the cloud that is spoken of in the book of NUMBERS. Wherever the cloud went, the Jews went. When Mrs. Grosbard's children outgrew the *cheder* in Wyzan, she followed them to Suvalk and later, when her children outgrew the Talmud Torah, she followed her children to the great Grodno Yeshiva.

Most of the families with whom I ate, were very generous and kind. However, I recall one incident that hurt me very much. I was eleven years old and sat at the table of a family where the wife had taken sick, so the wife's sister served the meal. I suppose that I took more bread than she would have liked me to take and she said to her brother-in-law in broken Yiddish, *"Der ingle ken 'ahchlen' a sach"* (That boy can eat a lot). She thought I wouldn't understand her, but I did. I got up from the table, thanked her very much and never returned.

On the other hand, I must tell you about a heavenly couple who asked me to be with them every *Shabbos* when I was in Grodno, the city where I went to after Suvalk. This couple didn't have children. He was a bricklayer and she sold meat in the market. You must understand that for me, *Shabbos* was the big day, the day I would eat three complete

meals. Friday night, after services, my host and I went to his house where there was always fish, soup and a lot of meat. After eating and *Grace After Meals*, they rested and I walked back. In winter, when the days were short, he didn't undress to go to bed. Instead, by 11:00 PM, he would come to the yeshiva. It was five or six hours since I had eaten and he would take me back to his house for cold *tzimmes* with hot tea. When I remind myself of their generosity, I cry for these true *tzadikkim.* I am sure they are in heaven among the holy and pure.

The Rov Gives Me a Pinch . . .

There are certain things that happen in one's life that are never forgotten; they leave a lasting memory. The *Rov* of Suvalk, R'Yoseph Yoselevitch was a *Talmudic* scholar, a man of great wisdom and intellect, well-respected and admired. Once a week he came to the Talmud Torah to test the children and to observe how much they advanced from the prior week.

It happened that he came to my class while we were learning GEMORO BOBO METZEAH. We were learning about the four types of guardians, the *Arbo Shomrim.* A guardian that guards for free is called a *shomer chinom.* A guardian that guards for pay is called a *shomer sochor;* the man that borrows an article and is thus its guardian, is called a *sho-el* and finally, a *socher* refers to the responsibility of an employer for the acts of his employee.

All four are discussed in depth in the GEMORO. R'Yoselevitch asked a question, 'Suppose you borrow a tea glass, warm it up first, pour hot tea in it and it breaks. Is the borrower, the *sho-el,* obligated to pay for the glass?'

I raised my hand and answered, 'No, he is not obligated to pay.' 'Why?' asked the *Rov.* I answered, *"maiso machmas melocho."* She [the cup] died [broke] while performing her duty and her duty was to serve tea. There was no negligence, since, after all, he warmed it up first.

The *Rov* came close to me, gave me a loving pinch on my cheek and said encouragingly, *"Mein kind, lern veiter."* My child, continue with your studies; you'll be OK. My answer was correct. The day was mine! My friends in class became friendlier after that. In the past they had teased me for coming from a little village and they from the big city. That was no longer an issue. The *Rov's* gentle pinch accompanied me all the years I was in the yeshiva. I still feel his uplifting gesture. G-d rest his soul.

My first encounter with physical anti-Semitism was during an evening in Suvalk, while walking back to my room from the Talmud Torah. A group of young Polish boys surrounded an elderly bearded man going to *shul*. They danced around him shouting inflammatory anti-Semitic remarks, called him a 'dirty Jew' and other shameful names. This was not all. They came so close to him that he was unable to move out of their way and they started to pull the hair from his beard. His cries did not impress them. Instead they laughed. What a terrible sight it was. I thought, 'G-d what kind of crime did this little Jewish man commit that he deserves such pain and humiliation?' I was helpless but I did manage to alert a Jewish man who chased these hooligans away. Later in life, I learned that this incident was only 'child's play' compared to Hitler's 'final solution.'

I believe that this little *Yidel* didn't blame G-d for his pain and suffering. I believe that the Jews still believed in G-d as they were led to slaughter, but I do not believe the stories that Jews went to the crematorium **singing** *Ani Ma'amin*. There are some authors who have made a lot of money writing about life in the ghettos and about the Holocaust. Many of these writers, some of whom were not even in the ghettos, are guilty of falsehood, interested in making money and gaining prominence. To them I say, stay away, you liars, it is too holy a subject to defile. Do not transform the Holocaust into "*shoah* business." Holocaust literature must be honest testimony of the most brutal, unkind,

inhuman acts of an uncivilized society in a world that allowed such atrocities to occur.

One of the great personalities in Jewish history who came from Suvalk was Avraham Shtern, who later changed his name to Avraham Yair. He organized the 'Stern Gang' which put up great resistance to the English occupation of Palestine. I wish we would have had more patriots like him. His justifiable hatred of the English administration and their pro-Arab position resulted in his capture and murder by them, but not before he gave them plenty of trouble. May G-d avenge his blood.

Recently, the Polish Government put a plaque on the house where Yair was born. This was done in the presence of a large delegation of Polish people and a representative of the Israeli Embassy. I wish the Poles had been as courteous to living Jews as they are to those who are no longer with us.

Another great personality, born and brought up in Suvalk, was the first Finance Minister of the State of Israel, Pinchas Sapir. He was a great man, a great Jew and a great Zionist.

What a beautiful city. Unfortunately, Suvalk is now *Judenrein*, completely devoid of Jews, with the exception of one man whose aim in life is to care for the cemetery. I am proud that I, a little boy from Wyzan, had the privilege to be in Suvalk, to study in its *Talmud Torah* and benefit from the generosity of its beautiful people. ◆



1929
Grodno Yeshiva

. . . *To Grodno*

When I was twelve years old I went from Suvalk to Grodno. This time I traveled by myself. One of our teachers in the yeshiva arranged *teg* and a place for me to sleep. My entire belongings-underwear, socks, shirts, etc. fit in a small suitcase. Later, I was enriched with two additional, very dear items. Before my Bar Mitzvah, my father sent me a pair of *tefillin* and a *Tikkun*. Nobody from my family attended my Bar Mitzvah; I was called up to the Torah on a Monday morning, made the two blessings and that was all - no caterer, no festive meal, no music. Not even a fountain pen! I *daven* with *tallis* and *tefillin* everyday, but on Sunday, I put on the *tefillin* that my father gave me so many years ago. They have accompanied me all these years and millions of dollars can't buy them.

The *Tikkun* that my father sent, enabled me to learn to read in the

Torah. With much practice, I memorized the Torah's proper punctuation. and 'music' and achieved the status of *Baal Koreh*. Understanding the Biblical Hebrew is another level of study which I have spent my whole life doing. One must know how to read the Torah correctly in order to understand its language which in turn, makes it possible to gain insight to the discussions in the *Talmud*.

When, from time to time I returned to my *shtetl*, my parents basked in glory when I read the Torah in *shul*. Many years later when I applied for pulpit positions, the first question that the synagogue leaders asked was, 'Do you know how to read from the Torah?' I am forever grateful for my father's 'far-sightedness.'

For many, Grodno was known because of its great river, the Nemen. In the Jewish world Grodno was known for its great *Talmudic* scholars. One of the greatest of the 20th Century was the Dean of the Grodno Yeshiva, my teacher HaRav HaGaon R'Shimon Shkop. The greatest rabbis of Poland turned to him for his interpretation of the *Talmud*. How lucky I am to have been one of his students. Oh Lord, how grateful I am to You. Reb Shimon's *sefer*, *Shaarei Yosher* (The Gates of Correctness), is one of the classics of the *Talmudic* world. His greatness lay not only in the substance of his lectures but also in his teaching method. He was always meticulously organized and able to convey very complicated subjects in a logical manner. As is often the case with truly great people, he was very humble. He also took a fatherly interest in each one of us and was particularly affectionate with the little children.

The Grodno Yeshiva had a kitchen where the boys ate when they didn't have another place to go. The manager of the kitchen was a *tzadik-a-Yid* named R'Feivel who had a wonderful sense of humor. He managed to *shnor* bread, peas, potatoes, meat and whatever else he could get for the yeshiva. In the winter, potatoes would freeze and have a sweeter taste. He sometimes *shnorred* those that remained unsold. If we told him, '*R'Feivel, dee bulves zeinen zees,*' (the potatoes are sweet) he

would reply, 'What are you complaining about; you are eating *tzimmes.*' If only a small portion of meat was served, he used to say, 'You, yeshiva boys, should know what the *Talmud* states, *'Marbe bosor marbe reemo'* (The more meat you eat, the more the worms will have after you die). He tried his best and we loved him. G-d rest his soul.

Grodno had many synagogues. The outstanding one was the *Chevra Shas*, filled with advanced *Talmudic* scholars. I was the *Baal Koreh* there for which I received one *zloty*. It was a great honor to read in the Torah at the most distinguished *shul* in the city and I could buy a few loaves of bread. I remember one time I chanted one note incorrectly, *dargo,* for which I was reprimanded.

The *Rov* of Grodno, Rabbi Grozowsky was a great *Talmid Chochom.* One of his sons, Shmuel, was an outstanding student. Later he married my wife's girlfriend, Esther, daughter of the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, HaRav Pesach Tzvi Frank. This young man was brilliant and was the only one who dared ask a question during R'Shimon Shkop's lectures. Tragically, he died in Israel when he was still a very young man.

When Rabbi Grozowsky was unable to lead the *Talmud* class, Reb Gedalia der Zayger Macher would take over. It is worthwhile to describe the greatness and humility of this man. He was the *shamash* in the *Beis Medrash Hagodol* where he cleaned, removed the ashes from the ovens and emptied the spittoons. He never took money for this because he made a living repairing watches, but his knowledge of Torah was remarkable. He went to the *mikveh* every day. Many times we turned to him and he was always happy to help us. He fulfilled the saying, *'Lilmod u-le-lameid'* (to study and to teach).

Grodno prepared me for the future, so let me continue to describe a few more personalities from there. Though he died many years before I arrived, I had heard about R'Nochum'ke, a giant of a scholar, a *tzadik* and selfless man. His entire life was dedicated to helping his poor brethren. Everybody knew of his greatness and Grodno was proud to

have had such a man. I was told that on Friday mornings he would go from one rich house to another collecting money so the poor could buy food for *Shabbos*. One Friday morning he entered a rich man's house and behold, a group of men were sitting and playing cards. He turned to one of the players and asked for a contribution. Apparently the man's cards were disappointing to him and he became angry and slapped R'Nochum'ke in the face. R'Nochum'ke didn't lose himself but turned to the man and said, 'You gave me what I deserve; now give the poor what they deserve.' The rich man was overcome by R'Nochum'ke's humble way. He fell on R'Nochum'ke's feet and begged forgiveness, then gave a large donation. This is the type of person who lived in Grodno.

Another Grodno personality whom I did have the pleasure to know, was a very wealthy man named Mr. Shereshevsky. He owned all the tobacco factories in Poland. Even the anti-Semitic government of Poland had to respect him because of his financial power. The relationship of the government to Mr. Shereshevsky was like the Jewish story of the good angel and bad angel that visited the home of a religious family on *Shabbos*. Although the bad angel would like to curse the house, the sanctity in the home forced the bad angel to say *amen* to the good angel's blessings.

Mr. Shereshevsky was a very religious man who had a special love for yeshiva students. On Thursdays a number of boys ate in his home, so on that day, Mr. Shereshevsky didn't go to work. He loved to eat all three meals with us and we always looked forward to being there. At the end of supper he would inspect the soles of our shoes and the sleeves of our jackets to see if they needed mending. This saintly soul lost his family and all of his money and factories when the Nazis took over Poland. But, he managed to escape, ultimately came to America penniless and survived on the charitable assistance of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). How correct King David was when he wrote PSALM 49, "So fear not when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house

increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies; his wealth will not follow him below." Mr. Shereshevsky's wealth was taken away from him while he was still alive.

In Grodno there was a well-known Jewish physician named Zamkov. People stood in line to be examined by him. He never took money from rabbinic students or poor people. One day, one of my friends took sick and I took him to the doctor. He examined him, gave him medication and as we were ready to leave, he said, 'Boys, stay for a while. I must tell you that I am not a believer in G-d, but I do believe in the resurrection of the dead.' We were shocked and amazed. He continued to explain that all week a Jew runs around to make a few *zlotys*. He does not eat and sleeps only a few hours a night, like a dog looking for a bone (In Poland, people didn't have it as good as dogs have it in America.) Comes Friday afternoon, he stops working, his wife prepares food and he goes to *shul*. Upon his return he eats gefilte fish full of onion, pepper and salt, a big bowl of soup and a piece of meat and then goes to sleep with a full belly. In the morning he gets up, again goes to *shul*, returns to his wife's fish, soup and potato *kugel* made with a lot of *schmaltz*, and *cholent* made with potatoes and more *schmaltz* which had been cooking in the oven since *erev Shabbos*. After eating all this he finishes with a big glass of cold water. By then he is tired and goes to sleep for a few hours . . . . 'If this man gets up alive, I believe in the resurrection of the dead!'

Dr. Zamkov, a bachelor, had a gentle soul. Whether the sick had money or not, he always had an open ear to hear their cries. Dr. Zamkov was a great Jew and healed all people regardless of their religion. Even the Gentiles used to say, *"Dobry lekaz yak oychetz,"* (A good doctor is like a father). Grodno was proud to have such a man.

Grodno was surrounded by woods, hills and the magnificent Nemen River which split Grodno into two parts. Loggers from further north used the river to ship their goods. Beginning at age 13, for one and a half years, I studied in the *mechinoh,* preparing for the main yeshiva. This

was located in Grodno itself. The main yeshiva, however, was in the *Furshtot*, a suburb of Grodno on the other side of the river. Here the more advanced students would not be distracted by the glamour of the city. The main kitchen though, was a twenty-minute walk across the river near the *mechinoh*! We would begin our studies at 8:00 AM and take our main meal at 1:00 PM. In winter, it was so cold crossing the river to the kitchen that if you spilled a drop of water it would freeze immediately.

A little history of Grodno . . .

As far as we know, in 1492, an order was given to expel the Jews from Spain and Portugal. It is possible that the Spanish Inquisition caused the Jews to flee to Grodno. In the years 1576-1586, King Batory, a good man, invited the Jews to Grodno.

In 1790, there was a blood libel against the Jews. Some Christians accused a Jew named R' Eliezer, the son of Shlomo from Verbelov, of killing a girl to get Christian blood for baking *matzohs*. This of course, is quite ridiculous. A Jew is forbidden even to eat a piece of animal meat unless it is free of blood. This poor, saintly, innocent man, was accused of a ritual murder. The judges ordered that his body be sliced into four parts and hanged in the four corners of Grodno. On a Thursday, in 1790, the second day of *Shavuos*, he was brought to the middle of the city and the order was carried out.

In 1789, a famous printing house, the Menachem Rom which printed among other things, the *Talmud*, was established in Grodno. In 1799, the printing house was moved to Vilna where it remained for over 135 years until the Germans destroyed it in WWII. I have in my library a photocopy of the *Talmud Bavli* printed at the Ha-achim V'almono Rom. When the original owner R'Menachem died, his widow and brothers took over and it became known as Ha-achim V'almono Rom.

To enter a yeshiva in Poland was to enter a different world. It was a world completely naked of earthly desire. The pursuit of money, gold

and silver was meaningless. Here one could find the true meaning of life. The fun of life was to learn more, particularly to understand the twice-weekly lectures of R'Shimon Shkop.

It is true that we lived a very meager life. Bread and tea sweetened with saccharin was enough to satisfy our hunger. Many of us didn't have *teg*, eating days, and many times the kitchen in the yeshiva didn't have much to offer either. All that didn't weaken our wish to continue *lerning*. Often in the winter, we woke up with a sheet of ice on our blanket. The owner of the house where I slept, didn't have enough money to buy coal. When we had absolutely no money in our pockets, we slept on benches in the *yeshiva* with a tractate of the *Talmud* as our pillow.

> *This is the way of Torah study: eat bread with salt, drink water by measure, sleep on the bare ground and live a life of hardship while you toil in the Torah. If you do this, happy shall you be and it shall be well with you; happy shall you be in this world and it shall be well with you in the world to come.* PIRKE AVOS VI:4

◆



- Class of 1934 -
Grodno Yeshiva

My Visit Home

Lack of funds caused my visits home to be very infrequent, once every two years or so. On *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* we never left the yeshiva and the spirit that prevailed there during the high holidays was awesome. The anticipation of going home to visit my family was something that I can't explain. Mind you, I had not seen my parents for over two years. I had not been in the company of my sisters and brother for a long time. We would soon be together again to enjoy the feeling of love and devotion and to share stories and events that had taken place during the time I was away. For weeks I was already in a state of exaltation. The day arrived; from Grodno to Suvalk I came by bus; from Suvalk to Wyzan by horse and buggy. Today it takes less time to go from New York to Israel (7,000 miles) than from Suvalk to Wyzan which was

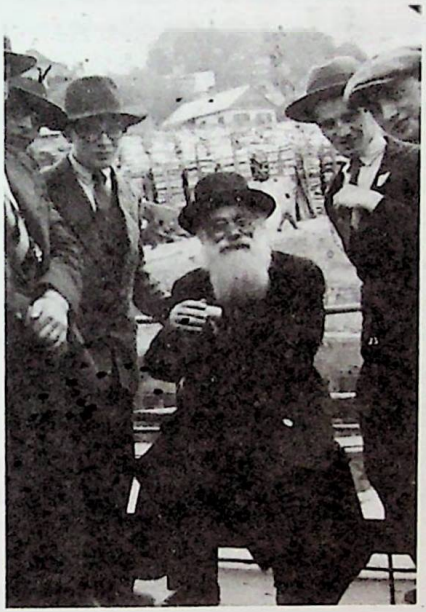
a distance of approximately 20 miles in the melting snow. The owner of the poor horse who didn't have enough food for his children, certainly could not feed his horse too much. At times it was easier to walk many miles than to see the horse labor so hard. Very often we had to help the horse stand on his legs. But who cared. When you are young and want to be with your family, you don't mind all the temporary obstacles.

When I finally entered my home, I kissed my parents, sisters, and brother, said the morning prayers, ate breakfast and went to sleep for a few hours. Next was a visit to the *Rov*. His smiling face and his warm handshake made me feel elated. After reporting to him how many *tractates* we had learned since the last visit, you could feel his thankfulness to G-d that the Torah would forever be the power to keep the Jewish people alive. Although we were young boys, the elderly people in town, even the great *Talmudic* scholars, showed us great respect and love. Inwardly, I felt that the prayers we recited every morning are being fulfilled

> *As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says the Lord: 'My spirit it is which shall be upon you; and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not part from your mouth nor from the mouths of your children, not from the mouths of your children's children,' says the Lord, henceforth and forever.*

In the evening, we all sat together. Neighbors came in and I reported on Jewish life in the big cities, the great synagogues, the rabbis, the cantors, etc. When I was young I had a pretty good voice and an ear for music, inherited from my parents, especially from my mother. I sang melodies and chanted cantorial pieces and they loved it. I was in heaven. The stories, the melodies were to them like a balm for their aching hearts.

To encourage other young men to go to *yeshivos*, the students were given opportunities to show what they know. We were invited to give a *drosho*, a sermon or lecture on a subject of our choice. My favorite subject was *Shir Hashirim* (Song of Songs) written by King Solomon.



HaRav HaGaon R'Shimon Shkop z"l
Grodno

This book, chanted in the synagogue on *Pesach*, is a debate between G-d and His people. It is a beautiful book. (Tell me, which book in the Bible is not beautiful?) When I was sitting at the head of the table looking at the worrisome faces, I always felt I was in the place where G-d's glory descended. My father always sat in a corner far removed from me and I always wondered why. But one day, I learned the reason. Seeing his son lecturing and the approval on the people's faces, my father always cried. In order for me not to notice, he sat in a far corner covering his face with a handkerchief.

One time I changed the subject. I chose to lecture on the *Thirteen Principles of Faith* by Maimonides, because on *Shabbos Hagodol*, the rabbi of the town had given a lengthy lecture, quoted the *Talmud* many times and quoted Maimonides as well. My father and the rest of the people listened, but didn't understand. The rabbi remarked in his sermon that in order to secure a place in heaven, you must know Torah. The people were terribly upset. My father cried, 'In other words, we, the not learned, will not inherit the hereafter?'

Years later, I would write an article on what I said to the people at this lecture. . . .

"The Rambam and the Poshutch Yid"

I was born in the little Polish town of Wyzan near Suvalk. My town, much like others throughout Europe, had a *shul,* a *Beis Medrash* and a *kloiz.* In Wyzan, there was a *Chevra Shas*, a *Chevra Mishnayos* and a *Chevra Ein Yaakov* for the learned people; the average Jews, i.e. shoemakers, tailors and bakers said *Tehillim* all day while they worked. These *Tehillim Yidden* were real *tzadikkim.* As difficult as it was for them to earn a living, they were *s'meichim b'chelkom.* They didn't complain but, indeed, were grateful to the Almighty for the meager weekly food, and were most happy when they could provide food for *Shabbos and Yom Tov.*

My father, orphaned when he was an infant, was among those *tzadikkim.* While he never had a formal religious education, his aim in life was that his children would have the Biblical and Talmudic knowledge which he missed. To that end, my father made sure that the town's *cheder* was suitably arranged so the children could learn comfortably. In the winter he fixed the oven for heat and collected kerosene and candles to light the *Beis Medrash ezras noshim* where the *cheder* was located. When I was ten years old, he registered me in the *Suvalker Talmud Torah*, and arranged *essen teg* i.e. eating in different places for me each day. From then on, I was on my own as I studied in various yeshivos, particularly under the tutelage of *HaRav Ha-Gaon Reb Shimon Shkop* in Grodno.

It was customary for a *yeshiva bocher* to come home for *Pesach*---if he could gather the funds to make the trip. (I managed to do this approximately every other *Pesach.*) During the visit, it was expected that he either give a *drosho* or sit and *lern* with the people of the community. My subject of choice was usually *Shir Hashirim.* On one particular *Shabbos HaGodol,* the *Rov* of Wyzan had given a discourse in which he quoted the Rambam quite often. After listening to him for two hours, my father turned to me and said, 'What do we *poshuteh Yidden* know about Rambam? His work is only for the *lamdonim.*' Tears were in his eyes. It was then I decided, that this *Pesach,* instead of *Shir Hashirim,* I would address myself to the *Thirteen Principles of Faith* recited daily by every Jew. I would show these wonderful people what *they* could know about the Rambam and what he had done for them too.

A large group sat around the long table in the *Beis Medrash.* I began with a short history of Maimonides, with the fact that he is referred to as the

Nesher Hagodol and I explained that the *Talmudic* world speaks of him as *"Mi Moshe ad Moshe lo kom k'Moshe.* I explained that, as the codifier of the *Talmud,* Maimonides had written *The Guide for the Perplexed,* that, as a physician, he had written many medical books and that most of all, he is known for having written the *Mishna Torah* or, as it is familiarly called, the *Yad Hachazoko.*

And then I turned to the introduction of *Pirke Avos... "Kol Yisrael yesh lohem chelek l'olom haboh."* They too, the *poshuteh Yidden* as my father called them, could receive a portion of the hereafter, *"Ki yesh sochor l'fulosech,"* (because there is a reward for your deeds). Jeremiah 31:15.

Every Jew must acknowledge the validity of the *Thirteen Principles of Faith*; the essence of the Jewish religion is contained there. Unity of G-d, Revelation, Reward and Punishment.

I believe with perfect faith 'G-d created and leads the world, He has no body and to Him alone it is right to pray.

I believe with perfect faith that Moses was the head of all the prophets and Moses was the one who brought the Torah from G-d to the people and the Torah will not be changed.

I believe with perfect faith that G-d will reward those who do good and that every day we believe in the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead.

As my studying with them reached this point, I saw in the faces of my audience a new understanding, a new hope that salvation can come for them too, not just for the *lamdonim.*

At the end of my session, my father turned to me with tears in his eyes and said, *'Mein kind, host arein g'blozzen a nayeh neshomeh in unzere kerpers'* (You have blown a new soul into our bodies).

The *Igud HaRabonim* celebrates its 50th year. We, the member rabbis, are very proud. But we must continue to share our faith, the authenticity of our Torah and the reward for remaining loyal to its teachings with the average Jews, with the *poshuteh Yidden.* Thus, we will also celebrate our efforts to bring and sustain the principles of our faith to our people especially now, in this time of great need.

~ Written in 1991 for the 50th Anniversary Book, Rabbinical Alliance of America ~

My wonderful brother and my terrible blunder . . .

I must respectfully tell you that regardless of how smart you think you are, you are never sure that you will not make a mistake. While I was home and enjoying every minute of my visit, my brother and I had a discussion. On one issue, I said to him, '*Dovid'ke*, what do you know about it?' I noticed his face turning all colors and realized what a terrible mistake I had made. With tears I apologized. Of course, he made nothing of it, but I never forgave myself for embarrassing such a good soul.

Dovid, three years younger than I, was a handsome, talented young man. If he had lived, he would have been one of the greatest comedians. He could sing in four or five languages, dance, whistle, mimic animals, birds, humans, etc. In the worst of times my brother cheered up the people by telling a funny story or by acting the part of a *magid*. When he was called for *Maftir* (last honor with chanting of the Prophets) people cried joyously for his tremendous voice. He didn't go to yeshiva; he remained at home to help in the house. We loved each other dearly. The Nazis shot him in the back trying to escape. (G-d avenge his blood!)

There were thousands and thousands like him. Oh Nazis, G-d should only repay you for your cruelty! How many Einsteins you killed, so many scholars you burned, so many talents you destroyed. The Lord will not forgive you; neither will I. I look with disdain and shame upon those (fellow Jews) who say that the time has arrived to forget German atrocities. How can you? Restitution for the property the Nazis took away? Oh no, billions of dollars can't repay even for one little finger on a hand of my sisters and brother that they burned. As long as I remain alive my feet will never step on German soil, soil soaked with my people's blood.

Even the State of Israel is doing business with the Germans. Perhaps I can forgive the State of Israel, but I can't understand nor fathom the Jews from Israel and the United States for going on vacation to this cursed country. They will never change. Today we read in the paper or

listen to the news how the neo-Nazis in Germany are again destroying cemeteries, painting swastikas on Jewish buildings, etc. Most Germans my age or a little older were killers. I don't accept the theory that only Nazis killed Jews. No! Doctors, scientists, lawyers, the entire upper crust of German society were involved in exterminating my people.

My visit home for *Pesach* came to an end, and once again the parting was hard. Saying goodbye to everybody left me emotionally drained. All kinds of thoughts ran through my mind. Will my next visit home enable me to see all those beautiful faces again?

As we say at the end of a *Seder*, "*L'shono habo b'Yerushalyim*," (Next Year in Jerusalem). So, I wished myself a *next* visit in Wyzan. I went back to the yeshiva and once again resumed my studies. ◆

קינה על גריבישקי

אלי גריבישקי
גריבישקי אינה יכולה להביא תועלת.
היא ארץ יושביה אוכלת
זרועיה וצמחיה הם בלים
אנשיה וחבריה הם כלים.

השדות נתרוקנו בלי שום רוחים
הבעלים שלה צועקים ונאנחים
השקיעו בה כסף וזהב
ואפילו הפרות המעיטו בחלב.

יתר השדות אינן שמות על לב
על גריבישקי השרויה בצער ובכאב
מתבואותיהן בעליהן שבעי רצון
ומתבואת גריבישקי רק לעג ולצון.

את גריבישקי ארץ נדחת
מגדלת את צרות וקדחת
גם מחלות בטן ומעים
אבל לא להניח משהו בשינים.

אלי גריבישקי על מר גורלך
בקשי מהשם שיטיב מצבך
איש לא יכול לנגוע עליך
כי מי יכול לסבל מנגעיך.

אנו כלנו נקח מאתך הפרידה
השארי את שממה וגלמודה
שפכי כמים הרבה דמעות
כי בך נתקימו כל הקללות.

יחזקאל

-Tribute to Gribishky -



Farming at Gribishky as Hachshara
Vilna
'I carried the pot and spoon, so I was the cook!'

The Chofetz Chayim

Having completed my studies in Grodno, I went to Vilna and will tell you about it soon. However, I want to speak here about another great yeshiva in Radin, not far from Vilna. It became famous because of its *Rosh Yeshiva* whose real name was Reb Yisroel Meyer HaKohen, but was known as the *Chofetz Chayim*, 'one who desires life.' These two words are taken from PSALMS XXXIV:13 which states, "Who is the man that desires life and loves many days that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile." One of his books is *Shemiras Haloshon* (Guarding The Tongue). The *Chofetz Chayim* devoted himself to teaching people how to live a righteous life. For him, one of the most important aspects of this was not to engage in gossip. His learning was great and his piety exceeded his learning. He was good-natured and shied away from publicity. He objected to being called

"Rabbi" and people had to address him by his given name, R'Yisroel Meyer. His most frequent quotation was from the *Talmud*, *"Ha-chaim v'ha-movess b'yad ha-loshon"* (Life and death are in the tongue). How true this is. Many more people are killed by the tongue than by the sword. To meet this man was a great privilege, so I visited the Radin Yeshiva just to see this *tzadik* who always found a good word even about the worst transgressor. His goal in life was to promote *Yiddishkeit*, especially among the youth and to foster a good Jewish environment for them. In those days many Polish Jews became Socialists. Socialists were against the discriminatory Polish Government and were anti-religious and opposed to the Talmud Torahs and yeshivos. So they organized the *Yiddishe Bund* schools. The head of the schools was Yankele Pat.

The *Chofetz Chayim* became terribly alarmed about the success of the anti-religious Socialist schools and made a wise decision to organize two teacher's seminaries, one in Lomze and one in Grodno. These two seminaries were called Horev, another name for Sinai. To be accepted, you had to have a good background in spoken Hebrew, grammar and Bible. In the *yeshivos* one studied only *Talmud*, but I had a fairly good background in Hebrew and Bible from the Suvalker Talmud Torah and was accepted. It was a two-year course. All day we were in the yeshiva and for three hours in the evening, we were in the seminary. It was a long, tedious and exhausting day. The Polish border police destroyed all hand-written documents. My Rabbinical Ordination certificate from the Grodno Yeshiva was destroyed by the Poles at the Romanian border. The Horev certificate they left alone because they thought it was grade school subjects we studied. Thus, I not only saw this great sage, the *Chofetz Chaim*, but benefited from his foresight. G-d bless his memory.

Do not seek greatness for yourself. Do not crave honor; let your deeds exceed your learning. Do not desire the table of Kings, for your table is greater than theirs. Your crown can be trusted to pay you for your work.

So was the life of a *yeshiva bochur*. ◆

"HAMASMID"

Chaim Nachman Bialik

There are abandoned corners of our Exile,
Remote, forgotten cities of Dispersion,
Where still in secret burns our ancient light,
Where G-d has saved a remnant from disaster.
There, brands that glimmer in a ruin of ashes,
Pent and unhappy souls maintain the vigil -
Spirits grown old beyond the count of time,
Grown old beyond the reckoning of days.
And when thou goest forth alone, at nightfall,
Wandering in one of these, the sacred cities,
When heaven above is quick with breaking stars,
And earth beneath with whispering spirit-winds -
Thine ear will catch the murmur of a voice,
Thine eye will catch the twinkle of a light
Set in a window, and a human form -
A shadow trembling, swaying back and forth,
A voice, an agony, that lifts and falls,
And comes toward thee upon the waves of silence.
Mark well the swaying shadow and the voice:
It is a Matmid in his prison-house,
A prisoner, self-guarded, self-condemned,
Self-sacrificed to study of the Law.
Within these walls, within this prison-house,
Six years have passed above his swaying form:
within these walls the child became the youth,
The youth became the man, fore-ripened swift;
And swift as these went, swifter yet were gone
The cheek's bloom and the lustre of his eyes.
Six years have passed since first he set his face
To the dark corner of the inner walls;
Six years since he has seen, for joyous sunlight,
Gray limestone, lizards and the webs of spiders;
Six years of hunder, years of sleeplessness,
Six years of wasting flesh and falling cheeks -
He knows that Jews have studied thus of old,
He knows the fame and glory they have won. ◇



Rabbi plants; Rebbetzin picks !

. . . To Vilna

I was 20 years old and it was time to enter the Polish army. Poland did not deserve two to three years of my life and the interruption of my studies. In Poland there were many Zionist organizations whose objective was to send as many *chalutzim* to Palestine as possible. Unfortunately, the Agudas Yisroel, an organization of great religious people, objected to the life of the secular *chalutzim*. During those years a limited number of immigration certificates were issued by the English Administration in Palestine. Initially, the Agudas Yisroel was left out from being able to send their youth to Palestine. Then there was a change in policy; the Agudas Yisroel was also given some certificates and I was one of the lucky people out of perhaps thousands my age to receive one. The Zionist organization required that a *chalutz* go to *hachshara* in preparation for the farming, road building, masonry and other manual skills that would be needed in Palestine. I volunteered for *hachshara*.

The Agudas Yisroel rented a farm in Gribishky, one of the small towns outside of Vilna where we were supposed to learn agriculture. For a few weeks we yeshiva boys learned a little farming and then returned to the Reb Meiles Yeshiva also known as Netzach Yisroel in Vilna. Students at agricultural colleges learn about the 'earth' whereas our studies combined 'heaven and earth,' with a strong emphasis on 'heaven.' Seventy-five percent of our time was spent studying in the yeshiva. I am absolutely certain that agricultural colleges here in America produce better farmers than we were!

The little farming that I did learn was eventually helpful to me anyhow. Years later, in Middletown and in Hartford, I had a garden with all kinds of vegetables every summer. Not only was it wonderful to pick the fresh vegetables from the garden, but also to wonder at G-d's great work. I used to love to see Naomi in the garden in the morning and watch her pick the vegetables.

Vilna . . .

In 1316 there were already Jews living in Vilna. A very large synagogue was built in 1570. The Torah was read from the *bima* which stood in the middle of the *shul.* The columns that held up the *bima* were so big that ten men could fit around each one. Upon entering the synagogue you walked down six steps, the opposite of the Temple where the *Kohen Godol* walked up six steps to light the menorah. I was told that this was a way that the Vilna synagogue memorialized the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The six steps down expressed PSALM 130 which begins, "A pilgrim song: Out of the depths I call to Thee, O Lord." The Vilna Pinkos tells us that in 1592, a group of hooligans destroyed that synagogue, but in later years it was rebuilt.

Vilna had 160 synagogues. Just across from the big synagogue was the little synagogue where R'Eliyahu, the *Vilna Gaon,* studied. This man who lived approximately 230 years ago, was known as the 'genius of the

world.' He wrote many commentaries on the Bible and *Talmud*. He slept two to three hours a night so he wouldn't have to interrupt his studies for too long. I was privileged to visit his grave in the Vilna cemetery. I keep a picture of him in my study.

The great Vilna Yeshiva was organized by R'Meiles in 1747 and was closed by the authorities approximately 70 years later. Once again we see the fear that the authorities had for the Hebrew *Alef Beis*. Later, permission was given for the yeshiva to reopen. I had the *z'chus*, to spend almost a year in the Vilna Yeshiva.

Vilna had many great Jewish institutions, including a Hebrew Seminary and a soup kitchen for the poor which distributed 30,000 meals a year, not only to Jews, but to non-Jews as well.

In 1799 the great printing firm, Ha-achim v'Almono Rom moved to Vilna. Between 1837 and 1857 alone, 480 Jewish books were published there. Vilna had one of the oldest Jewish libraries in the world called the *Strashuntz Bibliotech* containing many old books and documents. Scholars from all over Europe were attracted to this library. There was also a daily Hebrew paper called *Ha-z'man* (The Time) and the weekly *Ha-olom* (The World).

The city had a 'Catholic tower' called *Ostrobram*. Anyone who crossed the tower had to remove his hat to show respect to the religious figures stored there. Those who did not remove their hats were punished.

The poverty in Vilna was unbearable. Women dressed in *shmattes*, shivering from the cold, would sit on the street corners and try to sell a few bagels or baked potatoes just to make a few *groshen*. I don't know if there were rich people there. I couldn't tell. I didn't mingle with the rich. But the poor, I always recognized. Intellectuals, there were plenty. Just walking into the *shul-oif* (compound) where the Great Synagogue and little *shtiblach* were, you could recognize that there were many scholars of all subjects. By observing the traffic going in and out of the famous *Strashuntz Bibliotec* you knew that Vilna really deserved the title

Yerushalyim D'Lita, 'Jerusalem of Lithuania.'

Graf Pototsky z"l . . .

Near the grave of the *Vilna Gaon* was the grave of Graf Pototsky. Let me tell you a little about this man. Graf Pototsky was the son of a rich Polish landowner. This young man was blessed with a good head for studies, so his father sent him to Paris where one day he passed a synagogue (some say it was a *succah*) and heard beautiful melodies coming from the building. He fell in love with the Jewish religion and went to Amsterdam where he was circumcised, assumed the Hebrew name *Avraham* and became an observant Jew. Later he returned to a little town outside Vilna called Vileya where he prayed and studied in the synagogue day and night.

One day a little Jewish boy made some noise and Graf Pototsky reprimanded him. This little boy went home and told his father that a stranger yelled at him. His stupid father didn't investigate the matter by himself, went directly to the Polish (Catholic) authorities and told them that this stranger is really a former Catholic who converted to Judaism. He was arrested and the same methods of 'persuasion' that the Catholic Church used during the Inquisition were used on him.

Graf Pototsky remained steadfast in his conviction. On the second day of *Shavous*, the Polish Catholic authorities burned him at stake in front of thousands of Catholics at a place called the Ponarz. His last words were *Shema Yisroel*, "Here O Israel the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One." (In 1943 and 1944, the Jews of Vilna were exterminated by the Nazis at the same Ponarz.) The *shamash* of the synagogue bribed the executioner for Graf Pototsky's ashes and few remaining bones which he buried in the same cemetery where the *Vilna Gaon* is buried. Lo and behold, a tree grew on the grave in the form of a human being. The Polish Catholic authorities cut down not only a saintly human being, but also the tree. I saw this tree with my own eyes many years after it was cut

down. It lay on top of Graf Pototsky's grave and indeed, had the shape of a human being.

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodiensky z"l . . .

In my time in Vilna a Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodiensky, a man for whom all of world Jewry had great admiration lived on Zavalna 17 where, as a young lad, I visited him. He had a library with thousands of books. His word was the ultimate authority on questions pertaining to *Halacha* and on other important matters. He organized and was chairman of the *Vaad Ha-yeshivos,* the central organization for all rabbinical schools in Poland.

My *lantsman* Rabbi Yisroel Gustman (the brightest student in the Grodno Yeshiva) became the rabbi in Vilayka, a Vilna suburb and was a member of R'Grodiensky's *Vaad Ha-yeshivos.* Many years later, I found him alive in Jerusalem having escaped the Holocaust. His entire family had been destroyed by the Nazis. In Jerusalem he re-established the Yeshiva Netzach Yisroel.

Dr. Shabad . . .

Vilna was known as the city of intellectuals. In addition to *yeshivos* and synagogues there were great Yiddish and Hebrew writers and poets and other professionals. A physician named Shabad, referred to as the 'Angel of Healing,' organized many health organizations there. When Dr. Shabad died, the entire city of Vilna mourned and thousands of people followed his casket for many miles to the cemetery. YIVO, the research organization which recently celebrated its 100th Anniversary, memorialized Dr. Shabad for his great work. Our son Jacob was the main speaker at this event in New York.

The Good Jewish Doctor, My Mother and a Polish anti-Semite ...

Vilna had a Jewish hospital where people from all of Poland came to

seek medical advice. The Chief of Surgery was a Jewish woman whose name I cannot recall. Shame on me. She was not only a great doctor but also a *goote neshomeh*. While in Vilna Yeshiva, I received a letter from my father saying that my mother is critically ill. He already had taken her to a doctor in Suvalk but the doctor recommended the surgeon in the Jewish hospital in Vilna. I don't know how, but my father managed to bring my mother to Vilna. A family of complete strangers took her in for a few days before she was admitted to the hospital. After a thorough evaluation, this great surgeon called me in and said in Yiddish with a voice that appeared to ask my forgiveness, *"Mein kind, 'siz tzu shpet."* (It is too late.) My mother had only six weeks to live. She, no fool, understood her grave condition.

I interrupted my studies. We took the train from Vilna to Suvalk and from Suvalk we hired a coach to bring us home. The driver wasn't from Wyzan, didn't know the way and got lost. My mother was full of pain and asked for a little water. We stopped a Polish farmer, explained our situation and asked him for two things: a little water for my mother and directions back home to Wyzan. He was cruel beyond comprehension. He refused both things. Not only did he refuse, he threatened to harm us if we didn't get off his property. I don't believe the man had a human spark in him.

We started back. The horse found his own way to Wyzan and we found a little brook. As it was said by Isaiah the Prophet, "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib." The dumb animals have more intelligence than some people. Yes, the horse had more intelligence and certainly more humanity than the farmer. We find in the Torah that when Moses traveled in the wilderness with his people, he asked the Edomites' permission to go through their land; if they would drink any water, Moses would pay. Edom said to Moses, 'Stay away, lest I go out with sword to annihilate you.' This was our situation.

My mother lived exactly six weeks. Two days before *Rosh Hashanah*

in 1935, she died in my arms.

A Few Final Words on Vilna . . .

Vilna which was then part of Poland and is now the capital of Lithuania, is a city which had thousands and thousands of Jews and now has hardly a 'minyan.' I read that during the war, the Germans used the main synagogue as a stall for horses. Oh Hitler, what did you do to my people?! ◆

שיר על מות זאב ז'בוטינסקי

נקטף בדמי ימיו
איש רב פעלים
לחם בחרוף נפש
לגאולת היהודים.

אין בנו היכולת
לתאר צערינו
אוי, מי ירפא לנו
מגודל שברנו.

היה איש מחונן
בכשרונות שונות
מחנך, מארגן,
ובידיעות שפות.

שקעה שמשנו
באמצע היום
זה זאב ז'בוטינסקי
גבור הלאום.

יהי לעד
ברוך זכרו
מנהיגנו הגדול
שלום לעפרו.

יחזקאל
July 1940

Zev Jabotinsky

Jabotinsky was hated by the English. He recognized their hypocrisy and knew England would not keep the promise regarding a Jewish homeland despite the November 2, 1917 Balfour Declaration.

I remember the article Zev Jabotinsky wrote in the daily Jewish newspaper, Der Moment, *"Kinderlach, lern't zich shisen und layft avek fun Polin. Di himlen in Polin veren badekt mit shvartze volkens far di Yiden."* (Children learn to shoot and run from Poland. The skies of Poland are becoming covered with dark clouds for the Jewish People.) How prophetic he was. If Polish Jewry would have listened and taken his words seriously, hundreds of thousands of Jews would have been alive today. Unfortunately, his sentiments were not shared by some, including many anti-Zionist religious leaders who felt that the *chalutzim* were too irreligious.

Several years later, I had the privilege to hear this great leader and hero speak in Vilna. I will never forget it. He spoke for four hours without any notes. The people were spellbound.

In Palestine, he founded *Beitar*, the militant Jewish self-defense organization, for which he was arrested by the British and sentenced to fifteen years in jail. Later, they 'let him live,' but sent him out of Palestine on the condition that he never return.

Among his devoted disciples was Menachem Begin who in 1977 became the Prime Minister of Israel. Begin repaid the English for their cruelty by blowing up the King David Hotel which housed their administration. He gave those administrators 30 minutes to vacate, but they didn't take the warning seriously. Over 100 English police were killed and an entire wing of the King David was destroyed.

Jabotinsky's warm Jewish heart burst from grief and disappointment over the apathy of American Jewry. He died in 1940 here in America.

◆

ZEV JABOTINSKY

A man of great achievement was torn away in the midst of his life.
A man who fought with all his soul for the redemption of his people.
We have not the ability to express our grief.
Oh, who will heal us from terrible distress.
He was a man with many abilities,
An educator, an organizer, a man of many languages.
Our sun went down in the middle of the day.
This Zev Jabotinsky, the hero of the nation.
Let it be forever, his memory, a blessing of our great leader,
Peace in his grave. *H.L.*

-TRANSLATION OF ORIGINAL IN HEBREW-

My Last Simchas Torah with My Father

Simchas Torah is the last day in a chain of holidays. On that day, we conclude the reading of DEUTERONOMY and begin again with GENESIS. *'Ki lekach tov nosati lochem Torosi al ta'azovu. . . . Etz chayim he lamachazikim bo v'somchei-ho me-ushor.'* (I gave you good instruction, foresake not My Torah. . . . It is a tree of life to those who take hold of it and happy are those who support it). All year the mood of the Jew is restrained because of life's uncertainties. When *Simchas Torah* comes, the gloominess disappears and for hours, people march around the *bima* with Torahs clenched to their chests, singing and dancing and children following with flags. *'Nogila v'nismecha bo'* (We rejoice and celebrate for it). It is hard to recognize the Jew, full of spirit and with so much hope and trust in the Almighty that He will protect them. Those who never witness this holiday, can't understand the soul of the Jew at all. The Israelites said, *'Na-ase v'nishmah,'* (We will do and we will

hearken). The congregation sings together grandly, knowing that salvation is on the horizon when the *chazzan* chants *"O-no Hashem hoshio no; O-no Hashem hatzlicho no; O-no Hashem a-nei-nu b'yom korei-nu"* (O Lord save us; O Lord prosper us; O Lord answer us when we call). The atmosphere in the entire *shtetl* changed; misunderstandings vanished; there was only celebrating.

My father, although frail and small, became strong and tall on *Simchas Torah,* dancing and singing and holding the Torah close to his heart. As *Gabai*, he was escorted to *shul* under a *chupah*, a sign that he will again assume this honored position as leader of the *kehillah*. I chastised myself for questioning where he took his strength. After all, *'He giveth power to the faint and to him that hath no might, increaseth strength.'* ISAIAH 40:29 He believed as I do, that the Messiah will come and make an end to all Jewish *tzores*.

On this, the last *Simchas Torah* with my father, he was not the same. It was three weeks after my mother died. He clenched the Torah to his chest, then turned to me and said, *'Mein kind, nem de Torah. Zee vet avek-falen. De fire iz ois-ge-loshen gevoren. Ich hob nit kein ko-ach.'* (Take the Torah or it will fall. The flame is gone.) My mother lived 52 years, every day of her life filled with accomplishment. She was so beloved and respected that the tragedy of her passing affected the whole *shtetl.*

At least I had some consolation about my mother's death. It happened under civilized circumstances - in our house, with her family around her. She was buried in accordance with Jewish Law, with a proper *tahara,* dressed in *tachrichim* and in sanctified ground. Not so with my father, brother and sisters. For them death came at the savage hand of the Nazi beasts- no *tahara*, no tombstone and until 20 years ago, not even a date of death. *But, my dear family, your bodies were burned but your spirit is properly buried deep within my heart forever. Peace be with you.* ◆

. . . *To Mir*

After Mother died, the atmosphere in the house changed completely. No more songs, no more laughter. A dark cloud of sadness hung over the house. How terrible and heartbreaking it was to see my father bent over the *Siddur* crying. He loved my mother dearly, and all that my sisters could do was to listen to his grief. The only one who managed to get a smile from him was my youngest sister, *Basha Gitele*. Later the Nazis, may their name be erased, killed her when she was eight years old.

One day my father turned to me and said, '*Mein kind,* run away. The Polish Army is not for you.' He believed wholeheartedly that the end of Jewish life in Poland was coming. I did not return to Vilna; instead, the *Agudas Yisroel* sent me to the town of Mir, supposedly also for *hachshara*. However, there was almost nothing like manual arts to study

there, so they sent me instead to the yeshiva.

In this book you find many negative remarks about the Polish Government and people. They deserve them. But I must compliment one Polish man, G-d rest his soul, for showing goodness that really touched my heart. To get to Mir, I traveled by train from Suvalk which took many hours. It was almost twilight, time to find nine more Jews to *daven* with a *minyan*. I found them and we congregated in a corner. When some Polish boys tried to disturb us, the conductor noticed and stood guard until we finished. As I recited the *Kaddish*, I heard him scolding the hooligans after which I grabbed his hands and kissed them. He cried.

The Yeshiva of Mir was the 'Sorbonne' of *yeshivos* and I felt honored to be admitted. One thing is for sure- there were boys who were more knowledgeable. But, I didn't ask questions and went. We followed more or less the same pattern of study as in Grodno. I spent seven months in Mir during the coldest part of the year. Can you imagine 400 boys studying in one big hall with the voice of Torah heard loud and clear? People from all over the world came just to see the yeshiva; many rich Jews came to select a *choson* for their daughters.

Most Jews of Mir engaged in buying and selling grain. They were fine people with big hearts; nonetheless, the economic situation in the yeshiva was terrible and I had to eat. I volunteered to dig graves in the frozen ground in exchange for a few loaves of bread. This made it possible for me to remain at the Mirer Yeshiva. This too, was beneficial to me. I found myself in the greatest yeshiva of the world and was able to recite *Kaddish* after my mother in such a highly spiritual atmosphere.

The *Mashgiach* at the yeshiva was R'Yeruchem. Twice a week he lectured us about proper conduct and the meaning of life. He was a philosopher and a great thinker who constantly walked in the aisles to see if the students were really learning. His eyes penetrated you and you could not escape his glance.

Mir was my last yeshiva before I left Poland. ◆



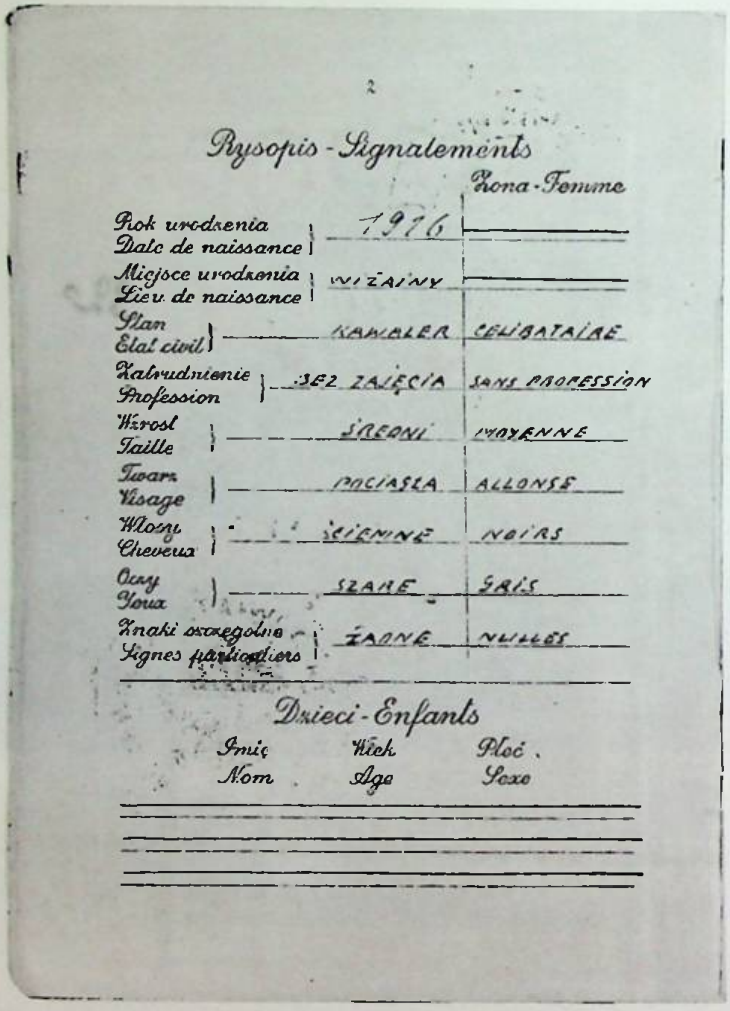
'Yosel der Minister'
surrounded by Bashe Gitele, Dovid, Chashke,
Sheine Rochel and me.
Dvor'ke was out of town, Chana in America.
Mother had died the year before.



- The Mirer Yeshiva -



- The town came to say 'goodby'
to the Polish Army's 'most wanted' fugitive -



2

Rysopis - Signalements

		Żona - Femme
Rok urodzenia / Date de naissance	1916	
Miejsce urodzenia / Lieu de naissance	WIĘZIENNY	
Stan / Etat civil	KAWALER	CELIBATAIRE
Zatrudnienie / Profession	BEZ ZAJĘCIA	SANS PROFESSION
Wzrost / Taille	ŚREDNI	MOYENNE
Twarz / Visage	OWALNA	ALLONGÉ
Włosy / Cheveux	CIEMNE	NOIRS
Oczy / Yeux	SZARE	GRIS
Znaki szczególne / Signes particuliers	ŻADNE	NULLES

Dzieci - Enfants

Imię / Nom	Wiek / Age	Płeć / Sexe

Money Talks

The Poles used to say, "*Zydy to Palestine*" (Jews, go to Palestine)! I was a young man, in good health, although I never saw a banana in my young life. My diet consisted mostly of bread, potatoes, and once in a while a piece of meat . . . a very meager diet. I didn't need to fear being overweight.

I knew very well that I would be drafted into the army. G-d, I, your humble servant, who studied your holy Torah, should go to be a soldier in the Polish Army? Eat non-kosher food? Desecrate *Shabbos*? Not be able to put on *tefillin* every day? How would You allow it?

To leave Poland, I needed a passport and the Governor's signature had to be on every passport issued. A young man my age was not allowed to leave Poland unless he was an invalid, etc. How did I get a passport? A letter of great importance was sent to cousin Polly in Brooklyn, explaining the seriousness of the situation. My aunts and

uncles in America, thankful that at least they have one rabbi in the *mishpocho*, collected $110. You know, my friends, for money you could buy a lot of things . . . especially Polish officials. So the secretary of the Governor was bribed with a fifty-dollar bill. He stole a passport, wrote in the required information: age, place of birth, birth date and inserted a picture. He signed the Governor's name and there was a passport!

The other fifty dollars went to buy a ticket for the boat from Romania to Palestine. Ten dollars was left over. With five dollars I bought a few things for my trip and a ticket to Warsaw and the other five dollars was what I had in my pocket when I arrived in Palestine.

The entire *shtetl* of Wyzan knew that I was about to leave so, a month before, they organized a picture to be taken with me in the center. I knew it would be very dangerous to have this picture with me during the border crossing. I arranged to have all of my family pictures including those from the yeshiva sent to someone in Palestine by a non-Jew.

For a month I had to live incognito. Being caught would mean 'goodbye world.' I would be put in jail for the rest of my life or even shot. I ran from place to place, hiding in stables and in the straw on Jewish farms.

The last *Shabbos* before I left Wyzan forever, was *Shabbos Hagadol.* I made up my mind that regardless of what happened, I would go to *shul.* I believe that when the congregation saw me, they were shocked and prayed for my success. I was given *Maftir* and if I ever chanted an *Haftorah* with feeling, this was the time. I cried, the entire congregation cried and Dovid'ke held my father so he would not collapse.

My father's watch . . .

The next day I changed clothes to look like a farmer and sat with my father on a horse-drawn wagon. We went to Suvalk so I could take the

train to Warsaw. In Suvalk we bought a ticket and my father gave me the remaining five dollars. We started to say goodbye to each other. The tears were flowing and the kissing did not end.

I sensed there was something that my father wants to tell me. He finally opened up. '*Mein kind*, do you remember the incident I had with the man who accused me of pocketing money that came for the poor? You told the man that as long as your father was the *Gabai,* he would do as he pleased. Instead of being happy that you stuck up for me, I told you to apologize to the man, as it was not your business. I never forgot the incident and never forgave myself for being too harsh with you. Please, *mein kind*, forgive me.'

More tears and more kisses and at the end, my father took out his golden watch which he had inherited from his father. 'Take the watch. I want it to remain in the family.' With all my strength, I said, 'No Daddy. I will not take it. If you want, you will give it to *Dovid.*'

Later I would learn that a young girl from Wyzan disguised herself as a Polish girl and witnessed her father's and my father's end. They both were made to dig their own graves, but my father managed to give the watch away to a Polish woman in exchange for a linen cloth. That linen cloth served as his *tachrichim.* The watch served the ultimate purpose that in death he had his appropriate burial garment. How happy I am that I didn't take it.

The train started to move, a last kiss, a last waving with the hands. I can imagine what went on at home during the *Seder.* I am sure it was more like *Tisha B'Av* than *Pesach.*

The next day, I arrived in Warsaw. A delegation from the *Agudas Yisroel* came and arranged places for us to stay the first two days of *Pesach* and also arranged our transportation to the Romanian border. On the train, there were 1200 boys and girls. It took a long time to travel from Warsaw to the Romanian border, but I was happy that I had already

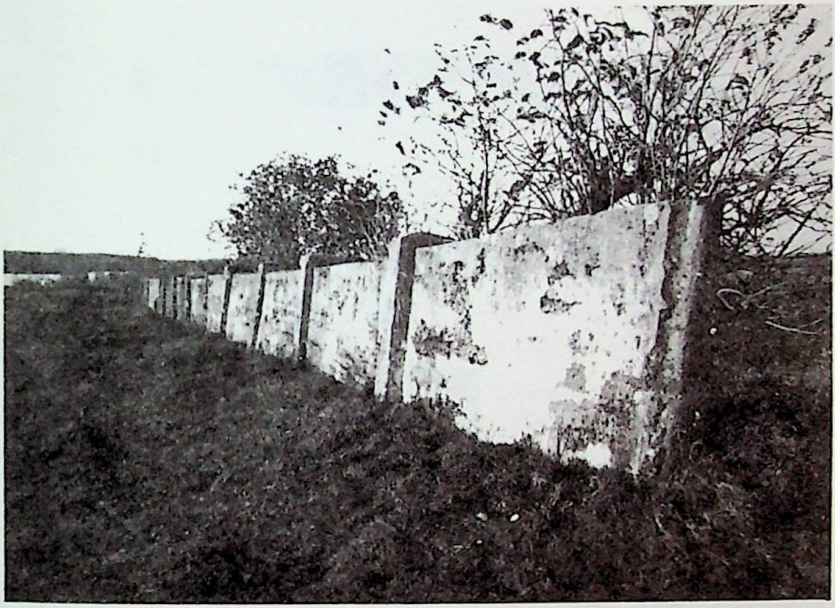
gone through the anguish of parting from my family. In the Warsaw railroad station I witnessed once again the crying and kissing of people saying goodbye to their children which was very painful for me.

We finally came to the border, and here was the crucial moment of my life. I knew the authorities were looking for me and that I would be safe only inside Romania. At last, I crossed the border and nobody questioned my passport. This is where the Polish authorities destroyed my certificate of ordination from the Grodno Yeshiva. I recited *Hagomel* – the prayer by one who has come safely through a dangerous experience. *Blessed art Thou, Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, who bestowed favors on the undeserving, and hast shown me every kindness.*

This is the end of my travels in Poland. From Wyzan to Suvalk to Grodno to Vilna to Mir and finally, my departure from Warsaw. *"'Go thee,' said the Lord to Abraham."* Indeed, I am a descendant of Abraham our Father. I left Poland with an aching heart, leaving my father, my sisters, brother, brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews, and of course, colleagues and friends in the *yeshivos*. I made it; I survived. Most of them did not. I recall their beautiful faces. ◆

A few years ago I had a U.S. passport and Polish visa, ready to visit my birthplace. Jacob and Harold were supposed to go with me. As the saying goes, 'A man proposes and G-d disposes.' On the advice of my physician, I had to cancel my trip. Jewish people do go, especially the Chasidim. They do a beautiful job restoring the cemeteries where so many Jews are buried. The Polish Government is polite to guests. Why not? Tourists, Americans in particular, are welcome for their dollars. Yet, every so often, we read that anti-Semitism is still alive in Poland, even though there are only five or six thousand elderly Jews left there.

Our daughter Rachel, G-d bless her, was in Poland in November 1986. She took a Jewish group there, but told me only two days ahead, when it was a certainty. In that period, she called many times asking what to look for. After her group left for Israel, she traveled five hours by cab to Wyzan. Nothing remains except the cemetery where my mother is buried. Rachel brought me a stone from the dirt road with a photo of the site that had once been the shul. These items, encased in lucite, are on my desk. What a wonderful gift! ◇



- Inside the Wyzan Cemetery -
Wall was built while I was still there
with money from my American relatives.



-HaRav HaGaon R'Yechezkel Sarna, *z"l* -
My Rov
whom I had the z'chus to see again in Jerusalem in 1968

AS A SOLDIER IN PALESTINE

. . . *To Palestine*

Crossing the Romanian border brought a sigh of relief – not only for me with my forged passport, but for all the passengers who were going to *Eretz Yisroel.* We traveled in the Romanian train packed like sardines, with hardly any toilet facilities and many mothers had their babies with them. So, if you fell asleep you were awakened by the crying infants. But it was sweet. We were free and we were going to the land G-d gave to the Jewish People.

Food in the train was very meager: a piece of *matzah*, a glass of water, just enough to quench our hunger and thirst. (Remember, we started our journey on the Black Sea on fourth day of *Pesach*). We finally came to Constance, the Romania harbor, to take the boat to Palestine. It so happened that it was a Polish boat. The name of the boat was *Batory.* The Captain and the crew behaved well. It was the first time

in my life that I saw both a big passenger ship and the Black Sea. We were assigned cabins; mine with three other men were all the way down. We fell asleep but I felt sick to my stomach— like I had eaten an old fish. In the morning, we managed to get up and we did have a *minyan*. The sun came out and I felt better. We traveled several days. On the sixth day of *Pesach*, the Captain announced that we must stop in Turkey to get more *matzah*. We remained on the boat, but could see Constantinople from afar.

Pesach was over. The last night on the boat none of us slept as the Captain announced that soon we will see Palestine. Our hearts were beating a mile a minute. Little by little, the boat came to Haifa. A delegation from the Jewish Agency was there to welcome us. They gave us a medical examination, one *piaster* and told us our destination. Not having any relatives, I chose Gedera because my first teacher's daughter and her family were living there. Indeed, they welcomed me. They themselves were living in a *tzrif*, a makeshift bungalow– four walls with and a roof and dirt floor (not strange for me). The name of the blessed family was Kaplan. Mr. Kaplan, a religious man, made *Kiddush* Friday night on Carmel wine, the wine we always dreamed about drinking. Every morning Mr. Kaplan would go to Rehovot to buy the ice and deliver it to his customers. He had an Arab to help him who one day took sick. Mr. Kaplan told the Arab that I would go to Rehovot with him to buy the ice. I was glad to do it, but Mr. Kaplan was very smart. He put an ice pick in my pocket. It is then I understood what our sages meant by *"kabde-hu v'chashde-hu,"* (respect him and suspect him). We came back safe and Mr. Kaplan told me he found work for me in a *pardes*. My first day was on Friday. The sun was hot and I had to loosen the earth which was hard as a brick, around each bush. I finished the day, but Friday night I got a nosebleed and thought that was 'the end.'

I was in Gedera about two weeks, working one day and having two days off. I decided to go to Jerusalem. But what do you do if you have

no money, no relatives? Jews have *bitochon*. I had a friend from Grodno Yeshiva who came to Palestine a year before me. Luckily, I remembered his name and address - Amos Street - from the last postcard I received in Poland. I found him on a Friday and he invited me to stay with him. 'Whatever I eat, you will eat.' That *Shabbos* we both ate pita and a big watermelon.

Frankly, I was destitute. But, G-d works mysteriously. My friend worked on construction. The man he worked for was Prusak, a builder. My friend suggested that we daven at the home of Mr. Prusak who was in mourning and had a *minyan* in his home. We both went to Prusak and for the first time in my life I was in a circle of *Yerushalayem Yidden*.

It happened that the *Baal Koreh*, the Torah reader, was sick and could not come to the *minyan*. When it came time to read the Torah, there was nobody to do it, so I volunteered. They were hesitant to let me - young, no beard and clothed in just a shirt and jacket - not fitting. But, it is said, when you need the thief, you remove him from the gallows. They finally agreed.

My heart was filled with *tzores*, no money, no family, etc. However, my reading found favor and I was given *Maftir*. The reading was very fresh in my mind. Afterward my friend and I were invited for *Kiddush* and the *Shabbos* meal with the boss.

At the table he inquired about me. After answering all questions, he asked if I would like to work for him. *Would I?!* I worked for the man for about four weeks. My pay was one pound a week, approximately five dollars- and I was happy.

About the work . . . Mr. Prusak was a gentleman, but business is business; you have to produce. I was assigned to mix cement by hand (no machines) and carry it on my shoulders up to the second and third floors of a building. It was hard. It reminded me of Pharaoh who subjected the Jew to work *b'chomer u-vilvanim*, with mortar and bricks. At the end of working a ten-hour day, I came home hungry, but more tired.

A Second Encounter with The 'Angel of Death' . . .

One day we worked in Kiryat Shmuel, a fancy Jerusalem neighborhood. It was a building for Mr. Feinstein, President of Mizrachi Bank. The man was extremely intelligent, always with a smile on his face and a kind word. I could not put his wife in the same category; she never smiled and was always critical, but who cared. I worked for Mr. Prusak, who complimented me once in a while, saying, 'For a *yeshiva bochur* you are doing very well!'

I was assigned to dig a hole near the foundation. Suddenly, I hear everybody shout with terror, "*Yechezkel neherag*!" (Yechezkel is killed). Frankly, I was terribly perplexed. I know quite well that who shall live and who shall die is announced in heaven. But, gosh, I think I am alive. I touched my body; it was intact. I breathed. The only thing I felt was a sharp scratch on the side of my right foot. So what? You don't die from that. As the masons put in the stones, a big one (40-50 pounds) had rolled off the scaffold and fell only three or four inches away from me. I shouted, *"Ani Bachayim!"* (I am alive!)

That *Shabbos*, Mr. Prusak gave a *kiddush* at his house in my honor. I did make the *brocho, Hagomel* for this was the second time I wrestled with the *Angel of Death* — and won.

My work for Prusak didn't last too long. The Arabs refused to deliver stones, sand, and gravel, so Mr. Prusak almost went bankrupt. Now, where do I turn? I didn't save up money, my garments are worn, my stomach is empty, my heart is full of uncertainty. I was not the only one. There is a saying in the TALMUD, RUTH RABBA PAGE 2, "*Tzarat rabim chatzi nechoma.*" (The affliction of the multitude is half of consolation). I didn't give up hope.

There is a story about Rashi, the great interpreter of the Torah and Talmud, (1040 - 1105) whose real name was R'Shlomo Yitzchaki. He was once on a boat with a number of diamond merchants and a storm capsized the boat. They made it to shore, but moaned and cried, 'We lost

our merchandise. How are we going to make a living?' Rashi smiled and said, 'I have my merchandise with me.'

Sure enough, when they came to the city of Troy, people recognized him and immediately invited him to be the Rabbi. Now, the merchants realized that Rashi was correct; his learning, the Torah, was his merchandise.

PSALM 131– A PILGRIM SONG

I lift up my eyes to the hills; from whence will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth . . . He Who guards you will not slumber. Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. The Lord is your guardian . . . The Lord will guard you from evil.

...ensuring words.

I said to myself, 'Yechezkel, you spent so many years in the *yeshivos*; Why not go back? You will increase your knowledge and at the same time you will have three meals a day.' In Yiddish they say, "*Torah is di beste s'chora*" (Knowledge is the best merchandise).

I registered at the Chevroner Yeshiva where I became friends with many boys who had also come from Poland. R'Yechezkel Sarna, one of the great *Talmudic* scholars, was the *Rosh Yeshiva*. Originally, the institution was called K'nesset Yisroel, founded in Slabotke, Lithuania. Rabbi Epstein, the *Rosh Yeshiva*, moved it to the city of Hebron in Palestine. In 1929, the Arabs made a *pogrom* and close to 60 boys were killed – brutally, their heads chopped off with axes. Danger lured at all times, so the yeshiva was moved to Jerusalem and is called the Chevroner Yeshiva. In 1938, R'Yechezkel Sarna also ordained me.

A little about Hebron . . .

There is an old city in the Negev. Years back it was called Kiryat Arba. There are several reasons for calling it this. First, the city was divided into four quarters. Second, when Sarah died, Abraham purchased a piece of land from Efrom the Hittite for 400 *zuzim* (a type of universal

money.) Kiryat Arba is now Hebron. There we find *Ma'arat Ha-machpela*, the Double Cave of Adam and Eve, of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebecca and of Jacob and Leah. All of them are buried there. *Machpela* means 'couples.' Hebron is 17 miles from Jerusalem and was first capital of Israel. King David ruled there for seven years. Later the capital was transferred to Jerusalem, I hope forever.

Again, I was engrossed in my learning. On *Shavuos* afternoon, we visited King David's Tomb. According to chronology, King David was born on *Shavuos* and died on *Shavuos*. King David is a descendant of Ruth who embraced Judaism with the immortal words to Naomi,

> *Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee. For wherever thou goest, I will go, and wherever thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy G-d, my G-d.*

In memory of Ruth, the true convert, we chant the *Megillah* of Ruth on *Shavuos*. *Shavuos* means 'weeks,' seven weeks from Passover and *Shavuos* means 'oaths'. The Jewish People promised under oath to accept and obey the Torah. It is a beautiful holiday, celebrated at the beginning of summer. No *matzohs* to bake and no dishes to change. Just a holiday to enjoy physically and spiritually.

It is the custom to stay up all night and *lern*. That night all of us went through the Talmud. Of course, each student took a portion, then made *Kiddush* and went to the *Kotel*. What a feeling – trying to embrace the smooth stones – smooth because they were washed with millions of tears. I was overtaken with emotion when the *Kohanim* (descendants of the High Priest) stood near the *Kotel* wrapped completely in their *taleisim*, and with two hands stretched out and upward, repeated each word of the Priestal Benediction, *May the Lord bless you and keep you* . . . . I have the *z'chus* to stand at the holiest Jewish place, the place where our great Kings, Prophets and Judges stood . . . and now, I; *Who am I?* ◆

In Defense of Our Land and Our People

I never held a gun, a pistol or any other instrument of destruction in my life. While in the yeshiva, one of the teachers gave a talk about the sanctity of Israel and how we were obligated to the defend it. Even to give our lives for *Eretz Yisroel.* In his talk, he mentioned the very interesting story about the tribes of Israel; Reuven, Gad and half of Menashe who came to Moses and said, "Wherefore if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan." NUMBERS 32 Moses became very angry and gave them the following answer:

> *Unto the children of Gad and to the children of Reuven, shall your brethren go to war and shall you sit here? Wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over with the land which the Lord hath given them?*

The land referred to here, is where the King of Jordan established his



- Gaffit Lindenthal -
Is this what the Polish Army was missing?!

kingdom. His grandfather was given the land by England in 1922. But, according to the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, the land east of Jordan was to be part of Israel. When Balfour was ready to issue the Declaration, he asked Chaim Weizmann about the border of *Eretz Yisroel*. Weizmann turned to NUMBERS 33, 'Here are the borders of Israel.'

Isn't it true what is found in the Yiddish saying, 'When you show a dog a finger, he wants the whole hand.'

After listening to the Rabbi's talk, I asked myself why he chose this dramatic episode. He was an ardent Zionist and a great admirer of the *Haganah*. This was a message to us. 'Join the *Haganah*. Don't let others defend you.' It punctuated deep into my soul and I, too, made up my mind to join forces. One day, coming to the yeshiva, I found this message on my desk. "*Yechezkel*, we know all about you. You will come to this place on Sunday at 9:00 P.M. The room will be dark. You won't see anybody. But, somebody will see you."

It was a new group of volunteers. That is the beginning of my three and a half years in the *Haganah*. Several times a week, in the evenings, twelve of us got together in the Alliance School for training. For all three and a half years in the *Haganah*, I knew only those twelve. My commanding officer was Shmuel Soifer, strict, but a good soul. The twelve boys all came from *yeshivos* or from religious homes. It was called *Plugah Datit*, the 'religious division.' We trained the same as other divisions, only on *Shabbos* and holidays, we were off. We trained on Polish guns, to use a pistol, to take it apart and reassemble it in the dark. We also learned how to use hand grenades. A lot of time was devoted to teaching us how to administer first aid.

To be a member in the *Haganah* meant exercising your brain. You had to remember every order, every place, your number (no name), how many bullets you have, how many you used and the Morse Code.

We learned to recognize an enemy from afar, to establish distances

and how to know where in the world we were. East, West, North and South were easy. At night all was very difficult. We were taught to find our way in the desert where the sun, the hot sand and the horizon blinds and misleads you. You think you are finding your way out, but you don't. We know why it took Moses forty years to lead the Jews in the desert! I remember my commanding officer said, 'Tomorrow we will go on a hike in the Judaen Desert.' Let me tell you, it was no picnic. He gave us several lemons and two cans of water to quench our thirst. Within an hour, the water was gone.

Recognizing the enemy was a big job. First, the Arabs spoke fluent Hebrew; they dressed in modern clothing and resembled *Sephardic* Jews. In their traditional garb, they often hid between rocks. The Arabs have oil and we have rocks! The only way to identify them was to throw a small stone and hope they would stick out their heads.

After three months of intensive training, at least 100 recruits were put in a big dark room and with the *Shevuath Emunim*, the Pledge of the Faithful, we promised to be loyal soldiers.. If caught, we were never to reveal our name, place or the commanding officer's name etc. - even if it meant dying.

We actually had to fight two enemies: the Arabs and even more troublesome, the English. The British Administration was supposed to help the Jews establish their State, but turned against the Jews and many times we found ourselves between two fires. We could hear British soldiers say, 'Those bloody Jews.' But we were determined to defend our land, to defend every Jew possible.

The *Haganah* faced a big problem of how to get more rifles, hand grenades, pistols, and any kind of ammunition. It was forbidden for Jews to have ammunition, so we couldn't buy it and the English mobilized its army to catch anybody with armaments. A number of great Jewish patriots were hanged because they were caught with guns, among them Dov Gruner and Shlomo Ben Yosef. This Shlomo Ben Yosef took blood

out of his veins and wrote on his cell wall, *"La-mut o lichbosh et hahor"* (To die or to conquer the mountain).

How did we get what we needed? Ammunition was smuggled in by small boats. A pistol or a revolver was taken apart, stuffed in bellies of big fish and brought to the necessary places. The girls in the *Haganah* were of great help. Because of their physical build, they could hide a lot of parts. The English had a little more respect for the females and didn't do full body searches. Another method was to put the parts into watermelons. At times, we had to attack a truck that carried ammunition and this was the most daring way, but alcohol helped. The English also liked to drink; how happy we were to see them make more than a few *l'chaims*!

The English administration issued only a limited number of immigration certificates which was the legal way of entering Palestine. But, thousands of others wanted to come to *Eretz Yisroel*. The English Navy patrolled the shores. We put on bathing suits and pretended to swim offshore. The illegal boats came close to shore, the passengers were given bathing suits and they jumped into the water, mixing with the crowd. Hundreds of newcomers entered this way.

Among the thousands of English soldiers stationed in Palestine were soldiers from Australia and New Zealand who were more humane. They pretended not to see or hear. Two outstanding generals deserve the hereafter. Generals Weingarte and Brady, admirers of the Bible, were very sympathetic and we benefited from their friendship.

The administration applied all kinds of restrictions. The space near the Western Wall became smaller and smaller. They would not allow any tables except for the few minutes during Torah reading. They did not allow us to blow the *shofar,* not even at the end of *Yom Kippur* and thoroughly searched every Jew who came to the *Kotel* to pray. Regardless of how much the English tried to prohibit the *shofar* . . . the blast of *Tekiah*, stronger than all the church bells in England and more

effective than the sounds of Her Majesty's battle ships, was heard loudly. That drove the English mad. Nobody was caught and to this day, how the *shofar* came to the Wall remains a secret. 'Shame on you England.'

> *Ten miracles were done for our fathers in the Sanctuary: no woman miscarried from the scent of the sacrificial meat; the sacrificial meat never became putrid; no fly was seen in the slaughterhouse; no unclean accident ever happened to the High Priest on the Day of Atonement; the rain never extinguished the fire of the woodpile [on the altar, which was under the open sky]; the wind did not prevail against the column of smoke [from the altar-fire, so that the smoke was not blown downward]; no disqualifying defect was ever found in the Omer[of new barley, offered on the second day of Passover], or in the two loaves [baked of the First Fruits of the wheat-harvest and offered up on Pentecost], or in the shewbread [which was changed weekly, on the Sabbath], though the people stood closely pressed together, they found ample space to prostrate themselves; never did a serpent or scorpion do injury in Jerusalem; and no man ever said to his fellow: 'I have not a room to lodge overnight in Jerusalem.'*
>
> ETHICS OF THE FATHER, CHAPTER 5

We Jews live continuously with miracles. I am reminded of the story of Abraham and Isaac when G-d commanded Abraham saying, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee unto the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Isaac turns to his father and says, "Behold, here is the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" All of us know the end of the story. The angel appeared and told Abraham not to slaughter his son. Abraham looked around and "behind him a ram was caught in a thicket by his horns." You see, thirty-five hundred years ago a miracle happened at the same place. Remember, the *shofar* is made from a ram's horn. So the *shofar* on *Yom Kippur* was one of the miracles. . . .

My first guard duty was at *Beit Broza* owned by one of the oldest farmers in Palestine, in Motza Tachtit, approximately 10 miles from the center of Jerusalem, across from Kiryat Anovim, in a valley surrounded

by hostile Arab villages. He had a big family and cows, goats and chickens. My duty was to walk around incognito, carrying a Polish rifle, fifty bullets and two hand grenades. I was terribly scared- alone in unfamiliar territory but, proud and privileged to stand guard in my land. My tour was from sunset to sunrise. I started to like Motza and Mr. Broza who was a religious man with a *Shabbos minyan* in his house. When he heard that I could read the Torah, invited me to eat three good meals a day with his family and got permission from the *Haganah* for me to stay at least a month.

In the morning while it was still dark, the Arabs would go to Jerusalem to sell their produce - a time to be extremely alert. How strange it was to see the Arab riding on the donkey, his wife carrying the produce on her head. During the day, I was to be asleep, but unwelcomed guests visited me. In Wyzan, we had bed bugs. In Motza we had vicious mosquitoes. We found a remedy for the mosquitoes, but, there came another *tzore*-- a fly called *barchash*, invisible with the naked eye. This fly penetrated the covers, but more so the skin. The *barchash* was a silent enemy. Now we had four terrible enemies— theEnglish, Arabs, mosquitoes and *barchash*.

At the end of my stay, Mr. Broza took me down to his wine cellar. Among the many big wooden barrels filled with wine was one barrel, 110 years old. He gave me a small glass with a small amount of wine. Jokingly I said, 'Mr. Broza, there is not enough wine to make a *brocho*.' He smiled and answered, 'Drink it. If you want more, I will give you.' I didn't need more. My head started to spin like a *Chanukah dreidel*.

I went back to the yeshiva. Several times a week, at night I guarded for a 12-hour shift. I became used to being on duty. I trained myself to have eyes not only in front of me, but also on all four sides. Mukor Chaim, Talpiyot, and Mushmar Hanoded, the "Wandering Group." Whenever there was a suspicion of trouble, we were there.

I would like to share three cases of importance with you. They

happened two weeks apart. As you know, we *Ashkenazi* Jews start to recite *Slichos* a week or so before *Rosh Hashanah. Sephardic* Jews start a month before. Usually, the *Slichos*, an introduction to the High Holidays, are said right after midnight or very early in the morning. Two weeks before *Rosh Hashanah* I had *sh'mira* in one of the schools on *Machneh-Yehuda St.* This school was a 'hot spot.' Next to the school, separated by a stone wall, was a *Sephardic* Synagogue. I found out later, that there was an entrance from the school to the synagogue. My duty began at 6:00 P.M. and lasted until 6:00 A.M. Around 5:00 A.M. I was really tired. From out of nowhere I saw an Arab climbing the fence. Trouble- face to face with the enemy. I knew my orders. I also knew what the GEMORO IN SANHEDRIN, PAGE 72 says, "*Habo l'horgecho, hashkeim l'horgo,*" (if somebody wants to kill you, you kill him first). According to orders I shouted, *"Amod!"* (Stand!) There was no reply. The man kept climbing.*"Amod!"* a second time; again, no reply. A third time, *"Amod!"* and put a bullet into the barrel of my rifle. I took cover behind a tree. ***"Amod!"*** - one more time. At that moment the man heard my order to stop, jumped off the fence and actually fell near me shouting, *'Al tiro- ani av me-chamisho yelodim!'* (Don't shoot, I am a father of five children.)

All of this took maybe ten seconds, but felt like an eternity. Why was the man climbing over the fence? And why didn't I, a disciplined person, follow orders? Why did I break the rules by not discharging the bullet? This man, a *Sephardic* Jew, was also dressed like an Arab. He, with his floppy trousers, was the *Shamash* of the *shul*, wanted to arrange a place for *Slichos* which was to begin soon. But, he forgot his keys! Knowing there was an opening from the school, he climbed the fence. After the incident was explained, we kissed each other and cried from joy. I thanked G-d for not allowing an innocent man to be killed, and for the split-second decision to yell once more, *"Amod!"* I was reprimanded by my superior, but was also praised for breaking the rules- for the extra

amod. On *Succos*, the entire congregation invited me for *Kiddush*. It has been more than fifty years and the picture of the man climbing the fence and me ready to kill him has never disappeared from my eyes.

Those of you who have been in Jerusalem in Mea Shearim have noticed the uniqueness of this place. It certainly does not look like Fifth Avenue. But you can be highly impressed with the "voice of Torah" that rings from every house. *Yeshivos* and more *yeshivos*, young men clad in *Chassidic* garb. When they walk I think their eyes are always focused upwards. I used to love to *daven* in their *shtiblach*, small rooms with no decoration, a couple of wooden benches and an Ark. One *minyan* after another– *Shacharis* starting, perhaps at sunrise, *Mincha* around noon, then *Ma'ariv*.

On the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, Bennie and I were each wrapped in a *tallis*; the *Gabai* asked if I would read the Torah and blow the *shofar*. As I left the *bima*, a young man pushed a note into my hand. It was an order to report to *Ramat Rachel*, a *kibbutz* where young children from Germany came to escape Hitler. Obviously, my commanding officer knew at all times where to find me. Rachel Yanait, the second President's wife, was the head of the village. The Arabs attacked the village and there was great apprehension about the safety of the children. Members of the *Haganah* were summoned. I left the *minyan* and the *shofar* and reported for duty.

The shooting continued and the entire group remained in the village trenches. Sandwiches were thrown to us to eat. So it was that we prayed from the second day of *Rosh Hashanah* until a day before *Yom Kippur*. Thank G-d nobody was hurt. Only a few cows and a few chicken coops were destroyed. As PSALM 130 says, "From the depth I call upon the Lord." G-d hears your prayer from wherever you are.

The *Haganah* needed men who could serve a dual purpose . . . to work as a special policeman called a *gaffir* and at the same time serve as a soldier. As a *gaffir*, I was allowed to travel unrestricted. Every other

day the administration proclaimed *otzer* (curfew). You could leave the house only during a few hours of each day to shop for necessities. I wore my uniform and carried my travel card. Indeed a 'big shot,' but only G-d knew the fear of being caught that I had in my heart.

Two weeks after the incident with the man I almost killed, the *Haganah* asked for volunteers to go to *Yam Hamelach*, the Dead Sea, to guard the potash installation . . . .

Let me give you a little description of this Dead Sea area. First, the Dead Sea is the lowest point on earth. I believe 1300 feet below sea level. No fish are in the sea. It is completely covered with salt, thus, there is no vegetation. Only hot sun and a lot of salty air. During the day, the mercury goes up to almost 110 degrees. At night it goes down to 30-40 degrees. It is exactly what our father Jacob said to Laban, his father-in-law, "Thus I was in the drought consumed by day and the frost by night." GENESIS XXXI:40 It starts from Jericho and stretches south to Sodom and Gemorrah, two well-known cities. (G-d destroyed them because of their wickedness . . . Lot's wife turned to a pillar of salt . . . Lot got drunk and became the father of his two grandsons, Amon and Moal to whom his two daughters gave birth) You see the effect of wine!

Many times there was a *chamsin*, a hot wind blowing the sand and salt in your face and you could hardly breathe. The road from Jerusalem to the northern part of the Dead Sea was extremely dangerous. It was like turning around a winding big ball . . . from both sides big, big rocks . . . the road very narrow. For obvious reasons, traveling to the Dead Sea was always in a *shaiyarah*, a caravan of trucks. The drivers carried loaded guns. Going down was with empty trucks; going up to Jerusalem in trucks loaded with the chemicals. You could feel how the motors labored. If there was one flat tire, the whole *shaiyarah* stopped. Sometimes the Arabs destroyed the small bridges and the trucks could not go further; other times the Arabs shot at the tires. The trip down took least two hours; up took three to four hours or more. Today you reach

the Dead Sea from Jerusalem in one-half hour. I was assigned with three more *gaffirim* to be in *fescha*. The trucks always assembled at the Mandelbaum Gate, but there were days when no trucks arrived, so we were hungry, but did manage to secure water. We slept in a hut with the rifle by our side.

The day I left for the Dead Sea was in the middle of *Succos*. I said goodbye to my friends because *sh'mira* at the Dead Sea was very dangerous. Why I volunteered to go there I do not know. I went and something terrible happened. We were four on the post. Two were supposed to stand guard and two were to sleep. All of us fell asleep. An Arab threw a grenade. Two *shomrim* were killed instantly and one died a few hours later. I was untouched, only shaken to the point that I could not report to headquarters what had happened. Later, I came to myself and reported by telephone. My sad task was to take the three bodies for burial in Tel Aviv.

We left in the morning, buried them and started back, but only made it to Jerusalem. It was already sunset and no trucks would dare travel to the Dead Sea at night. Now, where do I go to sleep? I was upset, hungry and angry.

At that time I already knew Naomi and her family, so I decided to go to her place. She lived with her sister. I can't begin to describe to you the moment I entered the house, dressed in my uniform with my rifle, bullets, and two hand-grenades. They all knew what had happened regarding the casualties, but did not realize that I was so directly involved in the sad and tragic story. Again, I had wrestled with the "angel of death" and again I had won.

I continued in the *Haganah* until two to three months before I left Palestine for America. It was 1940– no medals, no farewell speeches; I simply said *Sholom* to my friends and my officer. My few years in the *Haganah* were most satisfying and I have always been grateful to the Almighty that He enabled me to play even a small part in defending my

people. Would I do it again? Yes, indeed. Knowing Jewish history, I believe that every concerned Jew must do his utmost for his people. ◆

Chayalim Almonim

'Unknown Soldiers'

The unknown soldier without uniforms, only fear and death around us, are mobilized to all kinds of life. Only death will relieve us from guarding.

In terrible days of pogroms and bloodshed and long nights of despair in the cities, in the villages we'll raise our flag and on it 'defend and conquer.'

With bereaved mothers' tears at the loss of children and with the blood of pure infants like with cement, we will glue our bodies but our homeland will be established.

If we will be killed in the streets or marketplaces they will bury us in silence at night but in our places thousand others will come to guard, to defend forever.

HAGANAH HYMN

Rothschild, Toscanini and Naomi

One year in Palestine, just before *Pesach*, my financial situation was very sad. The yeshiva also was in very poor financial condition. I did not have a few *piasters* to buy *matzah*. Just when you burn the *chometz* (I had nothing to burn) the mailman brought me a letter from Los Angeles from a cousin of my mother. In the letter, Cousin Yetta sent me five dollars. *I am rich!* With the five dollars, I bought things for *Pesach*, fixed my shoes and bought a new shirt. I was a Rothschild!

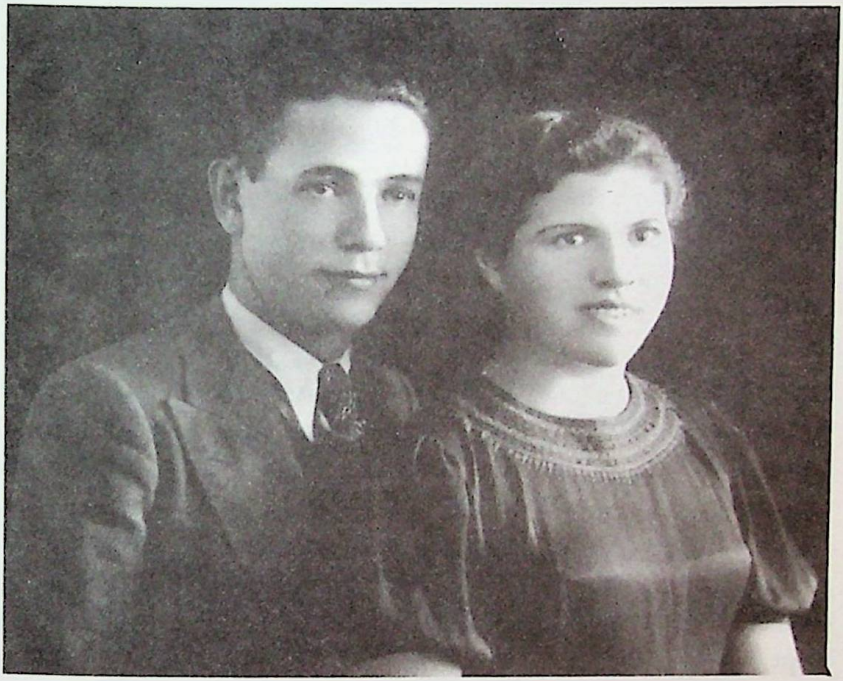
Toscanini, the famous conductor, came to Palestine to conduct the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, organized by Huberman. One friend from Lithuania, had a radio in his room. His name was Prusak, a first cousin to my former boss. Many friends came to Prusak's house to listen to the concert. In the crowd were Naomi Weinberg and Esther Frank, daughter of the Jerusalem Chief Rabbi, HaRav Tzvi Pesach Frank. Naomi and Esther were very good friends. Apparently, as I entered the room (I don't

know how she knew me) Esther whispered in Naomi's ear, 'He's from Poland and a Rabbi.' Naomi did not hesitate, 'He will be my husband.' Sure enough, I am!

That was *Pesach*. The next time I saw Naomi was *erev Shavuos*. We had a date which in those days meant taking a walk together to discuss a book or something of interest. It was *Shabbos* and that evening would be *Shavuos*. Closer to evening, I apologized saying that I must leave and go back to the yeshiva. I thought that would make her angry, but no, that impressed her even more. We started to see each other more often. Naomi introduced me to her sister, her sister's husband and family. I continued in the yeshiva and several nights a week was on *sh'mira*. When I went to the Dead Sea, Naomi sent me *Shabbos* food with the caravan. I assure you it was most welcome.

One day Naomi said, '*Yechezkel*, let's get married.' Naomi, a *Sabra*, had a lot of guts. I looked at her in amazement. Here I was, 22 years old, no money, no job, without enough food to sustain myself, let alone to support a wife. Naomi recognized that her proposal struck me like lightening. She didn't lose herself, but told me that she had to leave for America before the end of age 21, having inherited citizenship rights through her father. She suggested that I will be able to follow her after three months, having gathered the information from the American Consulate in Jerusalem.

I was in an awkward situation. First, I love Israel so much. How can I leave when thousands are dying to come here? Second, I was serving my country well. Third, I had two older, unmarried sisters in Europe and it wasn't customary for a younger child to marry before older ones. But Naomi's proposal could not be dismissed so lightly. Of course I married her- *after* receiving the blessing from my father and sisters. *Sheinke* thought it would be better if Naomi would go to America without getting married and her brothers in the U.S. would find her a more suitable husband, one who could support her. But Naomi persisted and we were



Naomi and I
November 1938

married on January 22, 1939. Six Rabbis performed the wedding and none of them had to help me say the nine Hebrew words as I placed the ring on her finger. No one from my family was there.

The American Consulate made the arrangements for Naomi to go to America first and then three to six months later, for me to follow. On February 4, 1939, I took Naomi to Haifa and she sailed to America.

Chief Rabbi and Fellow Traveler . . .

Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog *z"l* was Chief Rabbi of Palestine in 1939. Naomi had the great privilege of traveling with him to America on the same ship.

Rabbi Herzog stayed in the United States for a long visit. Meanwhile, German General Rommel approached the Egyptian border, aiming to take over the entire area. American Jews advised the Rabbi to remain in the U.S. because it was too dangerous to return to Palestine. He refused, saying that because his people are in danger, it is his place to be with them. Second, he didn't believe the Germans would overtake *Eretz Yisroel* reasoning that only two destructions had been prophesied. He related the dramatic story of Joseph's making himself known to his brothers. "And he fell upon the neck of Benjamin, his brother, and wept." GENESIS XLV:14 Rashi comments that the word for 'neck' is written in the plural, not the singular. Thus, Joseph wept for the two Sanctuaries in Benjamin's portion of land, destined to be built and eventually destroyed, one by Babylonians, the other by the Romans. In this light, Rabbi Herzog said he was not afraid to return. As we know, Rommel was defeated and eventually committed suicide. The prophecy holds true to this day, thank G-d. One hundred million Arabs have threatened little Israel many times and failed. Rabbi Herzog, G-d bless your soul. You were a true leader. ◆



- January 22, 1939 -



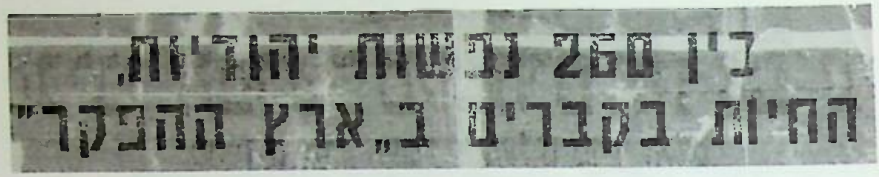
HaRav Yitzchok HaLevi Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Palestine
(seated center)
and Nachama Bracha Weinberg Lindenthal
on deck of SS Aquitania

Shechita, Milah and a Visa

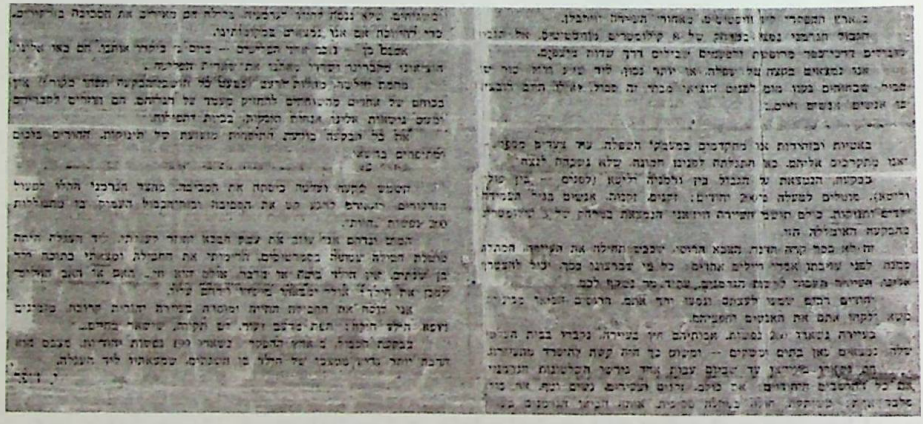
My teacher for *Shechita* (slaughter of animals for kosher meat) was Rabbi Avraham Rom, a great scholar and one of Jerusalem's *shochtim*. I had already learned the laws pertaining to *shechita* in the yeshiva. In a short time, I was certified by the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, HaRav Tzvi Pesach Frank.

Becoming a *mohel* was a little more complicated. The Hadassah Hospital *mohel* was very well known and agreed to teach me for five Palestine pounds. I was a very busy young man who had to learn everything in three or four months; after all, I was going to the United States. As it turned out, getting the American visa didn't happen so fast.

Naomi's brother Irving Weinberg, the prominent Rabbi and then Principal of the Soloveitchik Yeshiva in New York City, had advised that I become a *shochet* and *mohel* while still in Palestine. He said that if I came to the United States without knowing English, I would be able to



My eyes fell on this article about my town.



make a living only in small towns which needed rabbis who could perform many ritual functions. I took his advice and am grateful to him.

The Bible says, "Many thoughts are in man's heart but the advice of the Lord is accomplished." The skies of Europe became dark, the rumbling of war was heard and in August 1939, Hitler attacked Poland. The annihilation of European Jewry had begun.

While waiting for a miracle to happen, we hoped that perhaps things would change. I stayed with Naomi's sister *Sheinke* and her husband, Bennie Gabrielowitz, a first class gentleman. We became so close that people thought we were brothers. One Saturday afternoon we visited Bennie's relatives. On the table was a Hebrew newspaper with an article describing how the Germans had entered a town in Poland and how the Jewish families were chased out of their houses and how they had to live in the fields and at night searched for food that the farmers might have left unharvested. I turned white as a ghost. The article clearly named Wyzan as the town being described. That was *my town, my people*, among them, my father, four sisters, their husbands, my brother, my nieces and nephews. Bennie noticed that I was about to faint.

The war was in full swing. Country after country was being swallowed by Hitler. I had a huge problem. Naomi was in America and I was in Palestine. The Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean separated us and who knows when or if I would be able to go to the U.S. After deliberation in my own mind and some advice from friends, I decided to send her a *T'nai Get*. It is a 'divorce with condition' specifying that in case I would not be able to come to her after so many months, she would be divorced and would have the right to remarry.

Meanwhile, I continued training at Hadassah Hospital and in time was ordained as a *mohel* too. The head of Hadassah Hospital, Dr. Jasky of blessed memory, had taken a liking to me. He told me that his wife was pregnant and if the baby is a boy, he will allow me to be the *mohel*. To make sure that the operation will be okay, he would be the *sandek*.

Indeed, it was a boy and I, shaky and nervous, circumcised the child with Dr. Jasky saying, 'Yechezkel, continue. You are doing fine.'

Unfortunately, during the War of Independence, while Dr. Jasky and 35 other physicians were traveling to Hadassah Hospital on Mt. Scopus, the Arabs ambushed them and all of them were murdered. Dr. Jasky, G-d keep your soul among the *tzadikim*.

There is a saying in the Bible that G-d's salvation may come as quick as the blink of an eye. One day, the American Consul sent one of his secretaries to tell me that I had a visa to go to the United States and I should come to pick it up. I sent a cable to dear cousin Polly. In a short while I received money to buy a boat ticket. I believe it was 60 or 70 dollars. When my friends heard, they advised me not to go because the Atlantic was mined and too dangerous. The deep waters of the Atlantic would be my grave. What a dilemma: to go or not to go.

A great *Talmudic* scholar, the *Chazon-eesh* lived in B'nai Brak. Bennie printed his books. Occasionally, proofread the material. Unable to reach a decision about my voyage, I went to the *Chazon-eesh* and told my life story. He looked into my eyes and without hesitation said, 'Go to America. G-d will protect you. After all, your wife is an orphan. In her *z'chus* you will be able to join her.' Listening to this pious man, all my hesitations and doubts disappeared. I purchased my ticket on the *Nelah Hellas*, a Greek ship. On her return trip, she sank! Let her rest in peace on the bottom of the ocean. I am grateful to her for bringing me to the United States.

I said *Sholom* to my brother-in-law and family and left Jerusalem with an aching heart. Was I a traitor? I had many thoughts. The worst was when I reminded myself of the speech the Rabbi had made about joining the *Haganah*. Moses scolded the two and a half tribes who asked to remain in the land east of the Jordan, 'Your brothers will go to war and you will be here?' I was also very much concerned about the half million Jews who lived in Palestine. Remember, Hitler set his goal to

annihilate all Jews and he had found a very devoted friend, the *mufti* of Jerusalem, a vicious anti-Semite. The *Mufti El Husani* encouraged his followers to shower the Jews with stones while they stood at the Wall praying. He visited Hitler and upon his return from Germany, persuaded the Arabs to be even more aggressive and more warlike. Every day more Jews were killed.

O Lord G-d of hosts, how long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people? Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears, and hast given them tears to drink in great measure. Thou makest us a strife to our neighbors: and our enemies mock as they please. Restore us, O G-d of hosts, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. The boar out of the woods ravages it, and the wild beast of the field devours it. Return, we beseech Thee, O G-d of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and be mindful of this vine; and of the stock which Thy right hand has planted, and the branch Thou madest strong for Thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Thy countenance. Restore us O Lord G-d of hosts, cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. PSALM 80

I didn't hear anything from my family in Europe. We were on the boat sailing the Mediterranean which wasn't bad. The waters were calm but when we reached Gibraltar, the entrance to the Atlantic, the Captain made a speech. The boat would go zigzag to avoid floating mines. Each person had to have his floating jacket on at all times, even in bed. We had to remember the station and the number of the life boat assigned to us. On most days we had drills in case something should happen, but it was always announced that this was only an exercise. You can imagine the feelings among us. I believe that those passengers who never prayed in their lives, had a change of heart.

On the boat we managed to have a *minyan*, but we didn't have a Torah. We did have a *Megillah* which had been given to me by a student whom I tutored in *Talmud*. On Purim, I read it. This *Megillah* is one of

several great treasures that I still have.

Besides the fear of the floating mines, the weather was bad. A young couple with a two-year-old child was among the passengers. As soon as the boat moved out to the open sea, the parents became terribly seasick, but their child was fine. I felt pretty good as long as my stomach was full. So, I took care of the child.

A thoughtless man was on board. He loved oranges and, thinking there would be none on the boat, he brought a full wooden crate with him. After he finished them, he threw the crate overboard. Suddenly, the sirens blasted. No drill announcement . . . it was the real thing. We were well trained . . . Each of us knew exactly where to report. Trembling from fear, mothers were holding their babies near them and crying. I thought of my friends who had advised me not to go. Now I will rest at the bottom of the sea or even worse, a shark can make a good meal out of me. Every minute was fearful. I prayed for a miracle. After all, Jonah was also saved. I didn't expect the Atlantic to dry out for us like the Red Sea did for the Jews, but I hoped something would save us. I held onto the *tefillin* that my father gave me. Is that superstitious? No, not at all. I am a firm believer that G-d can perform miracles.

Sure enough, after ten horrifying minutes, the announcement came that all is clear. It was not a floating mine, but an empty orange crate! What a gift from G-d. Everyone, after quieting their nerves, was eager to find out the mystery of the floating crate. They wanted to know where it came from. Searching and probing, the Captain announced with a very stern voice who the owner was and reprimanded the stupid person for throwing it overboard. We all knew the person. He used to throw orange peels. For the rest of the voyage nobody had anything to do with him; no one talked to him. He was isolated. The next day was warm, the ocean was calm, everyone was on deck, but a group of people continued to debate over yesterday's frightening episode. One man said that he deserved to be thrown into the ocean. That aggravated me.

The story goes that Jonah tried to escape from G-d. Jonah was thrown into the ocean by the sailors. However, G-d appointed a big fish to swallow him. He lived in the belly of the fish for three days and then the fish spit him out. The story of Jonah is inspiring and teaches that you must follow G-d's commands and that you can't escape from Him. I told the story of Jonah to the people on the boat, reminding them that we have no right to assume that this man will be saved like Jonah. They listened to me. ◆



The Mohel gets a triple play!

AS A RABBI IN AMERICA

April 2, 1940

I wasn't sure if we would ever land in the United States– so many obstacles, so many problems including the boat losing a propeller, but, arrive we did. It was a happy boat. We had passed the Statue of Liberty. Finally, we came to Hoboken, New Jersey. It was April 2, 1940.

The immigration officer gave me the 'okay' to leave after slipping him $10.00 which I had borrowed from someone in Jerusalem.The little girl that clung to me the whole time, came running to me then, too. Naomi was understandably perplexed to see me holding the arm of a young child.

Three more people came to the boat. Besides Naomi, there was my older sister Anna who left Europe after the house fire. Naomi introduced me to her and we cried endlessly. Next, was my precious cousin Polly who had saved our lives many times and her handsome husband, Paul.

From Hoboken, we traveled by car to Brooklyn, to Polly's apartment on Crown Street.

In Europe I had my mother, father, sisters, brother and two grandparents. My dear mother had siblings, but they had all gone to America and she was the only one left in Europe. We had longed for cousins, aunts and uncles – we didn't have them in Poland. Now, coming to Brooklyn, I found myself surrounded by Uncle Ike and Uncle Jimmy, Tante Aidel and Tante Sheine and a slue of cousins. How wonderful I felt. But, before I was formally introduced, I locked myself in the bathroom and cried. Polly served a delicious meal of baked fish and strawberries with cream. Well, fish I could understand. We had fish in Europe too. But strawberries in April?!

After the meal, the introductions began. First, Uncle Ike examined my credentials. (He was a trustee of Yeshiva University.) After reading them, he came forward, kissed me and made the blessing of *Shehecheyanu*. "Thank You, G-d, for allowing us to reach this time."

Everyone wanted to know more about Poland in general, about Wyzan and about the family that was still there. It was impossible for me to relate all my experiences to them. ◆

My Uncle Recognizes the Coat

As you have already read, we experienced hunger in Wyzan, but we were pretty well-dressed. Packages of clothing always came from America. Some things fit, some didn't. Those that didn't fit, we sold for a few *groshen* or gave them to the poor.

Abe Berman, Polly's brother, owned Stein's Clothing and invited me to go with him to his factory. He wanted to give me a new suit. My sister said, 'Give him a coat and I will pay for it.' As we were about to leave, I put on my own coat and Uncle Ike started to cry out loud. 'Look people, look! This is my son's warm coat I sent to Europe six years ago!' His sobbing touched all of them. I turned to them and said, *My dear mishpocho, you have no idea how much your help meant to us in Europe. You have fed the hungry. You have clothed the naked.*

This coat crossed the Atlantic to Europe and then traveled with me

through five countries, three continents and now crossed the Atlantic again. In the immortal words of Ruth the Moabite to her mother-in-law, "Wither thou goest, I will go." I am grateful to the coat for it kept me warm and of course, Uncle Ike, I am grateful to you. "Six years he shall serve and in the seventh he shall go free." EXODUS 21:2 Six years the coat warmed me and now it will be free. A sermon - my first one in the United States. I didn't have any difficulty conveying the message to them. Even though my aunt and uncle were in America for many years, they still spoke in Yiddish. The cousins understood. Of course, Yiddish to me was like English to them. I believe the coat should have been put in a museum; after all, it had made history. I was fitted with a new blue striped suit and a beautiful coat at my cousin's factory. I looked like a real *yankee*, a real American.

Uncle Ike was a very clever man. Although, he himself had limited Biblical and *Talmudic* knowledge, he knew how rabbis are treated in America. He put his hand in his pocket. For a moment I thought he is giving me a few dollars and I will be able to send back the borrowed money to Jerusalem. But, it was not money. He handed me a small pocket calendar. '*Chatzkel*, when you become the Rabbi of a synagogue and when a woman asks you on Friday what time to light the candles, if you don't know, you are no more Rabbi!'

My family tried to Americanize not only my clothes, but my name as well. My Hebrew name is *Yechezkel*. In Polish, they called me *Chatzkel*. My parents called me *Chatzkele*. The cousins suggested I change my name to *Charles*. But my aunt and uncle objected. "Charles is too *goyish*." They compromised to *Haskel*. So, without any pain, my name is Haskel in English. Our visit ended and we took a train from Grand Central Station to Hartford, Connecticut.

It was April 4, 1940; we arrived in Hartford at 4:00 in the morning. Naomi's sister Ida and her husband William Lapp came to greet us at the railroad station. Naomi lived with the Parskeys at 104 Westbourne

Parkway. At that time, the street was part of a very exclusive neighborhood. Tired from a long journey on the ocean and overcome by emotion of seeing my wife, my sister and my large family, I fell asleep like a rock.

In the morning, I met a son of the Parskeys who had graduated from Harvard. Later he would become a well-respected Justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court. Leo remained friends with us for many years. He was once asked to have a Rabbi give the invocation at the opening session of the Court. He invited me and I was in heaven. Can you imagine coming from Europe and having such an honor?

When I arrived at the courthouse, I was introduced to all the Judges dressed in their black robes. The Chief Justice turned to me and said, 'Rabbi Lindenthal, it's nice to meet you. Please wear your yarmulke.' This is America. In Poland, the judge made my mother miss lighting *Shabbos* candles. Here, the Judge is proud to have a Jew practice his religion.

In the evening of our first day in Hartford, we went to meet more members of Naomi's family. Naomi's oldest sibling was a sister. Eva Stoltz was one of the most outstanding women in Hartford, a real *tzidkonis*, a pious and good person. She belonged to many organizations and worked very hard for all of them. But the most important job she undertook was being a member of the *Chevra Kadisha*. Eva Stoltz performed this great *mitzvah* for almost 65 years.

SHROUDS *are the traditional burial garment - not street clothes as are used by other religions. Approximately 1800 years ago, the Jews used to spend a lot of money on the deceased, dressing them in expensive clothes, jewelry and perfume. Poor people threw the bodies into the fields because they couldn't afford these costly things and naturally, the vultures had a good time. There came a great sage, Rabon Gamliel who ruled that all Jews must be buried alike. He introduced the shrouds.* PSALM 69 *says, "So fear not when a man grows rich, where the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing*

with him when he dies."

Even as she grew old, Eva Stoltz would not miss coming to *shul* on *Shabbos*. I would go to her house and walk with her. As King Solomon said in ECCLESIASTES 11:1, "Send thy bread over the water; some day you may find it."

Benny, Eva's husband, was the same type of person, very religious and mindful of his obligations to his fellow Jews. He too, was a member of the *Chevra Kadisha.*

We had come to Hartford on a Tuesday. On Friday, Benny said to me, '*Chatzkel*, tomorrow we will *daven* in the Mahl Avenue Shul.' We came to the synagogue and Benny said to the sexton, '*R'Leizer*, give this young man *Maftir*.' Leizer became angry. 'How do you know if this young man knows how to make the *brochos*?'

How the *Unseen Hand* works: Sixteen years later, I would become the Rabbi of Chevra Kadishe Teferes Israel Synagogue, the formal name of the *Mahl Avenue Shul.*

It had been a long time since I heard from Europe. I didn't have money to buy a Yiddish newspaper and I didn't understand English. It was very difficult to describe my feeling. In LAMENTATIONS 3:27 written by Jeremiah, we find, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." The MEDRASH EICHO RABATI explains this verse as follows: 'There are three yokes: The yoke of learning Torah, the yoke of being married with its responsibilities and the yoke of work.' I had accomplished two of them. I did learn, I did marry a fine woman, but the third - work? I couldn't find a job. I took the wandering cane in my hands and searched. Although there was an opening in Hartford, a member of the family obstructed me from getting the job.

On *Shavous*, I was in Newport, Rhode Island at the Touro Synagogue. I chanted the service, read in the Torah, preached three sermons. I gave a lecture in *Talmud*, a lecture in the Bible and all was fine and good. But the President of the synagogue, a young man, said to

me, 'We need someone who can speak English. Some day you will be fine.'

My Aunt Dobby, my father's sister, and her husband lived in Rochester, New York. They too, invited me to visit. While I was there, I tried out at a synagogue. Again, the same routine. All is fine, but, I didn't know English. My sister Anna lived in Philadelphia and naturally, I went to visit her. It so happened that there was a small Orthodox congregation, mostly elderly Yiddish-speaking people. I was invited for a 'tryout.' The same thing- chanting services, reading in the Torah, a lecture in *Talmud*; everything was okay. The last thing was to give a *drosho*. I did, but made a terrible mistake. As I stood on the *bima*, I turned my head and looked to the left side of the congregation. 'He is no good!' shouted the men on the right side of the aisle. 'He ignored us.' I lost again. But we learn from our mistakes. During the 53 years on the pulpit - the thousands of sermons and hundreds of lectures - I always reminded myself of Philadelphia and looked at both sides.

After five months of looking for a job, I said to myself, 'So don't serve as a Rabbi; become a peddler or go to work in a factory. There's nothing to be ashamed of.' "Love work and hate the holding of public office." ETHICS OF THE FATHER 1:10 Here I was in America, the *Goldene Medina*, the richest country in the world and one poor man couldn't find a job. In Europe, they said that in America money lies in the street and you only have to scoop it up. Well, in Europe people were not well informed.

People encouraged me. My sister Anna worried about me. One day she called to say that a friend from Roanoke, Virginia had visited and told her that they have a small congregation with 60-65 families. Their Rabbi's name was Murray Cantor who was not Orthodox. But, because there were many Orthodox members, they wanted an Orthodox Rabbi as well. I wrote to the president of the congregation and received an affirmative response. My sister bought the railroad ticket from

Philadelphia to Roanoke and gave me five dollars. She also wrote a note to the conductor to help me in Washington where I had to change trains to Roanoke.

The magical five dollars . . . When I left Poland my father gave me five dollars - all he had. In 1938, I was hungry and destitute, not a penny with which to buy *matzah* - Cousin Yetta sent me five dollars. Now, on the way to my first position in America and my sister has given me five dollars. ◆

Please pass the what?

Philadelphia to Washington was a short trip. The conductor was a very gracious man and he put me on the train to Roanoke, a trip that took almost five hours. The train went fast, stopping in a number of cities and the conductor announced their names - none of them familiar to me. I closed my eyes and dozed off and thought I heard *Suvalk, Grodno, Vilna, Warsaw.* But I was only dreaming.

I believe there is a song "*Que Sera, Sera*" whatever will be, will be. I finally arrived in Roanoke. Now, how do I recognize the President of the synagogue, Mr. Morris Masinter? He wrote that he would meet me at the station. A fine, well-dressed man approached, introduced himself as the President. He spoke a good Yiddish. (His father had been the Rabbi in Roanoke many years before). 'Are you Rabbi Lindenthal?' 'Yes, I am.' 'Are you *really* a Rabbi?' 'Yes, of course.' 'So where is

your beard?' Hearing the question, I thought, *'Haskel, this place is not for you.'* They are looking for an old man with a long beard and I am only 24 years old and no beard. 'Mr. Masinter, some time there is a beard but not the Rabbi, and sometimes there is the Rabbi but not the beard.' That answer found grace and he invited me to stay overnight at his home.After supper he looked over my credentials. His wonderful elderly mother assured me that I was the right person for the job.

The next day I met the Board of Directors and Rabbi Murray Cantor. A *shidduch*- I had the job. My pay was 11^{00} a week. They assured me that 'side money' would also come and found a place for me to stay at the home of the Diamonds. How glad they were that I was also a *shochet.* Meat was brought from Lynchburg, approximately fifty miles away. Now they would also have poultry. A few days before *Rosh Hashanah* 1940, Naomi came to Roanoke with clothes and two sets of dishes which Mrs. Parskey had given her as a gift. My debut was on *Rosh Hashanah.* I read in the Torah and blew the *shofar.* The first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, Rabbi Cantor spoke in English. He was an excellent orator. The second day I spoke in Yiddish. I was complimented, but really didn't know whether the sermon was good or if they just wanted to lift my spirits.

It is customary to visit the graves of the near and dear ones on the day after *Rosh Hashanah.* They took me to the cemetery to recite memorial prayers. I went home and gave Naomi 23^{00}. I was a rich man!

Suddenly everyone stopped speaking Yiddish to me. They wanted me to acquire the English language as soon as possible and even hired a Christian woman to tutor. Dr. Emilia Wilcox, a wonderful person, was a professor at Roanoke College. She had put her heart and soul into teaching English grammar, but I had trouble with my accent too. After a while, she introduced me to Christian groups of which she was a member and made me speak English to them. She was always nearby to help me. There is a Polish proverb, "If you can't say it orally, make motions with your hands and face." King Solomon wrote, "Far better is

a neighbor that is near than a brother far off." PROVERBS 27:10

The people of Roanoke were wonderful; every member of the congregation tried so hard to make us comfortable. Life became beautiful. There was still no news from Europe.

Dr. Jacobson, who came from the Bronx, spoke Yiddish and was a real gentleman. I told him that I had also trained in Hadassah Hospital to be a *mohel*. He thought that was wonderful because they had to import a *mohel* from Washington or Norfolk for every circumcision. He then told me that a Mrs. Fine is expecting a baby in a few weeks and if it is a boy, I will be the *mohel*. In those years, we could not predict if it was a boy or girl. A few weeks later, at 5:00 A.M. Dr. Jacobson awakened me. "Rabbi, it's a boy!" He invited me to his office to tell me how I should prepare myself. 'First, the circumcision will take place in the hospital. You will open the instruments on a sterilized tray . . . go to the scrub room, put on a cap and mask . . . scrub your hands for so many minutes and don't touch anything. You will enter the room where the circumcision will take place, holding your hands up. You will ask the nurse to help you with the gown, g-ow-n.'

All week long I reviewed the instructions. I did everything correctly - cap, mask, scrub and hands up. At the last minute I forgot what to ask for next. I broke into a cold sweat. Everyone was assembled. Many came just to see the new 'surgeon' perform. After a few minutes, I reminded myself. "Nurse, please give me the **gun**." The nurse started to laugh. "Rabbi, a gun? I've heard of many ways of doing it, but never shooting it off!!" Can you imagine the embarrassment? With Dr. Jacobson, G-d bless him, standing behind me, whispering encouraging words, it turned out just fine. *I had performed my first circumcision in America!*

After the first came a second one. The third circumcision was my oldest son Jacob. He was born in July 1941. When Naomi went to the hospital to give birth, nobody from her family was with her. But a gracious lady, Mrs. Cooper accompanied her and acted like a mother to

her. Naomi had been there for a few days and I came in for a regular visit but found her crying. I asked if something was wrong with the baby. 'No,' she said. 'Look, the Sisterhood President visited and brought a gift of $170. I don't want charity.' Later, it was explained to us that in America people bring gifts for the baby and this was the way they expressed their delight that we had become proud parents. And to this day, Jacob continues to make us proud.

The Sisterhood prepared a complete dinner as the post-*bris* party. Tante Aidel and Polly, Paul and their six-month-old baby, Burton, *shelpt* to the *bris* from New York - an 11-hour ride. We named our son after Polly's father, one of the nicest men I ever met. The *bris* was in the amphitheater of Roanoke Hospital. People said I was as white as snow, but again, Dr. Jacobson stood behind me. I became the official *mohel* in Roanoke and its surroundings.

Several days after Tante Aidel returned to Brooklyn, I received two gifts from her. One was the entire *Talmud Bavli*, a treasure, and a portable *chupah* (canopy). The *Talmud* I use very often, especially on Saturday mornings; under the *chupah*, I have performed many weddings.

We didn't have a car; I didn't even have a license, so Mr. Jacob Brenner drove me throughout Virginia and North Carolina. What a good man. We were at the Brenners' for *Shabbos* almost every week. The maid used to say, "Here comes your college boy."

The fate of my family in Europe did not let me have peace of mind. In PROVERBS 12:23, we find, "Anxiety in a man's heart dejects it; a good word gladdens it." I was waiting to get some news. Perhaps they escaped. But where? Poland and Lithuania were already in the hands of the Germans.

Jacob was only a few months old when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred. Meanwhile, Menachem Mendel Usishkin of the Jewish National Fund, died in Palestine. I knew Usishkin from my *Haganah* days. Dr. Jacobson, President of the Zionist Organization in Roanoke,

invited me to be the guest speaker at a memorial service. 'But Dr. Jacobson, my English is so poor. It is not fair.' 'Never mind,' he said. 'You can speak in whatever language you wish.' I entered the packed hall. Dr. Jacobson introduced me. "Here is Rabbi Linden. (He had shortened my name!) He will speak about Usishkin and what a surprise– he is in this country less than two years and he will speak in English." Let me tell you dear readers, if a grave would have opened up, I would have jumped in. But there was no choice. I did manage to speak some English, some Yiddish, and a lot of hand motions. Later, Dr. Jacobson revealed to me that it had been prearranged.

Before *Pesach*, Mr. Masinter advised me to go to Baltimore and purchase Passover food, cheaper when ordered in advance. Going back to Roanoke from Baltimore, I sat in the train wearing my *yarmulke*. A young handsome Reverend introduced himself and sat down next to me. We had a wonderful time together discussing all kinds of world problems and I told him about my life. I was delighted to see American clergy so down-to-earth and friendly. Before the end of our journey he turned to me and said, 'Haskel, your friendship means very much to me and I will relate it to my congregation. But you must answer a question that has bothered me and my Christian friends. Is it true that Jews use Christian blood to bake the *matzohs* which you use on Passover?' For a moment I was in shock. The little English that I knew suddenly flew out of my head. He must have noticed and started to apologize. In a disappointed voice I explained the Jewish Law about blood. The Sixth Commandment, *Thou shalt not kill* and,

> *. . . whatsoever man there be of the House of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among them, that eateth any manner of blood, I will set My face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life. Therefore, I said unto the children of Israel: No soul of you shall eat*

blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood. And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among them, that taketh in hunting any beast or fowl that may be eaten, he shall pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust For as to the life of all flesh, the blood thereof is all one with the life thereof; therefore, I said unto the children of Israel: Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof; whosoever eateth it shall be cut off.

LEVITICUS 17

I explained the kosher-slaughtering of animals– without pain; that the meat must be deveined; blood vessels removed. Further, that the meat must be soaked in water for one-half hour, salted for one hour and then rinsed several times. All this is done just to remove even a trace of blood. I was angry. He was uncomfortable. We parted in friendship, but not before I asked him to convey this information to his Christian friends. "Our hands have not shed this blood." DEUTERONOMY 20:7 Before *Rosh Hashanah* I received a nice card from him. Here was a man who knew the Bible and was well versed in worldly affairs, but I felt sorry for him because he too, was ill informed.

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The Rabbi's Daughter

In 1942 I went to Los Angeles to bring Tante Dobby back to the east coast. She used to live in Rochester, New York but had moved to L.A., had become sick and wanted to be with my sister in Philadelphia. The war was on, the trains were filled with soldiers and tickets were scarce. As a rabbi, I could get a ticket from Roanoke to Chicago and from Chicago to Los Angeles.

I arrived in Chicago on a Friday morning and since I don't travel or carry money on *Shabbos* I took a room in the YMCA and prepaid for two meals in a kosher restaurant - all this despite my limited English and not knowing a soul. I had heard about a famous Rabbi Epstein and decided to go to his *shul* Saturday morning. On the way I got lost but, came upon an elderly woman sitting on her porch with a *Siddur* in her hands. *'Gut Shabbos'* and continuing in Yiddish, I asked for directions.

She gave me directions and then asked where I was from. I told her - a very small Polish *shtetl* with 60 families that she probably never heard of. She asked, 'What's the name of the *shtetl*?' I told her. 'Did you know the *Rov* of Wyzan?' she asked. 'Not only did I know him, but, when our house burned down, half my family stayed with him.' With tears in her eyes the woman said, **"I am the *Rov's* daughter."** What happened next is hard to imagine. I spent the entire *Shabbos* day in her house. There was no need for the restaurant!

I arrived in Los Angeles and my cousin somehow knew who I was. "*Chatzkel*, I am Yetta" she yelled into the station. So this was Yetta who had sent me five dollars in Palestine making it possible for me to eat on *Pesach*.

I brought Tante Dobby to Philadelphia where she stayed with my sister Chana. Two month later I said *Kaddish* for her.

The love and devotion between my sister and me grew stronger and stronger. We sensed that we were probably the only ones left from the entire family. A little later, I received two letters, one from my father and the other from Dvor'ke. The letters were written in Yiddish and sent from Lithuania. It had taken six months for them to arrive and they described their plight. They were running from place to place and many people from Wyzan were killed or starved to death.

I sent money. I was helpless. The two letters were the last I heard from them forever.

◆

Baseball and Babies

But life must go on. Rabbi Murray Cantor was a beautiful man. I don't know whether he was an ordained rabbi or not. I never saw his credentials and I didn't care. Having grown up in the Bronx, he was an excellent speaker in English and in Yiddish. We became very close friends. As a matter of fact, he was the *sandek* at Jacob's circumcision. The Cantors had a car and every Sunday they would take us for a ride. They didn't have any children so when Jacob was born, they loved him as if he was their own. Emma was the finest and kindest woman who taught Naomi how to cook and bake and helped her with the baby.

I am grateful to this man for many favors including taking me with him to visit the sick and to console the bereaved and helping me with my English. Rabbi Cantor was a chain smoker. I had told him I will help him stop smoking if he helps me with my English. "It's a deal." he said. I

don't know how much my English improved but I started to smoke. This is the truth.

Among the things he taught me was that a rabbi in America must be familiar not only with Jewish issues but also worldly affairs and sports. So he introduced me to baseball and I liked it; I still do. We went to a baseball game. Naturally, I had already chosen a favorite team. As the game progressed I got more and more excited and wanted to shout, 'Strike him out' but forgot the English words and shouted in Yiddish *"Mach em oys!"* People around me thought I came from another planet. These are the pitfalls of not knowing the language well.

Fourteen years later in Hartford, one of my *Rosh Hashanah* sermons would be about life and baseball: how many strikes there are in life and how many errors; stealing a base and in the end, coming home.

Our house was always open to guests - friends and strangers. Naomi learned to prepare meals that made her famous. When we were not at the Brenners', Rabbi Cantor and Emma were in our house for *Shabbos* and *yontif*. The relationship between us was wonderful- never a bad word or a speck of jealously. G-d rest their souls.

Life was good in Roanoke but the war in Europe continued. The Germans took over country after country. America sent her boys across the ocean and every day hundreds came back injured or in body bags. A fire was burning inside me. What can I do for America? I wanted to enlist in the Army as a chaplain, had the physical exam and indeed was in good shape despite growing up without orange juice and eggs for breakfast. But I had flat feet and the doctor rejected me.

In those days the Jewish Welfare Board was very involved with the problems of the war. I wrote a letter asking them to appoint me as a civilian chaplain. There was no pay, no uniform and no chance to go to the front but I was appointed as one of three chaplains at Ashford General Hospital in White Sulfur Springs. A Catholic priest, a Protestant minister and I took care of 2,000 wounded soldiers. I spent two days a

week at the hospital. The Jewish Welfare Board paid my travel expenses and provided kosher food. On Friday afternoons the chapel was arranged for the *Shabbos* services. We didn't have a Torah, but we did have prayer books and *taleisim*. Sunday the same room was used for Christian services. Helping the wounded was a great comfort to me. Also, I learned that when you are sick, in pain, and in fear of dying, it does not matter who or what you are, the behavior is the same.

Despite the hospitality that we received in Roanoke, my heart was always in Wyzan. One day while walking on Jefferson Street in Roanoke, I saw a picture in a furniture store. My heart started to race. The picture reminded me of the lake in Wyzan where we would bathe and the hills around it. I paid $3 for the picture and it has hung in all the living rooms that we have had ever since.

Jacob was growing nicely, but we had a terrible scare. In 1943 there was a polio epidemic; many children died or were crippled for life. The Salk Vaccine was not yet discovered. One Saturday evening Naomi met me at the door crying. Jacob was in bed, stiff as a board, no movement in his muscles. We called the doctor who confirmed that it was polio, but told us that if we could make Jacob bend his head all the way to his feet he will be ok. The Polio would not have damaged him. All night long I sat next to his bed praying, moaning, asking the Almighty to have mercy and not to cripple my child. Suddenly I remembered his fascination with flashlights. I put a flashlight between his legs and Jacob bent his head. I moved the flashlight further and he brought his head all the way to his feet. Naomi and I cried from joy. We reported to the doctor that Jacob was walking and talking and even the doctor cried. What an experience.

Our precious daughter was born- *Rochel Dobbe* in Yiddish, Rachel Devera in English- named after Naomi's mother and my aunt. Now Naomi and I were proud parents of two beautiful children. Glorious years in Roanoke, but we began to think about religious education and environment for our children.



- 2,000 wounded soldiers of all Faiths -

Last letter from my father -

- D'vorke's last letter; this page and next -

Naomi had two sisters, two brothers and many cousins in Hartford. She wanted to be closer to her family. One Friday, as I arrived at the synagogue, I came upon a stranger. "My name is Sam Neiditz from Hartford." I brought him to our house for a *Shabbos* meal. He knew Naomi's family in Hartford very well and she knew some of Sam's family who had lived in Israel. One day he told us that Middletown, Connecticut was looking for a person to read in the Torah, take care of ritual slaughter, blow *shofar* and chant services. Naomi and I agreed to take the job. I went to Middletown and passed their interrogation. Had I mentioned that I was an ordained rabbi, they wouldn't have okayed my appointment. No title of "Rabbi."

Our decision to leave Roanoke was difficult. People were so good, so gracious. They cried and we cried but the decision was made. We had to vacate our apartment at 219 Washington Street two weeks before leaving town, so we stayed with the Brenners. They were angels.

Coming to Roanoke we were two people with a few clothes and two sets of dishes. Leaving Roanoke, we were four people with clothes, dishes, and bedroom, living room and kitchen furniture. We were leaving rich! More important, we had been treated like family; I knew the English language better and how to deal with an American congregation. Rabbi Cantor had taught me the 'do's and don'ts' and as he so often quoted, "May we be in good graces with G-d and Man."

The train ride back to New York was much easier than going to Roanoke four years earlier. But we left with an emptiness in our hearts because it was the cradle that enabled me to function in the American Rabbinate for fifty-three years. *Sholom* to you Roanoke; *Sholom* to you, beautiful people.

May He who blessed our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, bless this entire congregation and all other congregations---their wives, their sons and daughters, and all that belongs to them. . . . May the Holy One, blessed be He, grant them their reward. . . .preserve them in good health. . . . may He bless and prosper their work and the work of all Israel their brethren; and let us say, Amen. ◆

Dvor'ke last letter page

Middletown: Between Roanoke and Hartford

After the High Holidays, we came to Middletown, Connecticut. Located at 6 Broad Street with the synagogue on one side and a funeral parlor on the other, ours was a very old two-story house which had been painted before we arrived. In the back of the house lived the *shamash* of the *shul*, a man filled with troubles. His son was in the state mental hospital and his daughter who lived with him was also mentally ill. Many nights our children woke up crying from the noise that penetrated our walls. It was not pleasant.

We adjusted to our new environment. We met new people and made new friends. My English was still not very good, but I had been hired as the *Baal Koreh,* Hebrew and Bar Mitzvah teacher and *shochet*. William Cohen, American-born, was the Senior Rabbi. At the direction of the Board, the congregation addressed me as *Reverend* Lindenthal. Naomi



- Four-year-old Jacob was soloist in the Boys' Choir -

and the rest of the family did not like this; neither did I. In a way, though, I could not blame the Board. As the *Talmud* states, "A king (*shul*) can't wear two crowns at the same time."

While Rabbi Cohen was there, things went quite smoothly. He is a scholar, a beautiful orator and a man who knows the rabbinate well. I think he sensed I had *S'micha*, but we got along well and have been friends for 51 years.

Middletown was a very prosperous town with many merchants and manufacturers and the Jews enjoyed the prosperity. Despite the fact that people had varying orientations toward Judaism, almost everyone supported the one synagogue in town. That was a blessing.

People invited us to their homes and they came to ours. They liked us and adored our children. One day, Mrs. Rachel Wrubel walked by the porch where our Rachel was sitting in a carriage. She knocked on the door and said, 'I never knew that a *rebbetzin* can give birth to such a beautiful child.' The Wrubel family stayed away from Middletown's only *shul*. In time though, they became our great admirers and good friends and we brought them closer to synagogue and Jewish life. Each son became Bar Mitzvah and I officiated at a few family weddings. In my library is a set of books about Israel and the Jews which the Wrubels gave me simply as a sign of friendship. The books, now very old, are no longer available.

A dead person takes a walk . . .

Our neighbor, a fine gentleman, introduced himself as Mr. Roberts, owner of the funeral chapel next-door. We didn't realize that Mr. Roberts, his wife Mildred, their two children and his mother lived upstairs from the chapel. One day, Naomi decided to clean the windows at the top of our stairs. As she was scrubbing, she looked out at the funeral chapel and observed a body dressed in a white gown walking around. The bucket fell from her hands and she started crying and

yelling, '*Yechezkel*, a dead person is walking around!' "The dead cannot praise the Lord and nor can any who go down into silence." PSALM 115 The elder Mrs. Roberts had just gotten out of bed.

The Robertses were very friendly and helpful neighbors as were the Gellens, the first family on the street to own a television. But living near the *shamash's* daughter was no picnic.

A few months after our arrival, we bought an old car, a car that made history. Crossing the Arrigoni Bridge from Portland to Middletown one day, the car had four flat tires. It was almost as weak as the horse and buggy from Wyzan to Suvalk! The difference was that the horse ate oats and hay while the car demanded oil. In our 'Rolls Royce' we managed to go to Hartford almost every Sunday afternoon. One week we would park ourselves with Aunt Ida and the following with Tante Chava. They lived two blocks apart! That was a big treat for the children. Silently, I prayed that the car would make the trips.

Naomi was busy with Sisterhood and worked very hard in the house. I worked in the slaughterhouse from 7:00A.M. until noon, tended to other matters or a circumcision, taught in the Hebrew School from 3:30-6:00 and after supper, went to homes to give Bar Mitzvah lessons.

My first Bar Mitzvah was Marvin, son of the Jacob Hobermans; the second was Robert, son of Emma and Albert Lappin. Both were very successful as they chanted the *Haftorah* and conducted *Shabbos* services and both are still our friends.

The Jewish community of Moodus, a tiny town over an hour away, invited me to organize a school. Twice a week after Middletown's Hebrew School, I ate a sandwich while driving to Moodus, then taught from 7:00 - 9:00P.M.

I wanted to do something for Middletown's children who were not well acquainted with the *Siddur* and *Machzor*. Thus, began my choir and the young boys quickly learned the melodies. Parents were delighted to see their boys dressed in choir robes, chanting in harmony. It also helped

to keep the parents in the synagogue until the end of services! Jacob was then four years old and sang a solo. Now, those little 'Sinatras' have become doctors, lawyers, professors and successful businessmen, but they still remember the choir and Jacob's beautiful voice.

Working in a slaughterhouse made me marvel at our Sages— at how much they knew about anatomy and hygiene. It was very beneficial in other ways as well. During the war, when meat was rationed, we were well-supplied. Farmers who brought their cattle for slaughter, frequently brought eggs and vegetables for us. We had the best and a lot of it which enabled me to help our relatives, the Stoltzes, Lapps and Naomi's aunt in Hartford. As for Tante Golde, if only one-percent of the blessings she wished me would come true, I would be the most blessed man in the world.

I must confess that I didn't always have peace of mind and did not spend too much time with my children during their best ages. Always busy, always something to do— including evening classes at Wesleyan to improve my English. "They made me keeper of all the vineyards but my own vineyard I have not kept." (SONG OF SONGS CHAPTER 1). Thanks to Naomi, our children grew to be a pride to G-d and to humanity. Hopefully, they do not carry any grudges against me. ◆



- Jacob, Rachel and Harold -
who continue to bring us great nachas

Your reward will be great . . .

One day, Rabbi Lazar Gorelick *z"l*, the most learned rabbi in Connecticut, supervisor of Kashrus in the slaughterhouse and a wonderful friend, called to say that there are a number of *Talmud* scholars in the United States, young rabbis who had survived the Holocaust but have no profession with which to make a living. Would I teach them to be *shochtim? "Schorcho harbe m'od."* (Your reward will be great). Rabbi Gorelick indicated that there would be no monetary reward.

I was delighted for the opportunity to be their teacher. Perhaps that was the reason that I had survived. Every six months, students came to learn. They benefited from me and from my wife. Naomi cooked for them and washed their ragged clothes. She was like a mother to them. But our two small children, Jacob and Rachel, benefited even more.

. . .Let your house be a meeting place for scholars, sit at their feet in the dust and drink in their words thirstingly . . . Let your house be wide open to strangers; treat the poor as members of your own family. . . . ETHICS OF THE FATHERS I:4-5

The men told us about the hunger, about the concentration camps, and how they escaped from the Nazis. Some of them wound up in Siberia. These young men were real scholars and it was a pleasure to *lern* with them. They didn't forget what they had acquired in the *yeshivos*. "Torah is the best merchandise."

Some of these men had beautiful voices and brought to our home the melodies of their families, synagogues and *yeshivos*. Happy songs and sad songs - the sad melodies tore apart your heart. A few had been married before the war, but their wives, children and parents had not survived.

One such widower was my first student, R'Yitzchok Pretter, a gentle, very learned man. He had studied in the Bialystoker Yeshiva with R'Abraham Yaffe, a scholar and philosopher. Yitzchok Pretter's stories were unbelievable; he had been a partisan, was in the underground and had lived in the woods where he almost froze to death. At night, he and others would sneak into the village to ask farmers for food. Woe to the ones who refused. Many times they attacked German patrols; once, they hanged a German soldier.

After becoming a *shochet*, he took a job in New York. One day R'Yitzchok confided to Naomi that he had met a single woman. He wanted Naomi to meet her and hopefully, approve. The *shidduch* was made in our house and we accompanied him to the *chupah* at which I officiated. G-d had treated him like Job in the Bible: First he lost his family and later, G-d rewarded him. R'Yitzchok remarried and had several children.

All together I taught 19 young men. This is a 'plus' on the record of my life for the time when I will have to meet my Maker.

Our house was also an assembly of students from Wesleyan University who ate with us on *Shabbos*. We attended their weddings and celebrated the births of their children. They were scattered all over the United States making a nice living, but for many years, students from both groups called to wish us well. "If I am only for myself, what am I?"

PIRKE AVOS I:14

Rabbi Gorelick compliments Naomi . . .

Rabbi Lazar Gorelick (whose son R'Moshe years later became President of the Rabbinical Council of America) was a distinguished man, completely uncorrupted by material goods. He studied throughout the day, beginning at 4:00AM. The humility of this man and the simplicity of his house brought to mind the *Chofetz Chayim.* The man was a scholar and my mentor to whom I turned for the answer to all complicated questions. Possibly, he knew the *Talmud* by heart. How I admired his knowledge and his wisdom. One *Pesach*, he and his wife came to visit us in Middletown. He turned to Naomi and said, 'Rebbetzin Lindenthal, whatever you eat, meat or dairy, we will eat. We trust you.' What a compliment to Naomi. This man, who would not drink a glass of water in anyone's home, was joining us for dinner. From then on, when we hosted rabbis, Naomi would tell them, 'You can eat in my house. If Rabbi Gorelick ate here, you certainly can eat here.' ◆

Naomi's Birthday

ליום הולדתך
בפי ברכתי
שנות מאה ויותר
חיי נא אשתי.

שכר בעד אבלך
וימי יגונך
כשמש בצהרים
יזהיר מזלך.

צעדי בעוז
לקראת החיים
ויהיה דרכך
סוגה בשושנים.

יחזקאל

A Mother's Intuition . . .

Rejoicing with our two beautiful children Jacob and Rachel, G-d blessed us with a third child, *Chaim,* named after my mother *Chaya*. His English name is Harold.

During Naomi's pregnancy, she developed a severe case of asthma. It was very difficult for her to breathe and the additional weight made it even worse. Her physician, Dr. Julius Grower, gave us the very bad news that if the pregnancy continues she might choke and the baby will not survive either. He suggested that Naomi have an abortion so that at least she would survive. Oh G-d, another *tzore*.

Naomi would not hear of an abortion. She told the doctor that she will continue the pregnancy and that things will be O.K. She was right. On Friday, December 6, at 4:00A.M, a handsome 7 lb. 4 oz. boy was born. What a happy event.

I was the *mohel* - by then, very experienced - at Harold's *bris*. Still, this was my own son making it different. Naomi's wonderful brother Leo Weinberg was the *sandek* and my sister Anna and her husband Alexander, *Sander* as we called him, were the 'godparents.'

In the middle of the *bris*, there was a loud noise. Perhaps, the roof had caved in, but that wasn't the case. Our friend, Mr. Mandelbaum had fainted and his very large body fell to the floor. After finishing the *bris*, we revived this Goliath.

When Harold was two and a half years old, we attended the wedding of our nephew and niece, Barney and Mildred Lapp in New York. We left Harold in the care of our beloved friends, Mr. and Mrs. Gross who were delighted to take care of him. Before eating a spoonful of food at his first meal with them, Harold asked Mr. Gross, "Is it kosher?"

Yankel and Mabel Gross z"l. . .

In Middletown there was a kosher butcher. Jacob *Yankel* Gross and his wife Mabel were not ordinary people. Both were college graduates, pious Jews and full of love. People confided in them and listened to their advice. We loved and admired them. They had no desire for luxury and lived in a very small rundown apartment behind the butcher shop, with hardly any furniture and a coal oven in the middle of the room. The *shechita* students slept in their apartment.

Every Saturday night we assembled in the small room. Professors from Wesleyan waited to be invited to these gatherings where poetry was recited and books were discussed. We ate baked potatoes and herring and sang songs.

Our children would have eaten *Shabbos* lunch at the Grosses' every week if we would have allowed it. They still remember Mr. and Mrs. Gross with great affection. Surely, they rest among the holy and pure.

Too close for comfort . . .

While the law requires a Jew to live near enough to walk to *shul*, I would advise a rabbi not to live too close and for us, living next door to the shul was too close. We had no privacy. People came at all times, unannounced. After all, the house belonged to the synagogue so when people would arrive early for a Sisterhood meeting or other event, they came to the Lindenthals, even in the middle of supper or when we were bathing the children. Many times a woman forgot her umbrella and upon arriving home late at night, called for me to find it. Eventually we moved.

Do you know to whom you were speaking?

There were two hospitals in Middletown, a state mental institution and a medical hospital. I regularly visited patients in the medical hospital. Dr. Charles Russman, a psychiatrist, called to discuss the fact that Catholic and Protestant clergy always conduct services at the mental institution, but never a rabbi. From then on, there was a Jewish service every week!

One Friday afternoon, I came to the hospital; many patients attended, dressed nicely and well-behaved. Some women remembered that their mothers lit *Shabbos* candles. We sang *Sholom Aleichem*, *Adon Olom* and a few other melodies. Sitting in the front row singing beautifully, was a gentleman dressed in an elegant suit and white shirt. (What was he doing here?) After the service, we engaged in a delightful conversation which puzzled me even further. As I was about to leave the hospital, the gentleman turned to me and asked, 'Rabbi, do you know who you were speaking to? I will introduce myself to you. I am Dr. ExLax.' It hit me like a bomb! A sad story indeed.

No promise is the best promise . . .

Jacob became a Bar Mitzvah. Every seat in the *shul* was occupied as he conducted all parts of the service, read the entire Torah portion and

chanted the *Haftorah - Shabbos Nachamu*, the Sabbath of Consolation, coming as it does, right after *Tisha B'Av*. To Naomi and me, it was a Sabbath of delight, seeing our child, so bright and already so accomplished. It was a kind of consolation to me as I had recently learned that all the Lindenthals in Europe had been killed. In his speech which he gave in Yiddish, Hebrew and English, Jacob said, "It is customary to promise to fulfill all obligations incumbent upon a Jew. Well, let me tell you, it is better not to promise than to promise and not fulfill."

I have prepared hundreds of *B'nai Mitzvah*. They all promised a lot, but many of them didn't fulfill their promises and some were even a great disappointment to me. Indeed, Jacob had said what the Torah actually prescribes.

> *When thou shalt vow a vow unto the Lord thy G-d, thou shalt not slack to pay it; for the Lord thy G-d will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee, but if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shall keep and perform.* DEUTERONOMY 23:22

We should pay attention to this. How many promises people make, in marriage, in business and in pledges to worthy organizations? How many fulfill them?

The people were extremely fond of Jacob and he received many beautiful gifts. Jacob always loved photography and one of the gifts was a camera. He thanked the person for it, but didn't take it because it had been manufactured in Germany. He wouldn't accept something from the country 'which killed my father's entire family.' The man cried. ◆

In sickness and in health . . .

In 1955, we almost lost Naomi. The Middletown doctors sent her to Boston where she remained for seven weeks. In one week she had 18 blood transfusions. The three children stayed with our good friends Gertrude and Sam Cohen. Gert called everyone she knew and made sure that the blood used for Naomi was replaced by people from the community. Meanwhile, I commuted from Middletown to Boston three times a week until, one day a terrible storm caused memorable flooding in the entire Northeast. I could not go back to Middletown, couldn't afford a hotel room - and even with the money, I couldn't get to a hotel because the streets were impassable. Naomi was in the hospital, the children were with strangers and I was stranded sleeping on a chair.

Finally Naomi got better and we were reunited. How wonderful it was. But she was too weak to do anything so my dear sister Anna, came

from Philadelphia for two weeks. G-d rest her soul.

A Generous Man . . .

We often read about gangsters and cheaters, but we don't read enough about the good people and let me tell you, there are many beautiful people in the world. Sam Cohen, owner of the Middletown Packing Company (slaughterhouse) was one of the beautiful people. Due to Naomi's illness and lack of proper insurance, I was broke. *Me-ayin yavoh ezri?* (From where shall come my salvation?) Sam understood my problem, called me into his office, signed three checks and told me to fill-in the amounts. 'Pay the hospital, pay the doctors and buy necessities for the house.' Thank you, Sam; I shall always remember you. It took a few years, but I paid back every penny.

The Doctors . . .

Many doctors were our personal friends and often were our guests on holidays. Two doctors and their families were particularly major figures in our life in Middletown. Dr. Julius Grower, the children's doctor who delivered Harold was one. When Naomi decided to continue her pregnancy, he did everything possible to ensure her safety. His lovely wife Minnie was extremely generous to us. She told Naomi that she had been born 'with a silver spoon in her mouth' and could afford the best for their two daughters. Minnie wanted Rachel to benefit from this, so every outfit that Joanne outgrew, came to Rachel. As a result, she wore the finest clothes in the world.

The second was my physician, Stanley Alexander, a devoted and gracious friend and one of the best diagnosticians in the community. I remember one Saturday evening while the doctor and his wife, Josephine were in our house, he received a call from the baby sitter that their daughter had rushed to answer the doorbell without asking who was outside and she was kidnapped. You can imagine the terror. Thank G-d,

she was found unharmed within an hour.

Four doctors were present at one *Seder*. Rachel, our beautiful five-year-old, wouldn't stop crying, 'my head! my head!' The doctors examined her at the hospital and told us she probably had a brain tumor for which they could do nothing. We called in Dr. Alexander who tapped her abdomen one time and immediately detected a liver abscess. A couple of pills and two days later, we had our lively little girl back home. . . but not before she had questioned if she should eat the bread on her tray during *Pesach!* This would not be the only time Dr. Alexander saved a Lindenthal's life.

Principal vs. Principles . . .

I had a conflict with the Principal of the Hebrew School who is no longer alive to defend herself. Her daughter attended the school, received a low mark on her report card and the mother demanded that I change the grade. I refused. My *tzores* in the Middletown *shul* began. As Principal, she had a lot of power. I was in an unpleasant situation and didn't want to change what I believed was right.

To make the story short, I developed a serious ulcer. We had the best food at home, yet I could only have a glass of milk and crackers every two hours. The splendid Dr. Alexander often came in the middle of the night to give me an injection for pain. I will always remember his words: "Ulcers start in the head. It is not what you eat, but what eats you."

By then, Rabbi Cohen's successor had arrived. He had neither a deep understanding of, nor an appreciation for Orthodoxy and there were irritations between us. On several occasions, I disagreed with his *halachic* interpretation and instead of overlooking it, I spoke up. Some people thought this wasn't proper. I suggested that rather than relying on either him or me, they should investigate what TALMUD BROCHOS says on the issue. No one on the Board could read or understand the *tractate*.

Sam 'Shmuel' Auerbach z"l

Thank G-d for one member of the *shul,* a saintly gentleman, Shmuel Auerbach who, before coming to Middletown where his wife had a sister, had run a private Hebrew School in Hartford. He was my advocate and advisor and frequently, he, too challenged the rabbi's authority.

Mr. Auerbach came from Europe steeped in *Talmudic* and Biblical knowledge. As you know, there are dozens of interpreters of the Bible including, Rashi, Baal Haturim, Radak and Unkeles. One of the greatest was *Ibn Ezra* whose real name was Abraham ben Meier. He was born in 1092 in Toledo, Spain and died in 1167 having traveled extensively through France, England and Italy. Ibn Ezra had great difficulty making a living and was very poor despite being a physician and an astronomer. He once remarked that if he would sew *tachrichim*, people would stop dying. Some attribute the brevity of his commentaries to the fact that he couldn't afford to buy paper. Brief and difficult as his interpretations may be, his contribution to our people is magnificent. Mr. Auerbach was a master on Ibn Ezra and I am indebted to him for helping me understand it. He was also a Hebrew poet and I have his poetry. I loved that man. ". . . the reverence for your teacher (should) be like the reverence for Heaven." PIRKE AVOS IV:50

The Weitzmans . . .

There are people with whom you develop more than friendships; you make traditions! So it was with Fay and Ben Weitzman. Every year we spent July 4th at a picnic in their backyard. It didn't occur to us to do something else. It had become a tradition and was always delightful.

Ben's father, a sweet elderly man, was still alive when we arrived. One evening we realized how our children distinguished between generations. Harold, a toddler, completed his bedtime *Shema* with "G-d bless Mommy, Daddy, Jacob, Rachel and the *old man* Mr. Weitzman!"

Their son, Gerry remains a devoted friend to this day. ◆

In America you can talk back! . . .

For the most part Jews and Gentiles were very friendly and courteous to each other in Middletown - no overt anti-Semitism within the community. However, I wish to record an incident that almost gave me a heart attack. I was going by bus from Middletown to Hartford, minding my own business. Two women sitting behind me were speaking in Polish. The conversation was a very ugly one. Apparently, they worked at Wrubel's Department Store, owned by Jews and the two women started to curse all Jews. At that time, my Polish was fluent and my blood was boiling. But, I kept quiet until the bus stopped at Main and Gold Streets in Hartford and then followed them out saying in Polish, "All the curses that you wished on the Jews should fall on your ugly heads. Do you think you are in Poland?" They were stunned and I was satisfied! The new generation of Poles here in America is very

different— far-removed in behavior from their ancestors in Poland. G-d bless America!

Music to my ears? . . .

I believe it is accurate that only three people in the entire congregation (two being close friends of the Principal) gave me a hard time. But, the three really worked at it and it is not my nature to spend energy fighting off troublemakers. The rabbi was actually a nice man, but we defined religious practice differently. Perhaps, I could have endured, but then came the Board's decision to change to a more liberal form for services, with organ music on *Shabbos*. Of course, first they would have to purchase an organ. I advised Simon Edelberg, then President, of my resignation effective September 1, 1956, giving him several months to replace me. Mr. Edelberg was very gracious, but upset. 'What is the hurry?! It will take a few years before the change takes place. Stay with us.' I told him that it is time to leave, that our children must be in a more Jewish environment and, most important, we don't want to be in the way of the synagogue's contemplated changes. (A NOTE: It is now 1996 and the organ has not yet arrived!)

Master of Ceremonies . . .

The Mahl Avenue *shul* where Benny Stoltz had taken me on my first *Shabbos* in America, was now in a deteriorated neighborhood. Mr. Samuel Krupnikoff, G-d rest his soul, had stored the Torahs in his cabinet factory. They were like orphans. But, Mssrs. Sam Smith, Sam Haber, Samuel Krupnikoff and Mrs. Eva Stoltz along with her two sons, Albert *'Smiley'* and Arthur, felt that Chevra Kadisha Teferes Israel had a beautiful history worthy of preserving and a future worthy of creating. They had decided not to close the doors forever.

In January 1956, Teferes Israel completed a small building at 165 Blue Hills Avenue, Hartford. The joy of the 36 elderly members was

unbelievable and they formed a committee to plan an official opening of the synagogue. Strangely, all the local rabbis were too busy to be Master of Ceremonies for this event. Judge Leo Parskey would be the guest speaker but, still they had no rabbi as M.C. My beloved nephew, Arthur Stoltz called one Saturday night, told me the sad story and asked me to do them the favor. The rabbis' behavior was puzzling, but this was Hartford's synagogue politics, not mine.

It was Spring and once again, Teferes Israel came alive. We began the celebration. The elderly gentlemen carried in the Torahs while chanting the traditional prayers. Their eyes were filled with tears of joy. After being in *golus*, the Torahs finally had a new home.

It is said that when the Temple in Jerusalem was burned by the Romans, sparks flew in all directions and wherever a spark fell, a synagogue was built. A spark fell on 165 Blue Hills Avenue. Regardless of the opposition that these beautiful people encountered, it is G-d's will that a new facility for an old house of worship should stand here. With these words we opened the *shul.*

The Offer . . .

"Send thy bread over the water because some day you may find it." (ECCLESIASTES) One week after my conversation with Mr. Edelberg, Arthur Stoltz asked me to become the rabbi of the newly located synagogue in Hartford. Membership in the *shul* was $25 per year and my salary was $35 per week.

"The One that provides life will also provide sustenance." (TRACTATE TA'ANIS, PAGE 8) Naomi was a little reluctant but I assured her that we would make a living. After all, I could continue my work as a *shochet* a few hours a week and I am a *mohel.* G-d will be good to us.

We left as friends with everyone - even the troublemakers. People from there still visit us and those who later moved to the Hartford area, *davened* in our *shul.* Thank you, Middletown. G-d bless all of you. ◆



-The Torahs had a proper home -

"And Abraham withstood all the tests"

We moved to 131 Hebron Street. It was September 13, 1956, three days before *Rosh Hashanah*. On *Rosh Hashanah* I conducted services as the Rabbi of Teferes Israel Synagogue. The 35 members that made up the congregation spoke only Yiddish. Some were in America 40-50 years, but never learned much English. My sermon on the first day, in Yiddish, described how G-d tested Abraham ten times and Abraham withstood all the tests. The second day's sermon was in English. The topic was *Al Tiro Avraham* (Be not afraid be Abraham). Regardless of what I said to the congregation, my hope was that Hartford would be the last station of my journey and "go thee" would no longer apply to me.

Although we couldn't unpack the bundles and boxes, we did manage to have outstanding holidays. Cousin Yetta who had been visiting us in

Middletown, extended her stay, made all the draperies for our new house and moved with us to Hartford.

On *Simchas Torah* we all had a wonderful time. The old-timers danced not only because it was *yontif*, but because the Torahs were home.

The Board of Directors decided to have an installation ceremony, a beautiful event, but no local Orthodox rabbis attended. I learned then, that it was a 'close' relative (Naomi's brother Noach) who convinced others to boycott Teferes Israel and me. The situation lasted only a short time, but was very bad - and very bewildering to Naomi whose sister in Israel had said that her brothers would be so helpful. "Severe are the wounds of a friend." PROVERBS XXVII:6

"What shall I do unto this people? They almost stone me." (LEVITICUS 17:4) But justice prevailed. People became acquainted with us and the entire community took a liking to us- clergy and lay people. Rabbis Abraham Avrutick *z"l*, William Cohen and Isaac Avigdor invited me to join the *Kashrus* Committee and the Adult Education Program sponsored by the Orthodox synagogues. Naturally, I was delighted to be a part of the community and a real colleague of the other rabbis. ◆

"And thou shalt teach thy children . . ."

We wanted to open a Hebrew School; the younger members were thrilled because they had school age children. A few elderly members objected, saying we didn't need a school and we didn't need children to disturb services. But we won them over and started a school with 19 children. Naomi's teaching salary was $100 a year. I was the Principal and a teacher, all for the same $35 a week. Jacob, a high school student and Rachel, much younger, were also teachers. We had no money to buy books, so we asked several synagogues to lend us old ones no longer in use, but they refused. We managed without them. Seymour Smith gave me $150 to purchase books. G-d rest his soul.

We had books, but now we needed blackboards and furniture. This time we went to the public schools and they gave us old boards, desks and other supplies.

We didn't have classrooms, so we divided the 19 children into three groups. The first group learned in the auditorium, the second group met in the kitchen and the third group sat on the steps to the main sanctuary and pretended they were in an amphitheater! Did my *cheder* in Europe have a special room for each class?

"*Veshinantom l'vonecho*" (and thou shalt teach thy children diligently) SHEMA. Several parents who were quite poor, asked if they could enroll their children. We let in everyone. A Jewish child must get a Jewish education. We did not ask the parents for any money. Some paid, some did not. I had attended the finest *yeshivos* on the generosity of others and now could reciprocate.

There is a *medrash* about the time G-d was to give the Torah to Moses. G-d asked for collateral and Moses offered the three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as many others. G-d was not satisfied. But when Moses said that the children will be the collateral, G-d accepted his offer and the Torah was given to Israel.

Four months passed. The treasury was empty. Our congregation had no money then and would never be financially wealthy, but we always had spirit and devotion. Sisterhood's first project was a very successful rummage sale which provided money for the synagogue's upkeep and *mazel tov*, my first paycheck. Many people joined the *shul* and sent their children to our school.

Teferes Israel became very popular, growing in quality and numbers. Although in those days there were ten synagogues within a one-mile radius, we grew so much that the building became too small for all its activities. In 1960 we had to add a wing to the building. By then, we had 192 children in the Hebrew School.

You see, this little spark became a tremendous flame. ◆

The Soul of the Shul

Every Saturday morning for 37 years, we gathered around a table in the *shul* and *lerned Mishnayos*. Our two-hour sessions, held before *davening* with 20-25 people participating, resembled those in Europe where people gathered purely to learn. There were beginners and learned ones, some who had attended *yeshivos* in Europe. Mrs. Eva Stoltz, G-d rest her soul, with heart and mind always focused on *Yiddishkeit*, was the only woman who attended, always sitting and listening to the study of Torah.

The Mishna is a collection of interpretations by hundreds of great scholars. R'Yehudah Ha-Nassi (Judah the Prince) gathered the interpretations and formed the Mishna composed of 63 tractates which make up 523 chapters. Each chapter in the Talmud begins with a Mishna. The Mishna is the beginning of the oral law and consists of six divisions dealing with different subjects: Z'roim with agriculture; Mo-ed with

holidays and Shabbos; Noshim with marriage and divorce; Nezikin with damages, property, partnership; Kodshim with animal sacrifices and how the Kohanim had to handle each sacrifice and Ta'aros with purity of family life, mikveh, etc.

Chevra Mishnayos became a very popular link in the synagogue chain. The regular attendees organized themselves and appointed officers. Many people who didn't join the synagogue, did become members of this study group. Dues were 5^{00} a year - not much, but in time, the *Chevra Mishnayos* grew even financially. One day, I explained from the pulpit that it is customary to learn *Mishnayos* on a *yahrzeit*. By shifting around the Hebrew letters that spell *Mishna*, משנה, we get the word *neshomo* נשמה (soul). My friend said it was one of the best appeals I had ever made. People came when they had *yahrzeit*, joined the group and money flowed in. It became so successful that we were able to present thousands of dollars to the *shul*. Every year we had a *Hadron* and honored "The Man of the Year," always someone who contributed to the welfare of the synagogue or to the community - not necessarily with money.

Abraham asked G-d, if He would save the cities if he could gather 50 righteous people, but Abraham could not find 50 such people. He reduced the number to ten, but Abraham could not find even ten righteous people and G-d destroyed the cities of Sedom and Gemorrah.

The *minyan* is the soul of the *shul*. Without the *minyan*, it doesn't matter how many and what kinds of programs you have, you might as well close the doors. In fact, well-established synagogues do close their doors when people stop coming to *daven*. At Teferes Israel we had *minyonim* everyday, in every kind of weather, sunrise and sunset, for 35 years.

Sunday Morning Breakfast - Sunday Evening Chats . . .

On Sunday mornings we had our usual *minyan* followed by a full

breakfast which *shul* members prepared and served to the 25 or 30 who attended. On Sunday evenings, we gathered in private homes for '*fireside chats.*' Naomi saw to it that all refreshments were kosher.

Shabbos morning services were a great joy with more than 100 children from the Hebrew School participating. The distinguished Rabbi Morris and Rebbetzin Althea Silverman *davened* at Teferes Israel after he retired from the Emanuel Synagogue because we had so many children in attendance.

A beautiful event took place in our *shul* on *Shabbos* after *Mincha.* We gathered for *Shalosh Seudos*, ate a little food, sang *z'miros*, reviewed the Torah portion and then had the enormous *z'chus* to hear Mr. Aaron Krivitsky.

Aaron Krivitsky z"l . . .

With gratitude to his saintly soul, I write a little about Mr. Aaron Krivitsky. He was a very modest individual who made his living as a Hebrew teacher in Hartford. It was my privilege to become his close friend. We didn't go to baseball games or to other entertainment, but we *lerned* together. Mr. Krivitsky was a profound scholar of the Bible, a Hebrew grammarian, a Yiddish author and a Hebrew poet. His Yiddish book, *Mein Leben's Veg* (My Way of Life) is written for all occasions. His Hebrew poetry, hand-written and unpublished, is a treasure which I have from him. He left me his library of Hebrew and Yiddish books as well as a *Megillas Esther.*

Mr. Krivitsky read to us - beautiful stories that he had written and recited others from memory. It was always enchanting. Hartford was enriched by the presence this great man. G-d rest his soul. ◆



'Master of Ceremonies' Robert Scheinblum z"l,
Installing Officer Rabbi Zvi Tabory z"l
HaRav HaGaon R'Lazar Gorelick z"l and I

The Sisterhood . . .

Naomi organized the Sisterhood and it became a dominant force in the life of our *shul*. The first President was Mrs. Florence Steinberg, G-d rest her soul - a dynamo who worked day and night with boundless energy and an incredible sense of humor. More members joined and more projects succeeded and Sisterhood flourished.

> *. . . and all the women that were wise hearted did spin with their hands and brought that which they had spun, both the blue and the purple, and the scarlet and of fine linen.* EXODUS 35:25

Under Florence's presidency, followed (in alphabetical order) by Selma Darling, Adrienne Goldfarb, Naomi Grossberg, Sylvia Klau, Sandra Levine, Shirley Rothschild, Ruth Rudnick, Sari Rutt, Janet Sack, Marilyn Schaller, Mary Stengel, Lil Stoltz, Barbara Teller and Rhonda Zieky, our Sisterhood became the envy of others in the community. They had



- The eldest and the youngest -
Chava and Naomi
flanked by
Chaim, eldest brother and Leo, second to youngest brother



- Senator Thomas Dodd -
Someone had tried to avenge my family's death.
(left) Mike Rudnick, Naomi, the Senator and I

rummage sales, cake sales, dinners and even great Jewish shows which were produced and acted by the members. The women worked diligently for the betterment of the congregation.

Naomi spent thousands of hours making certain that all of these activities were done in the spirit of Jewish law. When the women suggested a get-together, Naomi convinced them it should be an *Oneg Shabbat*. After the Friday night meal, we would return to the synagogue to discuss Jewish history, laws, customs and personalities. For every monthly meeting, Naomi composed an opening prayer and when *yontif* approached, Naomi made sure the agenda included the holiday customs.

The *Ner shel Shabbos* became a very successful fundraising device. Before lighting *Shabbos* candles, the women put money into little *pushkes* earmarked for Sisterhood. Thousands of dollars were collected and sent to charities worldwide, still leaving a great deal for the *shul*.

We also formed a *Mr. and Mrs. Club* which was a social gathering, but after a few years the group fell apart! ◆

The Rabbi gets Life

After six years with Teferes Israel, the Board gave me Life Tenure and we had a big dinner to celebrate. The local rabbis were present this time. Senator Thomas Dodd, may he rest in peace, was the speaker, a greater privilege for me than most people realized. He had been a prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials. *Someone* in this world had tried to avenge the death of my family — and this honorable man was a guest at my dinner.

Among the speakers were Abraham J. Feldman, Senior Rabbi of Beth Israel, the Reform Temple, a most knowledgeable and respected individual, and Morris Silverman, Senior Rabbi of Emanuel and Editor of the *Siddur* used for decades in every Conservative *shul* in the country. Years earlier, when I had applied for *mohel* privileges at Hartford Hospital, 'forces' in the community fought against me, but Rabbis Feldman and Silverman wrote letters of support on my behalf.

During the evening, the Master of Ceremonies, a layman, referred to Rabbi Feldman as 'Father' Feldman. He didn't mind and he spoke very warmly, calling me "Sonny Boy." The last speaker of the evening, however, was our son Jacob who was clearly irritated by the MC's term. Said Jacob, "I am the only speaker at this event who has the privilege and obligation to call a rabbi 'Father.'" People appreciated his brilliant remark.

Naomi and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary with another dinner hosted by the congregation. Senator Abraham Ribicoff was the guest speaker, an honor indeed. The one who introduced the Senator though, was the guest I felt most privileged about. Harry Kleinman, was an attorney with the soul of an angel. He loved the synagogue and did all its legal work without taking a penny in pay. If we would have more people like him, the world would look much better. G-d rest his soul.

By 1970, Jews were leaving the Blue Hills Avenue neighborhood. Teferes Israel, now a vibrant congregation with devoted members, built another beautiful building, this time in the suburb of Bloomfield. This was no small undertaking considering that the *new wing* was only ten years old. Sisterhood continued as a major force in the synagogue and raised enough money to furnish two separate and complete kitchens, meat and dairy.

I served under many synagogue presidents. First was Mr. Samuel Haber followed (in alphabetical order) by Harry Edelson, Robert Hoffman, Harold Jacobs, Raymond Katz, Samuel Krupnikoff, Gerald Okrant, Michael Rudnick, Robert Sandler, Arthur Stoltz and Steven Zelman. Each one worked devotedly and served the congregation well as can be seen by the tremendous progress Teferes Israel made. From an outcast boycotted by others, it had become a greatly appreciated and highly-respected congregation. And I enjoyed similar regard.

I thank Thee because Thou hast answered me and has been my salvation.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

PSALM 118

Everything was good, but my cup of joy was interrupted by the death of my beloved sister Anna in Philadelphia. The relationship between us was great; she and I were the remnants of a large family. The officiating Rabbi asked me to say a few words at the funeral. I walked to the podium, opened my mouth, but could not say a word.

In 1972 on *Shabbos Hagodol* just before *Pesach* there was a beautiful Bar Mitzvah in *shul.* We returned home after the luncheon and two hours later, I was rushed to Mt. Sinai Hospital with a heart attack. That night, the resident on duty told Naomi, 'He may die tonight.' But, I wrestled with the *Angel of Death* again, and again, I won. I recuperated and continued my work until March 1986 . . . . While putting on *tallis and tefillin*, I felt horrible pressure in my chest. Another heart attack. On my birthday, May 27th, I had open heart surgery; on Naomi's birthday, June 9th, I went home. Yet again, the *Angel* didn't win.

I truly enjoyed being the Rabbi of Teferes Israel for 37 years . . . starting with a handful of people, growing fast and beautiful. But ours is definitely a 'wandering people.' In the last few years we saw 'the handwriting on the wall.' People started to move away from Bloomfield where we had been for 23 years. The membership started to decline and we experienced difficulty making a morning *minyan*. A committee was formed to look to the future. The cries came from very respected families. We could not remain where the demographics were changing.

I was 77 years old. It was time to retire and leave the ship to a younger captain. The committee chose to merge with another *shul* instead.

Naomi and I moved to West Hartford. Timing was critical; we couldn't live where there would be no *shul.* Teferes negotiated with several synagogues and ultimately joined with Beth David. I believed it

would be a good *shidduch*. They even wanted to get us another house closer to this *shul,* but we had put too much effort into the house we had taken.

The day we moved the Torahs from the Ark was one of the darkest days of my life. People actually assisted me so I would not collapse. The ceremony joining the two congregations was very impressive. The Torahs from Teferes were driven to the Town Hall in West Hartford and from there, were carried under a *chupah* to Beth David, a half-mile distance. Rabbi William Cohen came to greet us. We embraced and kissed and wished each other *Mazel tov*. The people stood and applauded for a long time. I am sure they understood my agony. No one could truly feel my agony. I did manage to congratulate the group and appeal to the members of Teferes to remain loyal to the joined synagogue.

Rabbi Cohen and I enjoyed a close friendship before and it has become even closer since. Whenever I came to Beth David, everyone greeted me warmly.

Was the mission to organize Jewish life in Teferes? Is that why I was left alive? I still ask why I survived and my family did not. I know I wasn't better than my sisters and brother and for sure not so righteous and pious as my father. Only the One above knows.

With this, I will close my description of Teferes Israel; the years of joy and achievement, years of great spiritual satisfaction, years with devoted members and treasured friendships.

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As long as the candle still burns . . .

Moses lived 120 years; Joshua 110 years. Look how much they gave us. King David lived 70 years, won 18 wars and still wrote the Psalms. King Solomon lived 58 years and in his short life wrote three of the greatest books, Songs of Songs, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Time is measured not by the clock, but by what we accomplish with it.

I have retired from the pulpit. Retirement means a new way of life to which a person must adapt. Occasionally, it can be painful. Even Moses became jealous. "*Shtei misos, v'lo kinah achas*" (I would rather die twice but not have even one jealous moment). Little by little it gets easier.

There *is* life after retirement. It is different - and the same. People still need help. People still have questions. People want comfort in illness and consolation in mourning. Friends have *simchas* and want us to celebrate. People visit and we delight. Friends invite us and we enjoy. We have *Shabbos* lunch and people join in.

You know by now, that *lerning* is always important and never complete. I continue to study our priceless ancient texts. Rabbis come with *halachic* questions and, with the greatest pleasure, we discuss the answers. And of course, this book, so long just a thought, is at last, being written.

"As long as the candle still burns, you can fix a lot." There is so much to do, so much to fix. People ask how it feels to have so much time on my hands. I don't have time, my friends. I am very busy.

◆



- Naomi and I -
1993



- Naomi and her mother -

Naomi

Naomi was born in Jerusalem, four months after her father died. She was not born with a silver spoon in her mouth. She was brought up for the most part, by her sister Sheinke because her mother was so busy trying to make a living in her little 'four by four' store. Aside from Naomi, Sheinke was the only sibling who hadn't emigrated to the U.S. when I came into the picture. I didn't have the *z'chus* to know Naomi's mother, Rochel Freedman Weinberg. People told me that she was a real *tzidkonis* who distributed *Shabbos challahs* to the poor by leaving them on the steps of their house and then running away so as not to be identified. Our daughter Rachel is named after her.

Naomi had a very fine education. She attended British schools in Jerusalem including Beit Sefer Lando and graduated from the Jerusalem

Girls' College. Naomi's brothers were all educated in *yeshivos* before they came to the United States. Her youngest brother, Yitzchak, was Principal of the Soloveitchik Yeshiva and spiritual leader of a presitigous congregation in the Washington Heights section of New York for over 40 years before returning to Israel. He is her only living sibling. Another brother, Noach was a *shochet* and *mohel* in Hartford. Her oldest brother, Chaim, also lived in Hartford and was the 'most excellent' *baal koreh* that I have ever known. Leo, third of the four brothers, lived in Sunnyside, Queens, and was a printer by trade. He was wonderful, kind, hospitable and the most humorous of all.

The eldest child was Chava Stoltz whom you have already 'met' in these pages. Bessie lived in Brooklyn. Ida came to America much before Naomi, but they knew each other in Palestine and were very close. Ida was a truly wonderful person in whom our children often confided. She was smart and loving but was burdened with illness for many years before she died. To this day, despite all the complicated foods which Naomi has prepared, everyone still reaches for those very simple 'Aunt Ida's Cookies.'

Sheinke, the sister who remained in Palestine, married Bennie Gabrielovitch of the well-known Soloveitchik family. Bennie was an only child and his mother sheltered him and watched over him, the 'apple of her eye.' This made childhood life quite difficult for Naomi because Raizel didn't appreciate that Naomi was a regular 'guest' in her son's house. She had little sympathy for Naomi who was growing up without a father and whose mother worked day and night. Bennie, though, was a unique person, very religious and scholarly and he never raised his voice.

In 1939, ten days after our wedding, Naomi left for America in accordance with her rights to citizenship through her father. I remained

in Palestine. Bennie invited me to move in with them and we became so close that people who knew him as an only child asked 'since when does he have a brother.' We even looked alike!

Sheinke and Bennie had four daughters and one son. Their 'Aunt Naomi' was in the same age group as these nieces and nephew. Some of the daughters were members of the *Haganah.* Avraham, the only son of Sheinke and Bennie, fought bravely in the 1948 War of Liberation and is a great patriot of Israel.

Meanwhile, Naomi was in America, wondering and working—wondering what was happening to me and working at the Underwood Typewriter Company in Hartford. Having been educated in British schools, she always spoke perfect English and with somewhat of a British accent.

Shmuel, husband of Sheinke's daughter Leah, is a 'second Bennie.' Today, I refer to him as 'my brother Shmuel' for his devotion to me is so deep. He writes, he calls and when I was sick, he ran constantly to the *Kotel* to offer prayers for my recovery. G-d should reward him with good health and long life.

Naomi was in the United States for 15 months before I arrived, much longer than we had planned, after which we settled in Roanoke, Virginia. The children came along and Naomi became the most devoted mother. I give her the credit for raising the children so beautifully. They were well fed, well dressed and well behaved.

Naomi has always been a very talented and resourceful woman. When my salary was quite meager, she knew how to shop so that one dollar bought two dollars' worth of goods. She also has a business sense which I never had. And by far, she is one of the wittiest persons I know with a wonderful sense of humor.

When people came to our home for *Shabbos* or a holiday, they were

overtaken by the beauty of the table she set and by the atmosphere in the house. And through the years, hundreds of people came, including the Jewish students at Wesleyan University and all my *Shechita* students from Europe. And she welcomed and fed them all.

Naomi went through many rough times in her life, including a number of surgeries and many illnesses, but, she managed to shake them off with the same determination she showed during her life-threatening third pregnancy.

With my involvement in synagogue life, Naomi has been the perfect help. She organized Sisterhood, instructed the women and taught in the Hebrew School. In fact, she taught first grade Hebrew for 37 years - and we still hear from her students who thank her for being strict and making them learn. Her *Kiddush* for the holidays became so well known that many times I was sure the people came to *shul* for her kugel more than for praying! Once, a little eight-year-old girl told me, 'Rabbi, I love the services, but mostly the *Kiddush*!' She could not have said it any better.

The Bible tells us why G-d created Eve, "And G-d said, 'it is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate.'" GENESIS Naomi, thank you; thank you for being a true helpmate; forgive me for the many times I have neglected to compliment your devotion, your courage and your work. Thank you for being you, the true *aishes chayil.* I admire you for many reasons, but above all, despite never having known your father and being brought up by a sister under very trying conditions, you grew-up to be a real *mensch* and a very talented woman. You have done wonderful things in life which will forever remain engraved on the walls of my heart. No wonder in the TALMUD TRACTATE SHABBOS, R'Yosi said, *"Mi-yomai lo korosi l'ishti ishti elo l'ishti beisi."* All my life, I didn't call my wife 'my wife,' rather I called my wife 'my home.' As long as I have you, I have a home. Thank you. ◆

Ask the Rabbi

There is a story told about a Rabbi who was engaged to be the spiritual leader of a famous congregation. The *kehillah* was proud to have such a Rabbi with them and provided him with an enormous salary, a spacious home and a private secretary. After serving two years, the Rabbi summoned the President and Board of Directors and announced that he was resigning. They were stunned. 'Did we mistreat you?' No. 'Did someone insult you?' No. 'Then, why are you leaving us?' Answered the Rabbi, 'Because, in two years of being with you, this is the first time you have asked me any questions!'

This is just a story, but the fact is that rabbis enjoy being asked about various subjects. I was quite lucky. My congregation asked many questions which prompted some of our best discussions. One such

session is worth mentioning. People could ask whatever they wanted about history, *Talmud*, Bible and Jewish personalities, but I told them that some questions I would not be able to answer. One person immediately announced, 'What kind of a Rabbi is he?' My answer to this angry man was that if I would know all that I don't know, I would know a lot!

Some of the memorable questions. . .

Do you believe in miracles? In TRACTATE P'SOCHIM 64, we find *"ein somchim al ha-ness"* (Do not depend on miracles). Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin once remarked that the greatest miracle of the Six-Day War was that we didn't depend on miracles! But there is more to miracles in Jewish History which we must acknowledge. The mere fact that we are alive as a nation despite *pogroms*, expulsions and other forms of anti-Semitism, must be attributed to The Almighty's help and is a great miracle. Each day in prayer we say *"Modim anachnu loch* for the miracles which are daily with us. Abraham our Patriarch came out of the furnace unsinged; Daniel came out from the lions' den alive. Wasn't it a miracle that Professor Einstein worked on behalf of the civilized world while the Germans were working on the idea of producing the Atom bomb at the same time? If not, no Jews would be alive today.

Do you believe in prayer? Yes, I do. Some prayers are answered as we wish them to be, but 'no' is also an answer. And even when the answer is 'no,' G-d gives us the strength to cope with the problems. Historically, there are many cases which looked hopeless, but a prayer helped to change the outcome. Didn't Aaron ask Moses to pray for his sister Miriam who was afflicted with leprosy? Moses composed a six-word prayer, *"Kel no r'fo no lo"* (Heal her now, O G-d, I beseech Thee). NUMBERS XII:13 The *Baal Shem Tov* said, 'Let your prayers be a window to heaven.' The *Yalkut* to GENESIS XXVII:22 says, "Let others

rely on their own hands, Israel's weapon is prayer." Elijah the Prophet, standing on Mount Carmel rebuking the false prophets, turned to G-d and said, *"Aneini Hashem aneini"* (Hear me oh Lord, hear me). "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt-offering." KINGS XVIII:20-39 *"Kol hamon k'kol Shadai"* The voice of the multitude is like the voice of G-d.

If G-d hears prayers how does He allow the really terrible catastrophes to occur? How did he allow the Holocaust to happen? Didn't he hear the prayers of the Jews during those days? I don't even try to find an answer to this question and I am not sure anyone else can answer it either. Not even King Solomon could have given this question a satisfactory answer. But with all my might, I object to the crazy fanatics who blame the Jews for not being observant enough. How ridiculous! When Rabbi Yishmael inquired of G-d about the fate of the Ten Martyrs, the answer came, *"Kablu Aleichem."* Accept, you righteous, this decree. Job, so afflicted trouble, said to his questioners, *"Lu yikteleini Lo ayachel"* Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. JOB XIII:15

We know that G-d created the world and all that is in it, but who created G-d? We have eyes, but we can see only a limited distance. We have ears, but hear only limited sounds. The only answer I can suggest for this question is that 'we are limited.' TRACTATE ERUVIM 14 relates, *"Arbo-o nichnesu l'pardes"* Four entered to discuss the first principle and seek to explain the nature, origin and structure of the world. The four Sages were Ben Azai who could not take it and died, Ben Zumo who lost his mind, Elisha Ben Avuyah who became an atheist and Rabbi Akivo who remained alive and with full trust in G-d. *"Nichnas b'sholom v'yotzo b'sholom"* (He entered in peace and left in peace) I am not a Rabbi Akivo and this question is far beyond my ability to answer, so let us go back to the beginning of the beginning, "G-d created the heaven

and earth. . . ." Beyond that we can't go. King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes III,

> *He has made everything beautiful in His time; also He set the mystery of the world in their heart, so that no man can learn the work which G-d has made from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in his life.* ◆

J'accuse

I was sitting among friends discussing the Jewish situation in WWII when someone asked, 'Rabbi, being in America for 56 years, do you have any regrets? Are you disappointed with the American Jews?'

No, my friends, I am perfectly happy with American Jewry today; in fact, I am very proud of the American Jews. . . . Not a day goes by without either a *meshulach* (representative) trying to raise funds for Israel or a dinner being held to honor an individual who has made it possible for an institution to exist. We can look with pride on the many universities, technological institutions, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged and indeed, more *yeshivos* than ever since the destruction of the 2nd Temple. All were established and have survived thanks to the generosity of American Jewry. It is well known that American Jewry has

shown its gratitude to this country by supporting its secular institutions as well. There is hardly a theater or art museum in which a Jewish person is not involved both financially and socially.

But, the countries in Europe that benefitted greatly from Jewish genius and philanthropy, repaid the Jews with expulsion and hatred. As a people, we were condemned collectively - even when only one person did something wrong. In GENESIS, we read the story of Esau's angels wrestling with Jacob.

> *And when he saw that he prevailed not against him . . . Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, except that thou bless me.' The angel asked for his name and Jacob answered, 'My name is Jacob.' The angel said, 'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel.*

One of the commentators asks what kind of blessing this was. Esau's angel foresaw the future of condemning the entire Jewish community for the misbehavior of an individual Jew. *Jacob* is singular. *Israel* is plural.

Professor Albert Einstein said that if his Theory of Relativity proves to be correct, the world will acknowledge him as a German, but if it is proven incorrect, they will say he is a Jew.

The partnership of American philanthropy and Israel can be compared to the partnership between the tribe of Zevulun and the tribe of Issachar. Issachar indulges only in the study of Torah and shares it with Zevulun, and the people of Zevulun share their substance with Issachar. Demonstrated in times of trouble and in times of gladness, it is a great partnership, a brotherly love, a true fulfillment of *Am Yisroel aravim ze lo-ze* (all Jews are responsible for each other).

Do you remember the few days before the Six-Day War, how Nasser threatened Israel with driving them into the sea? Jews in America and all over the world prayed to The Almighty to save Israel. Every Jewish heart was agonizing over the future of the little country. How glad we were when the infant Israel, the little David smote Goliath.

Today too, when we read of Arab atrocities in Israel - when soldiers or civilians are killed, we reach out to help. American Jews can be proud of their behavior and of showing their responsibility toward our people wherever they are. G-d bless you. American Jewish leaders of today have proven themselves worthy.

On the other hand, I must say, that my heart aches with disappointment in the American Jewish leaders during WWII. When Cain killed Abel, G-d asked Cain, "Where is thy brother Abel?" and Cain answered, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Therefore, G-d said to Cain, *Kol d'mei ochicho tzo-akim alai min ha-adamah.* "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." If we fail to recognize that we are all brothers, that all of us are the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, the guilt of our brothers' blood rests upon us.

Mind you, our Patriarch Abraham pleaded with G-d to save the people of the two wicked cities Sedom and Gemorrah. Later, when Abraham heard that his nephew, Lot, was taken prisoner, Abraham mobilized an army and rescued Lot. All this, despite the fact that Lot had not been nice to him. This is leadership.

Moses led the Jewish people for 40 years. He was not only their defender, but also their devoted leader, despite having his life threatened many times.

When the Philistines sent Goliath to challenge a leader in Israel, David came forward to face Goliath, three times his size, armed only with a slingshot and stones. David heard an inner voice saying, "Go rescue thy people." He, too, was a leader.

I can go on and on naming leaders who proved themselves to be the true messengers of G-d - not only in Biblical times, but in modern times as well . . . in Spain, in Portugal and in Poland. Jewish representatives

in the Polish Senate often found themselves in the lion's den, but fought bravely against this anti-Semitic body.

During WWII, many Jews from Israel fought against the Nazis. The most famous of them was Chana Senesh who volunteered to be dropped behind the German lines in Hungary to warn the Jews of the danger that lurks upon them. After her capture, the Germans applied every means to force her to reveal secrets, but she refused to answer and was brutally murdered. G-d rest her soul.

When Moses was thrown into the Nile, the Bible tells us that Pharoah's daughter, having come to bathe, heard a child crying. She said that this must be one of the Jewish children, and according to the text, sent her maiden to fetch the child. Rashi suggests: *Amoso* means 'her maiden,' but, *amoso* also means 'her arm.' Her arm was increased in length in order to reach the cradle. What a lesson! If you want to do something, you can do it. Pharoah's daughter wanted to save the child, so she succeeded.

Tragically, many American Jewish leaders who access to people 'in high places,' didn't lift a finger or utter a word to those who could have saved European Jews from the horrors of WWII. Among them were famous names - Joseph M. Proskauer, Rabbi Stephen Wise, Felix Frankfurter didn't care. Even Justice Louis Brandeis who was quite aware of the issues, advised Rabbi Stephen Wise that 'it would make a bad impression on Roosevelt in the midst of his abundant responsibilities, to trouble him with us.' Stephen Wise knew what was happening in Europe, yet he agreed to the State Department request not to publicize the information about the atrocities until it could be confirmed. So, Rabbi Wise was quiet and then it was too late. President Roosevelt, crippled both physically and spiritually, was silent too. Anthony Eden, The Bevins and Lord Mein, even the self-proclaimed

Zionist, Sir Winston Churchill, maintained not merely a 'Silent Night' but silence throughout the war. Meanwhile, the ovens in the camps were busy 24 hours a day burning our people. One of the above leaders said we could not have saved six million people. What would have been bad if they had saved even ten thousand??

It is well documented that Rabbi Eliezer Silver of Cincinnati took a group of people to Washington to protest at the White House gate and ask for help. When Roosevelt was notified about the committee, he asked his 'house Jew' Hellman who they are. Hellman replied not to pay attention to the bunch of *shnorrers*.

The Christian world kept silent, and perhaps inwardly, they were happy that Hitler was doing the dirty work of eliminating the Jews forever, so the world wouldn't have to be bothered with them. Even today's Pope is trying hard to hide evidence that Pope Pious XII quietly helped Hitler carry out his devilish plan. According to Christian doctrine, the Jews are a cursed people because they don't recognize Jesus. Too terrible. Well, the Christian world didn't care, but you, American Jewish leaders of that time?? The blood of your brothers cries unto you from the ground.

> *Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people; neither shall thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour.* LEVITICUS XIX:16

Rabbi Dr. J.H. Hertz says of the above,

> *In protecting the life of another it is permitted to take the life of the assailant, even in self-defense. If thy fellowman is accused of a crime and evidence that clears him of it is in thy possession, thou art not at liberty to keep silent.*

What powerful words! So where were you, our leaders? Why were you silent? In DEUTERONOMY XXI, we find the following law, "If one

be found slain . . . then the elders should wash their hands and speak out, 'Our hands have not shed this blood.'" Can the American Jewish leaders of that period truly say this? Forgive, O Lord, Thy people Israel.

Perhaps there can be something positive about this. I suggest that they can serve as a reminder to our present and future leaders. As someone once said 'a great pilot can sail even when his canvas is rent.'

◆



'While we mourn, we must rebuild Jerusalem. . . .'



Our children with Polly's, just as I had hoped-
Seated right- Barbara & husband Charles -standing left
- Lorelle, Jacob, Rachel, Harold -
Burton & wife Joan

The Shoah

It pains me terribly to write this chapter. Although I was not in the Holocaust, my father, four sisters, brother, three brothers-in-law, Tanchum, my nephew and Chayale, my niece were brutally murdered. I have learned from someone in Israel that my beautiful sister, Sheine Rochel was pregnant with a second child. They opened her abdomen, removed the fetus and then killed all of them. *Murderers!* I believe that all Germany is guilty of the atrocities. Germany is a cursed country. I am disgusted by the fact that many Jews live in Germany and perplexed why Jews go there for vacations. It is a land soaked with Jewish blood.

There has been much written. I will limit this to four parts. First is the statement written by a man in the Ghetto of Warsaw describing his last hours. Second is a poem by Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam *shlita*, the

Bobover Rov and a *Kinnah* by Rabbi Shimon Schwab *shlita, Rov* of K'hal Adas Jeshurun. Third is mine. If little Tanchum and his father were together in the ghetto surely these are the questions he would ask of his father. Fourth, is a song written in 1943, by Hirsh Glik during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Born in Vilna, he escaped from that city's ghetto and became a Partisan. Captured and sent to concentration camp in Estonia, he soon managed to escape from there as well, only to be murdered at the age of twenty-four, while fighting the Germans in the woods. The song became the official hymn of the Partisans.

We are obliged to remember the *Shoah* as long as we will be on earth. We must be certain that our children are aware of it. Let us not forget. Forgetting leads to denial and worse, to repetition. There are already those who deny that six million Jews were killed and others who deny that the Holocaust ever occurred.

WARSAW, APRIL 28, 1943

I, Joseph Rakover of Tarnopol, a Gerrer Chosid, a descendent of holy and righteous ancestors, of the illustrious Rakover and Meiselles families, am writing these lines at the time when the Warsaw Ghetto is ablaze. The house in which I am writing this is one of the last houses not yet touched by the fire. It has been already a number of hours since the terrible artillery fire was directed against us, and walls around me are collapsing like match boxes. It will not be long before the house I am in will become like the other houses in the ghetto; a grave for its defenders and inhabitants. I notice that it is dusk. Red rays of sunlight penetrate through the tiny hole in the window through which we kept shooting back at the enemy. The sun surely does not know how glad I shall be that I will not see her again. When my wife, my six children and I were hiding in the forest, it was only the night which offered us hiding and shelter. Daylight meant exposure to our mortal enemies. I will ever remember the terrible day when the hail of German bombs came down on the heads of the refugees, between Warsaw and Grodno. With sunrise, the planes came and sowed murder and death. During the murderous air attack, I lost my wife and the

seven month old baby she carried in her arms. The same day two of my children vanished and three others perished in the ghetto.

I am forty years of age, and when I look back on the years gone by, I can say with certainty, as far as a man is allowed to be sure of himself, that I led an upright life. I cannot say, after all I have endured, that my relationship with G-d has not changed; however, I am able to say with all certainty, that my faith has not wavered one bit. In the past, when times were good, my attitude toward G-d was one of deep gratitude for His kindness. Now I feel that He owes me something. Therefore, I think I have the right to demand something from Him. However I don't say as Job said: "Please let me know why you punish me." Greater and better people than me know the issue now is not punishment for sins; rather it is something very extraordinary. G-d is concealing His face, so to speak, from this world. Therefore, human beings are handed over to inhuman creatures. I think, to my great sorrow, that whenever evil rules the world, it is quite natural and inevitable that those who represent the pure and the Divine, should be the first victims. This is not a great comfort. However, the fate of our nation is never determined through natural causes, but depends on the supernatural, the spiritual and Divine. Therefore, I, a man of faith must view these events as part of the reckoning of the Almighty. That does not mean that religious Jews must accept the verdict and say that everything they are punished for is right. That would be a desecration of G-d, and a desecration of themselves.

Naturally, in such circumstances, I do not expect miracles, and don't ask G-d to have mercy on me. I will not try to escape from here. Rather, I will help the flames along, by pouring petrol over my clothes. Now, I have the opportunity to see life and the world with a clear view, an opportunity only rarely granted to man before he dies. I can see a fundamental difference between our G-d and theirs. G-d as it were, is a G-d of revenge and our Torah prescribes the death penalty for almost insignificant transgressions. Nevertheless, when the great Sanhedrin, our highest judicial court, condemned a man to execution as once in 70 years, it was called "a court of murderers." In comparison their god has commanded them to love even their enemies. Yet it is our blood that has been shed for almost 2,000 years in his name. I have only three bottles of gasoline left, and they are as dear to me as wine to a drunkard. After I have emptied one bottle on myself, I will insert into it these

lines which I am writing now. I will hide it somewhere deep in the window, and if someone will ever find and read it, he will perhaps understand the feelings of a Jew, one of millions who perished, forsaken by his G-d in whom he believes so much. With the two remaining bottles, I will kill the wicked Germans. I am proud that I am a Jew, not to spite the world because of its relationship to us, but rather just because of it. I would have been ashamed to belong to those people who bore and raised such wicked creatures like the ones who are tormenting us now. I am proud that I am a Jew, because it is very difficult to be a Jew. I believe that to be a Jew means to be a fighter, to swim eternally against the current of men's corruption and evil. The Jew is a tormented hero, a martyr. You say perhaps that now the question is not reward and punishment, but rather, so to speak the concealment of Your presence, which explains that human beings are handed over into the power of evil men. But G-d, I ask you one question which is burning me up. What else has to happen to the children of Israel, so that You should appear to us once again? I feel that I have to speak to You openly. Now more than at any other time in our history of endless suffering, humiliation and degradation, we are now being trampled upon like vermin, buried alive, and burned alive, degraded and humiliated, and being destroyed by the millions. I have the right to know; how long can you be so patient? Something else I would like to say, and forgive me for saying it: Don't pull the strings too tight, they might snap.

This test with which You have tried us, which is so difficult, so hard and bitter, that I beg you to forgive those of our people who have turned against You. Forgive please those who love You, because of their misfortune and also forgive those who have left you because of their success. We were - and still are - plunged, in an endless struggle against the world. Please don't punish them, cowards are not punished. Again I ask, please forgive them. Their suffering is so intolerable that they have lost their faith that You are their Father. I am telling You this because I believe in You more than ever. I know now that You are my G-d. You cannot possibly be their G-d because their dreadful deeds are the expression of vicious G-dlessness. But if You don't appear to me as my G-d, then whose G-d are You? The G-d of murderers? Death cannot wait any more. I have to finish writing. The shooting is getting fainter and fainter. Our last heroic defenders are falling one by one. Warsaw the great, the beautiful, the city full of fear of G-d, Jewish Warsaw, is dying. The sun is setting and I thank

G-d that I will never see her again. I can see through the little opening in the window that the sky is red like a pillar of blood. In a very short time I will be with my wife and children and millions of my people who have perished in the world which is all good, in which there are no doubts, in which G-d reigns supreme. I die peacefully but not content, smitten but in despair. I die believing in G-d. I follow Him even when He removed me from Him. I kept the mitzvos even though I was punished. I loved Him even when He brought me to the lowest stage where we have become a mockery and a laughing stock among the nations. My Rebbe used to tell a story about a Jew who escaped with his wife and children from the Spanish Inquisition. In a little boat, he finally reached a rocky island. The sea was stormy, and the weather was foul. Lightening struck and killed his wife. A terrible wave threw his child into the sea. Alone, naked and bare, frightened and scared, he reached the island. With his last ounce of strength, he turned his eyes toward heaven and said: "Lord of the Universe, I have escaped here in order that I should be able to serve You without hindrance, to fulfill your commandments and sanctify Your name. But You are doing a lot to make me leave my religion. If You think You will succeed in taking me away from the right path, I declare to You my G-d, and G-d of my fathers, that it will never happen. You can depress me. You can punish me to death, I shall always trust in You. I shall remain a Jew and nothing in the world will make me change". These are my last words, nothing will change.

You have done everything that I should deny You. I should not trust You. But, I die, as I have lived, with a rock-like faith in You. Shema Israel .... Hear O Israel, The Lord our G-d, The Lord is one. ▼▲

IN MEMORY of the MARTYRS of *CHURBAN EUROPE*

by Rabbi Shimon Schwab *shlita*
Rov of K'hal Adas Jeshurun

He Who remembers those who remember Him,
Each generation and its holy ones—
since the time You have chosen us—
May He remember the gruesome fate of the last generation.
Woe! what has happened to us!

Those who were swept away by the flood of blood—
who sacrificed their lives—
All who were submerged in the valleys of tears,
May G-d think of them in the lands of eternal life.
May their memory be a blessing for all eternity.

Lift up your hands to Him, woe O you Heavens!
Woe over the best of Israel's tribes—
Communities and congregations, cities and districts,
Fraternities, foundations, all rendezvous with G-d.

If only streams of water could pour down from eyes
towards waterfalls of the rivers of tears,
for the thousands times thousands of corpses
consumed in the fire of destructions and horrors.

For the princes of Torah, the pillars of tradition,
for the young flowers of the priesthood,
for the diligent scholars, the men teachers and women,
and the precious children in school.

The trusting daughters, the elderly grandparents, and their offspring,
and the infants whom they bore, everyone—
including the myriads beloved in life, not parted by death.

Seek out their blood when You take the count
of all the scattered, rent leaves, of every life perished
in the days of destruction and calamity— six thousand times a thousand.

An entire third to be destroyed, by the Blitzkrieg's fury,
of the cherished vineyards You dearly loved.
O Avenger of blood! The memory of their misery,
please do not erase from the book You have written.

Remember the moans and tumultuous screams,
when they were herded for slaughter—
May the rivers of their blood and the tears on their faces
not be forgotten forever.

Every tremble, every groan, every piercing cry
of those torn asunder by hoards of dogs,
remember and count them, collect them into Your flask,
Till the time the degraded ones' shame is avenged.

In the barbarians' camps were pain and sickness,
the anguish of mortified souls;
insults and mockery, shame and spit, searing wounds from horrible blows.

Hunger, thirst, frenzy, sorrow, the faint stumbling without any strength;
every death rattle of every forlorn one, far be it from You to forget.
The pillars of smoke, the fumes from furnace,
Piles and piles of bones and sinews, poison-filled halls,
the roaring sound of the multitude, choking in gas chamber.

The stench of the bodies, the tortured corpses,
fertilizers for the soil of the blasphemers.
How the tormentors turned their fat into soap,
and human skin into feminine adornments.

(Remember) the finger motions of the savage officers.
To the right—slave labor! To the left—the shadow of death.
[Remember] how the sharpshooters shot at those digging (their own) graves,
lowering them to the depths in the agony of the grave.

And how they afflicted our sisters and mutilated our daughters,
with doses of poison from sadistic doctors.
And fugitive survivors in burrows and bunkers,
and the disappearance of children in houses of apostasy, in monasteries.

Unblemished sheep, completely consumed,
the blood of the Diaspora's children.
Woe! O Ariel, for the corpses of your devout ones.
Who could count the sacred flock, whose flame will never be extinguished,
Your tested ones were Sanctifiers of Your name.

With the cry of 'Shema Yisrael,' they gave up their lives for G-d,
so that He might gather them in.
And-until the very last day, they justified His judgment,
and called out, 'I believe. . .' and sang a song of trust.

And now, a people is left, bewildered as an orphan—
without graves at which to pray, without tombstones
where to weep the laments of emotion-filled hearts.

Only blood libations are their memorials boiling, unforgettable—
and the mounds of ashes from their Akeidah,
are tributes from the Altar's ashes.

Who can express Israel's torment, whose mind is frenzied by misery?
The remnants of its splendor is a fraction of a bit,
how its pride is humbled today!

O Living G-d! Merciful One!
Comfort Your congregation that yearns for You so mightily,
Let new light shine, let rays of glory grow, And may G-d's spirit hover.

▲▼

KINNAH
IN MEMORY of the MARTYRS of *CHURBAN EUROPE*

by Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam *shlita*
Bobover Rav

Remember, please and lament, 0 all of Israel,
let your voices be heard on high.
For Germany has destroyed our people, during stormy days of the World War; with killings, horrible and cruel, with starvation and thirst.
For all generations, do not forget,
until you will merit witnessing the (ultimate) consolation.
(Remember) their screams and their weeping as they were
tightly packed and locked into the train's (cattle) cars.
Like sheep to the slaughter they were led to be
incinerated in the crematorium ovens.
May the sound of their pleading cries be eternally remembered,
by the One Who dwells in the Heavens.
When they proclaimed, 'Shema Yisrael'
they offered up their lives to the Lord of lords.
Roshei Yeshivah and their students, and the
multitudes of Your people were there.
They enslaved them with brutal tortures,
and they slaughtered them with high-handed arrogance.
The blood of tender babes cries out to You from the earth, (saying;)
'Exact vengeance for the children and the women;
let no living soul escape alive!'
For the burning of thousands of study halls and synagogues,
and for myriad of Torah scrolls and their students,
we shall lament with raised and screaming voices.
They set G-d's sanctuaries aflame, they ignited them,
and our eyes witnessed this.
Let those who lit the fire suffer retribution;
may G-d judge the corpse-filled nations.
Cry out loud, O heaven and earth, for the thousands of cities, citadels of Torah,

For the countries of Europe and their Jewish communities, the heirs and
trustees of our traditions,
For righteous tzaddikim, elders, pious chassidim,
all those who cleaved unto a faith so pure.
From the day we were exiled from our homeland,
there was never an annihilation as awesome as this.
Be compassionate with our remnant; look down upon us, please, from heaven, at the (death) camps of the martyrs, ten times as many as those who left Egypt.
Rebuild our holy Temple, and provide us with double consolation,
Exalt us, and bring us back to Zion and Jerusalem. ▼▲

Seder Night in the Ghetto of Warsaw
H.Lindenthal

Child: Daddy, I have a number of questions to ask you, not only the *Mah Nishtano*.

Father: Ask my child, but I don't know if I will be able to give you satisfactory answers.

Child: Daddy, I remember the night before *Pesach*, when you performed the ritual of *b'dikas chometz*, searching for chometz, you held a wooden spoon with a quill and I held the wax candle. We searched for 10 crumbs of bread in 10 places. Why didn't you do it yesterday?

Father: You are correct, my child. But, there was nothing to search for. If there was a crumb of bread, we would have eaten it; we are so hungry.

Child: In the morning before *Pesach* starts, you always took me to *shul* to be redeemed because I am a first born, a *b'chor*. We could not go; we are prisoners here and I am sure there are no more *shuls* anyhow. The Nazis burned all of them. But Daddy, you told me that the Jewish people are called the *b'chor* of the nation because we accepted G-d's Torah. So why weren't we redeemed? And if we gave the world the Bible from which so many people benefited, why did not *even one* of the nations save us from this graveyard?

Father: My child, you are right, but don't give-up. Let me tell you what we find in TRACTATE BRACHOS, PAGE 10, *"Even if a sharp sword lies on your neck to be killed, don't give up hope."* In MINCHAS YEHUDAH, we find, *"Yeshu-at Hashem, k'eref ayin."* (G-d's salvation may come as fast as a wink of an eye). So, my child, don't give up.

The child is unimpressed; he continues to ask.

Daddy, the first question of the *Mah Nishtanah* is, *"All nights we may eat leavened or unleavened bread (chometz u-matzo), why this night only matzo (unleavened)."* Here we have *no* bread at all, but we look like a matzo, dry skeletons; one push and we can break up into small pieces.

The second question is, *"All nights of the year we may eat all kinds of vegetables, why this night only bitter herbs - morror?"* I haven't seen a vegetable since we were locked up here. Morror? It is bitter

enough here, so terrible.

Daddy, the third question, *"All nights we don't dip even once, why tonight twice, in salt water and in charoseth?"* My dear father, here in the ghetto we are dipped not in salt water or *charoseth*, but in fire and blood. How long can this go on? Didn't we witness the *korban Pesach* (pascal lamb) the Nazis displayed before us? They took Yitzchok Rosenberg, the young *shochet*, 28 years old, a father of three children and for amusement, Captain Shultz, with a smile on his face, ordered them to tie his hands and feet. He is the *korban Pesach*. They put him on a bundle of wood and Shultz lit the fire! I can't sleep. *R'Yitzchok's* crying and gasping for air does not leave me. Do we really need the *zeroah* (shankbone) to remind us of the *korban Pesach?* I remember the song we sang in *cheder*, *"Ha ha-em l'zot korato chayim emor no kali mah zeh met."* If you call this life, tell me oh G-d, what is death?

The fourth question, *"On all nights we eat sitting or reclining, why on this night only reclining?"* Aren't we in cages? so narrow, so small and so short that we can't even lift our heads. Recline? Daddy, look at the people; they are living corpses.

And Daddy, before the end of the *Seder*, the one that stole the *afikomen* was rewarded a gift. *Yankele* climbed over the barbed wire fence, found a few rotten potatoes for his parents, but the Nazis caught him and shot him. Was this a reward? During the *Seder*, we used to sing, *Chad Gad yo* - (An only kid, the father bought for two *zuzim*. Then came a cat and ate the kid.) You said that the 'kid' is the Jewish people. G-d bought them because they accepted the two tablets - The Ten Commandments. The cat is the enemy who ate up the kid. Where is the reward?

My final question: How beautiful it was to see Mother, dressed like a queen, open the door for Elijah. You told us that Elijah the prophet will bring good tidings that the Messiah will come and will save us from all our troubles. Where is Elijah?

The child falls asleep. The father, shaken, murmurs to himself the *sh'fo chamos-cho*: *Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathens that have not known Thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon Thy Name; For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste this dwelling place. Pour out Thine indignation upon them; and let Thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the Lord.* ▲▼

ZOG NIT KEYNMOL
Hirsh Glik

Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg,
Chotsh himlen blayen-e farshte-in bloy-e teg;
Vayl kumen vet noch undzer oys gebenkt-te sho,
Es vet a poyk ton undzer trot: mir zaynen do!

Fun grinem palmen-land biz vaytn land fun shney,
Mir kumen on mit undzer payn, mit undzer vey,
Un vu gefaln s'iz a shprits fun undzer blut,
Shprotsn vet dort undzer gvure undzer mut.

Dos lid geshriben iz mit blut un nit mit blay,
S'iz nit a lidl fun a foygl oyf der fray.
Dos hot a folk ts'vishn falndike vent
Dos lid gezungen mit naganes in di hent!

Never say that you are on your final road,
Though overhead dark skies of lead may death forbode;
The long awaited hour's surely drawing near,
When with a roar our steps will thunder: *we are here!*

From land of palm tree to the far-off land of snow,
Our people come together crushed by pain and woe.
But where a drop of our blood has touched the ground,
There our strength and our courage will resound.

This song is written down with blood and not with lead,
The birds don't sing it, for it fills the air with dread.
This song was sung as all around us bullets sprayed,
And walls collapsed as people hurled their hand grenades.





- Chayele Wartelsky, Sheine Rochel's daughter -
- My sister Bashe Gitele and our nephew Tanchum, D'vorke's son -

A Tribute to Leah Darling

I have mentioned in previous chapters the amount of work and number of duties I had to perform in the synagogue. The synagogue was always short of revenue, so I had to assume many tasks not belonging to me. We could not afford an executive director to mail *yahrzeit* reminders; I did it. The synagogue certainly couldn't afford a private secretary for me, yet, the work was done. Many times people asked me, "Rabbi, how do you do it?" Well, my friends, G-d blessed me with the desire to work hard, often at the expense of my health, but my love for Teferes was so great that many pleasures were pushed aside. Don't give me all the credit.

Thirty-five years ago, Naomi and I met a young woman at the beach. Her name is Leah Darling. I mentioned to her that Teferes Israel is looking for a part-time secretary.

Mrs. Darling, G-d bless her, accepted the job and she worked for the synagogue and with me for 35 years.

Leah is a unusual person. As a secretary she was superb. She has an unbelievable memory, a 'living computer,' and could remember all telephone numbers of *shul* members plus, plus plus. A native of Hartford, she knew so-o-o many people and could recite their whole family tree. She could tell me how to get everywhere from anywhere. When I was called to perform a funeral and didn't know the family, she informed me about the deceased. She reminded me of appointments, of obligations and of deadlines for articles that I needed to write - sometimes for the Jewish Ledger, other times for the synagogue bulletin. I just had to dictate the text and could depend on her to correct my English. And she so often closed my door, blocked my calls and reminded me to rest!

For 35 years we never had an argument! Always pleasant, always accommodating. On the last day we spent in the synagogue before moving out, I said to her, "Leah, people will not believe that we never had an argument. Let's have it now." She laughed. We locked the office door for the last time and left.

Leah, you are wonderful and I shall never forget your loyalty, your devotion, and your friendship. May the good Lord shower the choicest of His blessings upon you and your family.

A faithful friend is a strong defense; he that hath found such a one, hath found a treasure. APOCRYPHA: ECCLESIASTES

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Berkeley, California

Over the years, Naomi and I have frequently gone West to Berkeley, California to visit our son Harold. We have always enjoyed the spirit of that remarkable little city. Berkeley has a nice Jewish life. I have had the pleasure of speaking at the Orthodox *shul* where several hundred people are in attendance on *Shabbos*. In addition to that *shul*, the community supports a Conservative and a Reform synagogue, a Chabad House, various *minyonim* and a Jewish Center. The Judah Magnes Museum, a gem, is in Berkeley. The museum houses one of the world's finest collections of Judaica. From artifacts of the no longer existing Jewish communities of India, Morocco and Tunisia, to the archives of the great Jewish western families like Levi Straus, Zellerbach and Goldwater, the Magnes Museum has it all. Seymour Fromer who

co-founded the museum with his lovely wife, Rebecca Camhi Fromer, a writer, has been the Museum Director for more than 25 years. They are our dear friends.

Seymour has traveled the world with the singular mission of preserving the rich heritage of the Jewish people. He has acquired very interesting Hebrew, Yiddish and Aramaic documents, many of them hundreds of years old. It was my pleasure to translate several documents for the museum.

You will recall an earlier chapter about the *pinkos*. At the museum, I learned that, in addition to those in Poland, communities in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Germany kept *pinkosim* as did Sephardic communities. Some in the Magnes collection are difficult to read due to general deterioration and the faded script of the *sofer*. With magnifying glass in hand, my task was to piece together damaged manuscripts, then determine which letters were erased, which words were missing and ultimately what the full content is. Completing a text gave me great satisfaction.

One very old document was a *get*. Traditionally written on paper, this one was on parchment. The elements had almost destroyed it. After many hours I was able to piece it together and found that the text was entirely different from that which we use today.

I am grateful to Seymour for inviting me to delve into the rich history of our people and to study how well organized the *kehillas* were. May the Almighty grant you, Seymour, many years of good health and enable you to work in the vineyard - preserving the work of Our People.

I cannot end my discussion of the Berkeley without speaking of two other personalities whom I count among my dear friends. Dr. Bebe Patten is the Founder and Chancellor of Patten College in Oakland. Dr. Patten is truly unique. She is a Christian woman with an extraordinary

friendship to the Jewish people and Israel. She has no agenda to convert Jews. Her office walls are covered with pictures of her with great Jewish figures including David BenGurion, Menachem Begin and Yitzchak Shamir. The Patten campus consists of a four-year fully-accredited college, an elementary school and a high school where students of all races study together peacefully using a curriculum that includes Hebrew, Jewish History and the Old Testament. Just how remarkable this woman is, is illustrated by the fact that Dr. Patten is the only non-Jew who sits on the Board of Directors of Bar-Ilan, Israel's only Orthodox university. At my retirement dinner, Dr. Patten presented me with an honorary Doctor of Divinity and established an annual lecture in Naomi's honor. I take great pride that I lectured at the College on the subjects of Maimonides, the *Talmud*, the Book of Proverbs and "Jewish Life from the Cradle to the Grave and Beyond." May G-d give Dr. Bebe Patten good health and length of days in her extraordinary work toward peace among all people.

The other person whom I wish to mention is Fred Rosenbaum, Founder and Director of Lehrhaus Judaica which offers courses to 3,000 students on the campuses of the University of California, Stanford University and San Fransisco State. Fred and I have discussed Eastern European Jewish life, early Zionism and contemporary Jewish life at length. Not only is it a pleasure to engage him in conversation, but also to go with him to baseball games. His encyclopedic knowledge of each player is apparent and it is a joy to watch him *plotz* when the home team doesn't perform to his standards.

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DAVID HOWARD

September 19, 1994

Dear Rabbi and Mrs. Lindenthal:

I hope you both are well. Everyone is fine here. I talk to Harold practically every day and often hear about you both. Our daughters Hannah and Eva are seven years old now and in second and first grade respectively.

Last year a group of us got together to establish the first Jewish Center in the history of our town. It's called K'hilat Ha'Aloneem and it's located in a former church meeting hall that seats about 150 people. It reminds me a little of the old Burlington St./Blue Hills Teferes Israel.

On Erev Yom Kippur a couple of us were invited to say a few words to the congregation about what different prayers meant to us. I chose the Kaddish. My comments follow:

"I think Kaddish was the first prayer I learned—before the S'chma, before the blessing for the candles, before the Kiddish. The reason was that my father died when I was seven, and I—the sole male survivor—was expected to say Kaddish for him as soon as I could.

When I was about ten, my mother switched us from the upscale Conservative congregation with its American-born and Seminary-educated rabbis and cantors, to a little Orthodox shul not much bigger than this one. The rabbi had been educated in Polish Yeshivas, escaped from the Nazis, lost his entire family in the Holocaust, fought for Israeli independence and emigrated to the U.S. with his Sabra wife. We had no cantor and Rabbi Lindenthal himself taught Hebrew school.

My mother realized that I needed a father figure, although I'm not sure she would have articulated it that way, and luckily, I found one whom I'd always be able to love and respect.

Rabbi Lindenthal was a great teacher and he instilled in me a spiritual feeling and an affinity for the tradition that's never left me. In my worst days of anti-establishment anarchy of the '60's, it never occurred to me that traditional Judaism was the problem. The shul had been good to me and my family. Judaism was something to always be honored. Period.

Once I turned 13, Rabbi Lindenthal would often call me up to join the dwindling minyan. There were maybe 8-12 regulars who davened Shacharis, Mincha and Maariv service, every day of the week. They had done it all their lives. They were, except for the Rabbi, all men well into their 70's. Some spoke no English at all; none spoke without an accent. On rainy or snowy days, some of them were too ill or frail to go to shul and invariably somebody would need to say Kaddish. Since you couldn't say Kaddish without a minyan, the Rabbi would call me to pray beside these men.

Rabbi Lindenthal always thanked me profusely and told me I was performing a great Mitzvah that I would always remember. And I have. It was on those wintery days in Connecticut that I felt most connected to my religion. I later realized that it didn't even have much to do with whether you believed in G-d or not. There was too much holiness there to worry about that. The Kaddish was sacred whatever you believed. And it still is."

Have a wonderful, healthy and happy 5755.

Episodes

The life of a rabbi is very interesting. Besides preaching, teaching and counseling, the rabbi is beset with many problems which require his physical presence – meetings with the synagogue board; with its affiliates; with the religious *kehillah* about *kashrus* and the *mikveh* and with Federation and Jewish Center. And there are meetings with community groups and town officials about security, vandalism and zoning. And there are meetings to settle arguments among Board members and you need King Solomon's wisdom to make peace. Meetings and more meetings and little things, oh-h those little things that take big chunks of time.

Some episodes in my life are heartbreaking while others are very humorous. Often something happens that can be shared with the family; other times events must be sealed forever in my heart. In this chapter, I will recall a number of incidents of both kinds . . . .

KILLING FOR KOSHER: *Kosher meat (other than poultry) comes from a very limited category of animals - those that have split hoofs and chew their cud. The animal must be slaughtered by a 'shochet' - an observant Jew with special training - who checks that the 'chalef' (knife) has absolutely no nicks and is extremely sharp. Still, the animal is not determined 'kosher' until certain organs are checked. From start to finish, it is a very involved procedure, carried out to ensure a humane method for the animal and purity for the consumer.*

A Different Aroma . . .

Some people accept suggestions readily. Others just can't seem to do this; they often must learn their lessons with a kind of 'shock therapy.' In the slaughterhouse, I had several able-bodied assistants who helped steady the steers. These men were always pleasant and cooperative and followed my instructions carefully. I had a special place for my *chalef* which all the men knew was off-limits to them. Actually, all the men knew this except Charlie Jones.

Charlie Jones smoked a pipe all the time; he smoked his pipe during breaks; he smoked it while working. The only time he removed it from his mouth was when it needed re-filling. The problem was, he would place it on the rack where I kept my *chalef*. I asked him a dozen times to put the pipe elsewhere, but my suggestion fell on deaf ears. I was terribly annoyed and finally spoke to the foreman who decided that we must teach Charlie Jones a lesson. When Charlie was looking away, he filled the pipe with cow manure. Charlie put the pipe in his mouth and puffed and puffed. 'What's the matter with the pipe?' asked the foreman. Answered Charlie, "I can't understand it; it's the same tobacco, but a different aroma!" ◊

WEDDINGS: *Jewish Law prescribes four parts to a wedding ceremony: 'Birkos Erusin,' two blessings of engagement chanted by the cantor or*

rabbi; sanctification of the marriage as the groom places the ring on the bride's finger and says the nine honored Hebrew words which in English mean, "You are sanctified to me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and of Israel." Reading the 'Kesubah,' the contract of obligations each has to the other, is the third part. Finally, there is the chanting of the seven blessings. The groom then breaks the glass and 'Mazel Tov!'

Kohen, Levi or plumber . . .

My first pulpit was in Roanoke, Virginia. It was WWII and a young soldier came to me with his bride to arrange for their wedding. Although he was to be shipped overseas, they insisted on getting married. Brave indeed! This would be my first wedding in America and I carefully explained all that would be necessary– ten men, a ring, kosher wine, a *chupah*, witnesses etc. All went very smoothly with one exception. I had already confirmed that the bride and groom were 'complete Jews,' that they had not been previously married and the like. They knew their Hebrew names and even their parents' names, but when I asked the groom if he is a *Kohen* or *Levi,* he was completely puzzled. He had no idea what I was talking about and my explanation in my very broken English was of no use. Finally, his face lit up. With a look of understanding he said to me, "Rabbi, by profession I am a plumber!"

NOTE: He returned from the war and my greatest reward was that they remembered to notify me when their first child was born. ◇

A double 'Mazel Tov' . . .

It is quite common to have more than one wedding on the same day. The following event, however, was so unusual, it was written-up in the New York Times.

A man lost his wife with whom he had children. After some time, the husband decided to remarry. Nothing new. However, his son also decided to get married. To make it unique and perhaps less expensive,

father and son decided to get married on the same day. They asked me to officiate, but according to Jewish tradition, two members of the same family may not marry on the same day. The solution? The father and his bride were married before sunset; the son and his bride were married after sunset— two different days. In Judaism, a new day begins after the sun has set. The sequence: "...and there was evening and there was morning one day." GENESIS I:5. *Double mazel tov!* ◊

DIVORCE: *In Hebrew, a 'get,' Jewish divorce decree, is called 'Sefer Krisus,' a 'book of cutting.' It is a cutting of the allegiance that existed between husband and wife and of the love they had for each other. It is very tragic. One of the most difficult things to carry out in Judaism is the 'get.' It takes a specialist. You must have witnesses who know how to sign their name in a certain way and a 'sofer' who has been specially trained to write the document. The twelve lines of the 'get' must be written with a goose feather and cannot have any mistakes. Nothing can be erased or the procedure starts all over again. It is very complicated. Without it, a couple who was married in a Jewish ceremony, is considered still married.*

YIBUM: *We find this law in DEUTERONOMY 25:5-10. It applied in cases where a couple had no children, the husband died and left a brother. The surviving brother had to marry the widow. 'Rabenu Gershon' who was called 'Maor Hagola,' 1000 years ago, established some modification to this which provides that the surviving brother gives the widow a form of a 'get' called 'chalitza.' He can never marry her even if he wants to; she can then marry anybody except a Kohen or her brother-in-law. The law of yibum dates back to when Judah's son married, and died without leaving an heir. His brother was asked to marry the widow, which he did, but would not make her pregnant. So he also died. (GENESIS 38).*

Your husband is dead? Mazel Tov!

Death is sad at any age. In the prayer at the grave, we say: "A person lives a year or a thousand years, what profiteth it him. He shall be as though he had not been."

A young man asked me to officiate at his wedding— a happy event. I knew the groom, but not the bride. We made arrangements to meet at which time the bride told me she was married before. I asked if she had obtained a *get.* She did. From which rabbi? She told me. If this rabbi officiated, I am in trouble.

I did not want to hurt the couple; neither did I want to tell them that this particular rabbi was not qualified to issue a *get* and without the proper *get*, I could not officiate at the wedding. They recognized my hesitation, but G-d was good to me. With no great thought in mind, I asked the bride if her former husband was remarried. 'Unfortunately, he was killed in an plane crash,' said she. *A-hah!* no need to worry if the *get* was kosher, so *mazel tov!* "You are now a widow and the law is different for a widow when she wishes to remarry."

Did she and her first husband have children? No. Another hesitation. Did her deceased ex-husband have brothers? No. Again, *mazel tov!* ◊

Two divorces and a wedding in the same week– for the same person . . .

According to the *Talmud* 'even the *mizbayach* cries when husband and wife separate.' When a couple comes to arrange a divorce, it leaves an emptiness in my heart. The frequency of divorce is too high and very alarming for the future of the Jewish family. In most cases, children are the innocent victims. In Europe, divorce occurred infrequently; Rabbis tried all means of persuasion to change the minds of the couple.

". . .and when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they

wept for Aaron 30 days, even all the house of Israel." NUMBERS 20:29 Take note of the words "even all the house of Israel." They mourned more for Aaron than for Moses. The *Talmud* states that 'the women wept hard.' Why? Because Aaron, the High Priest, was unique in his behavior with people. When Aaron heard of a husband and wife having difficulty, he tried hard to make peace between them. Hillel said "Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace; be one who loves his fellow men and draws them near the Torah." ETHICS OF THE FATHERS I:12

My case is a man who married a woman and then divorced her according to civil law, but didn't give her a *get*. He married a second time and subsequently divorced that woman, again without a *get*. There are now two women who, according to Jewish law, are married to the same man! When the man asked me to officiate at his third wedding, I told him that he must divorce his two previous wives according to Jewish law first. He did. A week later he married a fine Jewish woman. ◊

CIRCUMCISION: *A 'mohel' is someone medically trained to do circumcisions, and religiously qualified to perform the mitzvah of 'bris milah' which brings the male infant into the Covenant of Abraham. The mohel does the surgery; after the circumcision, the baby receives his Hebrew name - the one he will carry throughout his life - the one by which he will be called to the Torah, to his wedding - for all Jewish occasions. There is celebration. 'Simon tov u mazel tov!' (A favorable omen and good fortune.)*

A bris is a happy occasion for me. The Nazis killed one million Jewish children. When I perform a bris I think, Oh Hitler, your name will forever remain 'rotzeach,' murderer, but thank G-d, you didn't succeed completely. Here we are - Am Yisroel Chai - we are alive and will be as G-d promised, His seed.

The courage of a seven year old . . .

A seven-year-old boy and his family lived in Springfield where they had settled after arriving from Russia. The boy had not been circumcised, but was attending the local Lubavitch Yeshiva. Early one morning, his father brought him to Mount Sinai Hospital in Hartford. Most adults and children alike, are afraid to go for surgery. Before they wheeled him into the operating room, this little boy was dancing around and humming *Chassidic* melodies. It was unusual to see this. When I asked the boy if he is frightened, he smiled broadly and said, "Why should I be afraid? *Hashem* wants me to do it."

Already he knew the verse from PSALM 118, "If G-d is with me, why should I be afraid?" After hearing the interpretation of what the boy said, the nurse, a Christian, was teary-eyed. ◊

And sometimes the mitzvah without the celebration . . .

In Hartford there is a famous child heart specialist, Dr. Leon Chameides. He briefed me about a child who was dangerously ill and probably would not live more than eight or nine days. I was in a terrible dilemma– circumcising the child may hasten his death; if the child dies without being circumcised, it will have to be done anyhow. According to *Halacha,* a child must be circumcised even in death. I didn't know what to do.

One of the leading Rabbinic authorities in New York advised me to circumcise the child. 'G-d can perform miracles and on the merit of the *mitzvah*, perhaps he will live. We cannot know.' On Monday I circumcised the child; on Tuesday we put the child to rest. There is no way to describe the mood of the parents. But G-d is a great healer and a few years later, the parents were blessed with a healthy baby boy. ◊

Circumcised, but will he ever know?

A father invited me to circumcise his child with the following: 'the child is a mongoloid, he is blind, he will never walk, he is like a piece of clay; the child will have to be given away to an institution.' At Mt Sinai Hospital (Hartford), in the presence of the father, the doctor and a nurse, I performed the circumcision and in tears, named the baby with the blessing, "Even as he has been introduced to the Covenant, so may he be introduced to the Torah, to marriage and to a life of good deeds." Oh G-d, to what has this child been introduced? where will he enter? Will he ever know? The father kissed the baby and left. ◊

A Bris on a Safari . . .

The father, a professor of Judaic Studies, a very religious man, an observant Jew, was a convert to Judaism. For him, it had been a 'token' circumcision, *hatofas dam.*

A few months later, he brought his eight year old boy to me for a full circumcision. He advised me that the child has an allergy and cannot have anaesthesia. What do we do? Dr. Joel Deutsch, Chief of Surgery at Mt Sinai, knew how to use hypnosis instead of anaesthesia. We engaged him. While I performed the *bris* and Dr. Barry Lazarus put in the stitches, Dr. Deutsch, G-d bless him, took the child on a safari! The child described all the animals he saw and told us which ones he liked and which he did not. Then, Dr. Deutsch took the child to a circus and again the child was laughing and shouting. We finished, but when the child was released from the hypnosis, he felt the pain and the doctors gave him medicine. *"Es iz shver tzu zein a Yid."* It's tough to be a Jew◊

Mountains don't meet, but people do . . .

There is an Aramaic saying among the scholars "*Turo b'turo lo poga*

inish b'inish poga." (Mountains that are separated don't meet, but people do.)

It happened at a *bris* in a little town not far from Hartford. The father and mother were physicians. The father's father, the *sandek,* was so happy to have lived to become a grandfather. He was a Holocaust survivor from Poland. I noticed that he spoke with an accent similar to mine. When asked what city he came from, he answered, 'Oh, you never heard of it.' Upon my insistence, he answered - Grodno. I told him I studied in the Grodno Yeshiva; he started to cry. He also studied there and we were in the same class for two years. Yes indeed, mountains don't meet, but people do. ◇

His just desserts . . .

The Lord put words in my mouth to teach a man a lesson. We find in SAMUEL II 22:27, "With the pure thou will show thyself pure; but with the crooked, thou will show thyself perverse!" With a gentleman, be a gentleman, but with a vulgar person, teach him a lesson. Usually guests attend a *bris* and there is a celebration with lots of food. I try my best to see that only kosher food is served, sometimes, people don't ask me and there is a real *mish-mash.* It hurts, but there is nothing to do except perform the circumcision, check the baby and go away.

On one such occasion, I was waiting to check the baby. A man was sitting and stuffing himself with a big sandwich - salami and cheese!! It was so thick that he had to stretch his mouth to bite it. After swallowing the first bite, he turned to me and said, 'Rabbi, why don't you eat? The food is delicious!' I quietly declined. Again, 'Rabbi, don't be so old-fashioned. The laws of *kashrus* were good in the desert, but today the meats are inspected.' He continued to give me a whole lecture and I needed to put this man in his deserved place. "Thou favorest man with

knowledge and teacheth mortals understanding." Lord, give me something to shut this man up! When he was half finished with the big sandwich and half finished with his uninvited lecture, he turned to me and said, 'By the way, Rabbi, what do you do with the foreskin?' My opportunity had come. "Sir, you are eating it!!" ◊

The Teacher and the Student . . .

Over 9,000 circumcisions I've done in my career, traveling the length and breadth of Connecticut and southern Massachusetts, to the most rural places and in the worst winter storms. I even went to Berkeley, California, 3,000 miles from Hartford.

Our son Harold is well-known in Berkeley. One day, his friend Dr. Mark Klein, a psychiatrist, called to invite him to his son's *bris*. Dr. Klein indicated that he intends to call Rabbi Lebovics, a *mohel* from Los Angeles with a very fine reputation. Said Harold, "My father taught Rabbi Lebovics to be a *mohel* and my parents will be in Berkeley then." Dr. Klein thought for a moment- "In that case, I'll go with the teacher!" ◊

Years later, in September 1995, I received the following card regarding Rabbi Lebovics, from the daughter of Em and Viola Ohlbaum, long-time members of my shul:

ROXANNE J. COADY

Rabbi Lindenthal - September 28, 1995

I am very sad that you have had surgery - all of our prayers and love are for your comfort and well being.

An amazing coincidence happened - we were in Los Angeles for the bris of Mitch's son - Spencer Ohlbaum and the mohel starts speaking Hungarian. Well that was nice but then he asked where we were from - When he learned we were from Connecticut - He asked if by any chance we knew Rabbi Lindenthal - Well we nearly fell over - He then explained that upon coming from Israel he went to Hartford to be trained by guess who? - Rabbi Lindenthal - Well we felt very blessed that you were with us - by talent and training.

All our best wishes -

BAR MITZVAH- *Literally, this translates as 'son of good deeds.' It is a rite of passage; the boy is introduced as an adult and is responsible for all obligations incumbent on a Jew which includes putting on 'tefillin' every weekday morning.*

A Bicycle Bochur . . .

It can be difficult to prepare a boy for Bar Mitzvah, especially those who only have a few hours per week for their religious training.

Some parents spend a lot of money to mark the occasion, with fancy caterers, special music, flowers, balloons, alcohol and what not. In many cases, when the parents learn that the *tefillin* will cost $75-100, they are very distressed. 'Rabbi, it is too much money!' The Bar Mitzvah will cost them thousands of dollars but an extra $100 for Jewish fundamentals is too much.

At first, we teach the boy slowly; as the event draws closer, the child is willing to have longer and more frequent lessons. Some would rather play ball, etc. and their parents have to bribe them with gifts. In one unusual case, two weeks before the event, the boy announced, 'Rabbi, I don't need any more lessons. I got my bicycle already!' ◊

We don't mix men and women . . .

In our synagogue, we had an excellent custodian, Rex Clements. To this day, he remains a good and very devoted friend of our family. An extremely intelligent and religious man, he knows the Bible well and is very inquisitive. Quite often he asks me to explain the meaning of various passages and it is my pleasure to have these discussions with him.

Teferes Israel was an Orthodox *shul;* men and women sat separated. Many synagogues are embroiled in contoversy over the issue of separate seating. Thank G-d, ours wasn't.

It is customary to invite relatives, friends, neighbors and business associates, Jew and Gentile, to a Bar Mitzvah. One Saturday morning, an elderly Jewish couple arrived and Mr. Clements pointed out the two sections. 'No, in my temple I sit with my husband,' said the woman. Mr. Clements told her he has orders from the Rabbi to make sure there is no mixed-seating in the sanctuary. The lady had to give in. When services were over, Mr. Clements said to me, 'You know Rabbi, I have no trouble with the *goyim*. I have trouble with the Jews!' ◊

TORAH READING: *The Torah is read with a unique type of chanting. The Torah does not have written notes or punctuation, so all must be memorized.*

Torah in flight . . .

I have always been happy that I know how to read in the Torah, but one time, it was particularly thrilling. Naomi and I were flying to Israel. A *minyan* gathered on board. As it happened, a man was bringing a Torah for a *shul*. It was Monday, a day when the Torah is read during morning service. When they asked for a *baal koreh*, I was the only one who answered. What a thrilling opportunity! During the reading, I felt that I couldn't be any closer to G-d. ◊

Torah at the Wall . . .

You may know that the *Kotel* is never left alone; there are always people studying, reciting Psalms and of course, praying. Groups of people form *minyonim* all day. With my nephew Avraham and his family, we formed a *minyan*. *"Nu, Yechezkel, lech likro."* (Haskel, go and read.) Having the *z'chus* to read the holy Torah at the *Kotel*— what a privilege! My dear father, how far-sighted you were. ◊

FUNERALS: *One of the most striking characteristics of Judaism is the*

manner in which we deal with death and mourning. The keywords are simplicity and timing. In traditional Jewish practice, the deceased is dressed in shrouds not street clothes, is placed in a simple wooden casket with wooden pegs, not nails, is buried as soon as possible after death comes and mourning begins after burial, not before.

Rabbis have feelings too . . .

We are not made of iron . People don't always understand that. It was the funeral of an extremely intelligent, wonderful and beautiful youngster, a teenager– one of my students whom I had known for years. He witnessed a car accident, had stopped to help the people and tripped on a live wire. He was electrocuted. It was Friday just before *Shabbos*. The funeral was Sunday and the mortuary was filled. They lowered the casket into the grave and it was more than I could bear. I finished the service crying out loud with the other people.

Afterward, a woman came to me and said, 'Rabbi, I am disappointed in you.' The problem was not the eulogy, but 'on such occasions we look to the rabbi for strength. You broke down like everyone else.' I said, 'You expect more than you have the right to, lady; rabbis are flesh and blood like other human beings.' ◇

A Sad, Sad Funeral . . .

A neighbor on our street, father of two children, took sick and died. It was Friday and the funeral would be Sunday. His mother was a widow and the deceased was her only child. She died Saturday morning. As I was leaving *shul* that *Shabbos*, I was greeted with the shocking news.

In the mortuary stood the two caskets side-by-side. Hundreds of people attended. One person said to me, "I didn't know the family at all but I came to hear what you will say." What can one say? From the Saturday morning prayers, "They were lovely and amiable in their life

and were not parted in their death." A mother's love for her son was so great that she didn't want him to go alone. ◊

Strange Fire . . .

One hour before *Kol Nidre*, the opening prayer on the eve of *Yom Kippur*, the holiest day of the year, we had finished the last meal and were ready to go to *shul*. The phone rang. *Urgent!* A police sergeant told me to come at once. A young man had been found dead. I was reluctant to go for fear of being late for the service. He insisted. I came into the house and found a handsome youngster lying dead on his bed. He had overdosed on drugs. I left.

The day after *Yom Kippur*, the mortuary was filled, especially with young people. I turned to the young people,

> *And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron took either of them his censor and put fire therein, and put incense therein and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. And there went out a fire from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.* LEVITICUS X:1-2

Six of the deceased's friends were the pall bearers. In the evening, at the house for *davening*, the pall bearers asked if I would be willing to have a face-to-face talk. 'About what?' "Rabbi, you know about what." I told them I would be available any day, any time, day or night. No one called. A week later, two of the pall bearers died from the same cause. ◊

Please forgive me . . .

When I knew the deceased had been a fine and charitable person, I mentioned these things in the eulogy. When I didn't know the person, I said what people told me about him or her. But, if there was 'nothing good to say,' I just said the prayers and that was all.

My story is of a gentleman whom I knew well, who was called by

G-d to His heavenly abode. The man was a very fine person, a member of my congregation who attended regularly and gave money to distribute among the poor. Honestly, people do not pay homage to an undeserving person. Here, everybody in the capacity crowd was sad about the loss of this fine gentleman. At the conclusion of the service, a man approached. 'So you too, Rabbi, are looking for an extra ten dollars!' I didn't understand his remark. He continued. 'The man didn't deserve all the praise you gave him; he was no good.'

I turned to this 'champion of honesty,' 'Sir, if you didn't like him, why did you come to the funeral? To rejoice?' Leaving the chapel, the man turned to me again, 'Rabbi, forgive me, I overstepped my boundaries' 'I forgive you, but you really need forgiveness from the deceased. Ask if he can forgive you!' Later I learned that the deceased man had sued this one for an unpaid debt. ◊

The Psalms of David

Funerals are an unavoidable occurrence. To funerals come not only Jews but many Christians as well– partners in business, friends, neighbors or just acquaintances of the deceased. Christians often admire the simplicity of a Jewish funeral; no flowers and no wake. When this service was finished, a Christian woman complimented the eulogy, then added, 'But Rabbi, didn't you use a Christian text when you read the 23rd Psalm?' I responded, 'My dear lady, this Psalm was written by King David who lived approximately 900 years before Christ was born!' ◊

What's the hurry?

We usually wait for the doctor to pronounce a person dead, but one day, a gentleman called to ask for help arranging his brother's funeral. 'When did your brother die?' 'He didn't die yet, but he's on a respirator

and very close.' I rushed to the hospital. To make the story short, the patient fooled the doctor and his brother. He recuperated, went to Florida, remarried, lived several years more and then died of a different ailment! So, my friends, what is the hurry? We will be dead for a long time. ◊

Don't Pull the Plug . . .

A frantic woman called from Florida to say that her husband had a stroke and was paralyzed, unable to speak and on a respirator. Her children told her to 'pull the plug.' "Rabbi what shall I do?" I asked if he shows any signs of recognizing anything? Yes, was her answer. If that is the case, "Don't pull the plug!" Without a respirator, he lived almost another year. My message at the funeral: "G-d giveth and G-d taketh away. Let G-d's name be blessed forever." She understood. ◊

David against Goliath in our time . . .

A young Jewish employee of Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in East Hartford lost his father. Company policy was to allow a mourner three paid days before the funeral. Although the traditional *Shiva* is seven days, the employee asked that he be allowed to stay home for three days with pay *after* the funeral. The company refused. The young man tried to explain that in Judaism the mourning period begins after the funeral, but to no avail. They refused and threatened his job, but he stayed home anyhow.

The company agreed to have a rabbi testify about the Jewish Law. I took with me an English translation of the *Shulchan Aruch.* After a few hours of discussion, we won the case. I was not totally happy because the company should allow seven days of mourning. This point I lost. However, I managed to have on record what the Jewish law is and a

request that in the future they should treat Jewish employees with respect for our tradition. This is America. G-d bless this country. ◊

Too horrible to bear . . .

It happened in the slaughterhouse. The man, a fine person and very respected, from an old family in the community, worked with me everyday. I will not mention his name. At 10 A.M. we always had a coffee break. I had a special room where I changed my clothes, had my books and kept the 'kosher' seals. One day, while drinking my coffee, I heard shouting. We all ran to see what happened. The man was lying in a pool of blood. Seeing him on the floor, we almost fainted. There was no way to save him. It was too late. The man had committed suicide - with my *chalef.*

Doctors came; an ambulance came; the police came. They interrogated us. 'Was it suicide or murder?' The police took away the knife which was still lying next to him. I came home - very sick. For weeks, I had nightmares by day and nightmares by night; the only thing I saw was this man lying on the floor. ◊

The (un)holy yarmulke . . .

We had moved to a quiet street, mixed both religiously and racially. Our neighbors were all fine and respectable - and very friendly except for one Jewish man. He seemed a little upset with us; we suspected he simply didn't like having a rabbi on his street. One day I asked him why he behaved so strangely to us. His answer confirmed our thoughts. I assured him that we were not from the F.B.I., that we mind our own business and don't tell people what they may and may not do. With a sigh of relief, the man said, 'Rabbi, you are a gentleman and I promise you that when I cut my grass on *Shabbos*, I will wear a *yarmulke*! ◊

My handkerchief, his cigar and the 'chazir' . . .

". . . know what to answer a non-believer . . . ." PIRKE AVOS II:19

One Saturday morning, I was walking to the synagogue thinking about what to preach. A man with a cigar in his mouth as big as an elephant's trunk, drove-up in his Cadillac. He stopped his car and said to me, 'Rabbi, you are violating the Sabbath. Your handkerchief is sticking out of your pocket.' Apparently, I had forgotten to carry it the proper way for *Shabbos* - a minor violation and done unintentionally. I looked at the man with distaste. I knew this him well. He didn't belong to any synagogue, never contributed a penny to charity, was driving and smoking on *Shabbos* and now this man was chastising me! I did not want to talk to him and continued walking, but now I had my topic for the day.

I told the congregation what happened, about the *chutzpa* of the man and related a story about a rabbi who was walking home from *shul*:

A cow saw the Rabbi, walked over to him and greeted him traditionally with, *Sholom Aleichem.* The Rabbi responded indignantly, 'You cow, where do you come to greet me? You are an animal.' Replied the cow, 'Yes, but Rabbi, you drink my milk!' 'You are right, *Sholom Aleichem*, cow.' The Rabbi walked further and a horse greeted him, '*Sholom Aleichem,* Rabbi.' Again, this upset the Rabbi. The horse continued, 'Don't be angry at me. I am the one that transports you from one place to another.' 'All right, *Sholom Aleichem*, horse.' The Rabbi came upon a he-goat, '*Sholom Aleichem*, Rabbi.' 'My G-d,' said the Rabbi, 'the cow gives me milk, the horse takes me from one place to the other, but you, how do you contribute to my welfare?' 'Don't be angry, Rabbi, we have something in common: You have a beard and I have a beard.' 'All right, all right, *Sholom Aleichem*, he-goat.' The Rabbi thought he had been greeted enough for one morning, but the greetings were not finished. After the cow, the horse and the he-goat, he came upon a *chazir* (swine) - abhorrent to the Jewish people. '*Sholom Aleichem*,

Rabbi,' said the *chazir*. The Rabbi's nerves were at the breaking point. 'You swine, I don't drink your milk, I don't use you for transportation and you don't look like me. You, *chazir*, a symbol of every violation of Jewish Law. You have the *chutzpa* to greet me? Go to #%^*, *chazir*!' The congregation laughed. They understood and I felt better. ◊

Eighteen Benedictions, One Curse & Six Extra Months . . .

I had to testify in court against a Jew. This man, very active in my *shul*, had become entangled with the law and received a lengthy prison sentence. When the judge asked him to reveal the names of his associates, the man said he is forbidden to do so by Jewish Law and quoted from the *Silent Meditation*, recited three times a day. "May the slanderer have no hope." It became a serious problem. The judge asked that a Rabbi explain to the court for what purpose that prayer was included in the Jewish liturgy. In a very disturbed mood, I came to court and explained the history of this prayer. It was written when the Romans had forbidden Jewish people to study Torah. During that period, there were many Jewish traitors who revealed the names of Jews who did not follow the Roman Law. And I told the court that this prayer CANNOT be applied in this case.

The judge sentenced the man to an additional six months. I left the court broken-hearted. The prisoner shouted, 'Rabbi, I am not angry at you. I wish I had known the correct history.' This inspired me to teach the 18 blessings and one curse of the *Silent Meditation*. ◊

The Rebellious Father . . .

To some, the soup is too thin; to others, the soup is too thick. We are living in a very confused world. Many children have been influenced to forsake the teachings of our ancient tradition and have turned to cults, strange practices and other religions. It is upsetting and serious. I even

received a post card from one of my students, asking *me* to convert to Christianity. There is a silver lining in the dark cloud though. Thousands of young boys and girls have turned toward a more committed Judaism. We call these 'returnees' to religious life, *baalei teshuvah*. Many have convinced their parents to keep kosher homes and become observant Jews as well. On the other hand, some parents, far-removed from traditional Judaism, think of their children's new lifestyle as 'uncivilized.' Their children have disappointed them.

A couple in my synagogue sent their two children to our religious school, but showed hardly a sign of Jewish life in their home. Naomi and I became friendly with the couple. I had officiated at their wedding, circumcised and performed a *pidyon haben* for their son and named their daughter in *shul*. Both children loved traditional Judaism and were truly pious, *shomrei Shabbos*. The boy put on *tefillin* every day and learned to read in the Torah.

Apparently, they really questioned their parents and gave them a hard time for not being more Jewishly observant. One day, father and son visited me. The father had studied Torah as a young man, so he was able to quote from ancient texts. Full of anger, he pointed to his son and quoted from ISAIAH I:2, in which the Prophet scolds his people for abandoning G-d, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth; for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up the children and they have rebelled against me."

What a foolish and incorrect comparison. The verse refers to the people's choice of other gods. Instead of being happy that his children are following the path of our ancestors, instead of thanking G-d that his children were not indulging in alcohol and drugs or living a life of general anarchy, this man was angry. Perhaps he expected me to support his argument just because he was the parent. Instead, I told him he was

too dense to know a good thing when he has it. ◇

MINYAN: *A quorum; necessary for reciting mourner's Kaddish.*
ANIMALS: *The wisdom of the Sages with regard to animals, especially dogs, is very clear. In the TALMUD TRACTATE BOBO KAMO, page 60, we find, "If dogs cry ... the Angel of Death is in town." This is not a silly thought. Dogs can sense danger and alert people to fire or other peril. They can find people buried in places where humans cannot find them. And don't dogs lead the blind? I wish the German people would have behaved like the German shepherd dog and helped people instead of killing them.*
DOGS: *"And ye shall be holy men unto Me; neither shall ye eat any flesh which is torn off beasts in the field; Ye shall cast it to the dogs."* EXODUS 22:30 *Why should the meat be given to the dogs and not to another non-kosher animal? The answer is that G-d reciprocated the dogs for not barking when the Jewish people left Egypt., "But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue."* EXODUS 11:7

Mazel Dog!

Assembling a daily *minyan* can be a problem anywhere in the United States, even in the big cities. The older generation maintained the *minyan*; they knew it was necessary. Sadly, there are hardly enough people in the small communities to replace that very devoted generation. Young people are at work and for too many of them, religious services mean very little. Rabbis use all kinds of gimmicks to bring people to the House of G-d. Often, I was on the telephone for hours securing a *minyan* for the next day. Most who promised to come, did, but not without my call.

One day we had only nine men – short one man. What do we do? One of the nine had *yahrzeit* for his father and wanted to say *Kaddish*. I went to a Jewish house nearby, knocked on the door and a woman answered. I asked her very politely if her husband could come to the

synagogue. Angered, she said, 'Do not knock on my door; my husband has no time for the *minyan*; he has to walk the dog!'

The dog has more *mazel* than nine Jews; maybe we should change our greeting from *Mazel Tov* to *Mazel Dog!* I wonder if the dog will say *Kaddish* after such devoted owners. ◇

Man's Best Friend . . .

I am grateful to a dog that caused me to be enriched with a great gift! My library with hundreds and hundreds of books on all subjects, includes a collection of old, rare books, one which was published 330 years ago.

My Jewish friend had a Christian next-door neighbor. The neighbor put out his garbage for collection and a dog turned over the barrel. Amidst the trash were a few books in English and a little book in Hebrew. The Jewish man happened to be in the yard as his neighbor cleaned up, so he gave the Hebrew book to my friend who in turn, gave it to me.

I advised him that the book is very very old and suggested that he re-think giving it away. Said he, "No, I have no use for it." The book, in perfect condition, is PSALMS, written in Hebrew with Dutch translation and printed in Amsterdam in the year 1666. No wonder the High Priest of the Temple was responsible for removing the ashes from under the altar! ◇

The Humane Society . . .

A woman had very strong feelings about the importance of animals, particularly as companions and protectors. She wanted to know if I had the same compassion towards animals and posed her question in several different ways before giving me even one chance to answer.

My response consisted of a few things that Judaism has to say on the

subject, e.g.

- In the morning, before a Jew does anything else, he must first feed his animals.
- A calf cannot be slaughtered unless it has been allowed to live at least one week with its mother.
- A cow and her calf cannot be slaughtered on the same day.
- An ox and a donkey cannot be put together to plow a field; first, because the ox is stronger and the donkey will suffer because of her weaker body. Second, an ox chews its cud and a donkey does not. Thus the donkey might think you are feeding the ox and not him.
- You cannot muzzle an ox while he thrashes the wheat simply because he will suffer.

I continued by explaining some of the laws of *shechita* as they pertain to preventing pain in the animal. The Jews were the first ones to establish guidelines for the treatment of animals. We are really a Humane Society. I think I convinced the woman. ◊

ANTI-SEMITISM: *An attitude and series of actions particularly against Jews, rooted in Christian doctrine in which the Jews are accused of killing Christ. Anti-semitism intensified during various periods. People who never met Jews, carried a hatred toward us as Christ killers, as Communists, as Fascists, as controllers of the financial world and press and the ones to blame for any disturbance in the world economy.*
*Michelangelo gave the world yet another reason to think of us as strange and hateful. By incorrectly translating a Hebrew text, he depicted Moses as having horns. "V'ra-oo B'nai-Yisroel et-p'nai Moshe ki <u>korahn</u> ohr p'nai Moshe . . . ." (And the Children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face <u>shone</u> . . . .)*EXODUS 24:30 *The Hebrew root keren has a number of meanings: a corner, a horn and a ray. The word in the verse is the past tense of verb form.*

Thank You for the Compliment . . .

In Connecticut, there is a monument company whose founder was a magnificent craftsman. On a regular basis he came to my office for help

with Hebrew inscriptions. One day, his cousin who was visiting from Sicily came with him. The cousin didn't speak English, so, for a few minutes they spoke to each other in Italian. I became somewhat suspicious and politely asked him what they were saying. The monument maker was not eager, but after urging him, he proceeded. Apparently, his cousin said that, although he had never seen or spoken to a Jew before, he had been taught to hate Jews as Christ killers and that Jew look strange, i.e. they have horns, etc. The visitor told his cousin how surprised he is that I look so normal and behave so civilized!

Then it was my turn. I suggested that he visit the Arch of Triumph to see how his ancestors led the Jewish captives and told him how the Romans entertained themselves by throwing Jews to the lions emphasizing with hidden pleasure, that their brutality had not helped them survive. But we, the Jews, are still here. And of course, I used the opportunity to explain the ridiculous idea that Jews have horns. I know I lost my hair, but never any horns. Anyhow, I thanked my visitor for the compliment! ◇

The miracle of the Chanukah candles repeated . . .

The ninth plague with which G-d punished the Egyptians is described as *follows:And the Lord said unto Moses: Stretch out thine hand toward heaven that there may be darkness in all the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward the heavens, and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days; but the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.* EXODUS X:21-23

Do you remember November 9th, 1965 when total darkness engulfed the entire Northeast Corridor for many hours? We were holding Hebrew School classes for children ranging in age from eight to eleven. Suddenly, the synagogue was in total darkness– like the darkness in

Egypt. The children became frightened and started to cry. They were asking for their parents and shouting, 'Rabbi, I have to go bathroom!' We didn't have emergency lights. G-d, what shall I do? How can I calm the children? How will the parents come to pick them up? It occurred to me that only days earlier, we had received Chanukah candles from charitable organizations. Where were the candles? In my desk in the classroom! How wonderful! I grabbed a box of candles and the two matches in the desk.

"Let there be light. And there was light." (GENESIS) I believe the Almighty heard the crying of the children and harkened to their plea. *"Neir le'echod neir le-mea."* (A candle that illuminates one can illuminate one hundred.) TALMUD TRACTATE *SHABBOS* PAGE 122. How clever our sages were. I lit one candle and the children could see me. With another, I was able to find larger ones - *Shabbos* candles. I placed them in the windows of the synagogue. After a few hours, the parents were able to pick up their children.

All over Hartford it was pitch dark, but in Teferes Israel there was light! Miracles do happen; you just have to recognize them. "We thank Thee for the miracles . . . which Thou didst perform for our fathers in those days"— Two thousand, one hundred and fourteen years ago– and on November 9th, 1965! ◇

RABBI - *What is a rabbi? A rabbi is a teacher. The main objective of a rabbi is to share his learning with people who desire knowledge. The Talmud stresses the qualities a teacher should have, the most important one being patience. A teacher should repeat himself even 101 times in order to make the lesson clear to his students. You hear people address the Rabbi as Rabenu, Morenu 'our Rabbi, our Teacher' with great warmth and respect because this is the true meaning of the word.*

Teacher teaches Preacher . . .

In the various communities where we lived, I have gotten to know all the rabbis and many of the Christian clergy. These relationships developed during frequent visits to local hospitals and attendance at community functions. After one such meeting, a group of Christian clergy asked me to teach them Bible. They were very interested in the Jewish interpretation and its commentaries, as well as the *Talmud*. They were most interested in learning Rashi and Ibn Ezra. I agreed to teach with the one condition that we wouldn't discuss theology, religious beliefs. Each of us would remain loyal to his own religion.

For four years, several times a week in the morning, I found myself in the company of this very intelligent and inquisitive group. Not once did I find myself in any kind of uncomfortable predicament. I taught them what I know and they were free to 'take it or leave it.'

A group member once asked privately why my one pre-condition was not to discuss religion. I told him about a book in my library called *Otzar Vikuchim*, A Treasury of Disputes. It deals with debates about which religion is correct and gives the Christian arguments of why Jews should convert. Jews were forced to participate. I suggested he read the history of the 1492 Spanish Inquisition, to consider how many Jews were condemned to die and how many *pogroms* Jews had to endure for remaining loyal to their faith. I told him that our approach to religion is for all people to serve the god they choose, but we will continue to serve the G-d of Israel. He said, 'Haskel, you are so right; G-d bless you.'

This most pleasant experience came to an end when cancer took my larynx. Members of the group sent letters of gratitude and many asked if it would be okay for them to pray for me— an offer I accepted readily and gratefully.

◆

. . . speak no evil; speak nothing?

Another Victory

A Special Chapter

In 1986, I went through open heart surgery. It was tough, but little by little I regained my strength and lived a normal life.

In 1991 Dr. William Mancoll, G-d bless him, saw something in my throat that was not 'kosher.' He performed five or six scrapings, but by March 1994, it was cancer. Thirty-six radiation treatments— a very tough time. Often I felt I am choking; no saliva - my mouth was always dry. I carried a bottle of water with me all the time to moisten my mouth, even during the night. We hoped the radiation would kill the cancer. It did not.

Dr. Mancoll again recognized the seriousness of the condition and

suggested surgery. My children insisted we go to New York for more opinions. We left Hartford on February 16, 1995.

Three world famous physicians confirmed the cancer and the need for surgery on my larynx. We chose Dr. Jatin Shah at Memorial Sloan-Kettering for his excellent reputation and for the wonderful reputation of the hospital. Surgery was scheduled for March 3.

We remained in New York City. A series of lectures regarding what my limitations would be. I would lose my ability to speak, at least as I have known speech all my life. The recovery would be very slow. It would take a long time before I 'see daylight.'

Three days prior to the operation, a very comprehensive physical checkup showed that everything is okay. (*Everything okay?*) Two days to contemplate; two days to speak. Wednesday, March 1 and Thursday, March 2. I was with my family at Rachel's apartment. On Thursday morning, at Lincoln Square Synagogue I was called up for an *aliyah*. Who knows, perhaps this will be my last *aliyah*. G-d was with me. Four months later another *aliyah*.

The evening before the surgery, Jacob took us to Yeshiva University for supper. It would not be telling the truth to say that I ate well. Every bite choking back tears trying to hide my feelings, not to upset the family. I believe the whole family was trying to do the same for me.

Friday, March 3. I put on *tallis* and *tefillin*. Will this be the last time? We went to the hospital. They told me to say goodbye to my family. I kissed my wife; I kissed Harold. Jacob was parking the car. They wouldn't wait. No goodbye; what a horrible feeling. Only one person would be allowed to accompany me to the next stage. I changed into hospital attire and waited— and waited. The stretcher came; they told me to lie down. Rachel could accompany me to the operating room door NOW. The most nerve-breaking moment - my entire life went through

my mind like a film. Faster and faster. I looked at Rachel's big beautiful eyes filled with tears and then glanced at the light. Goodbye and *zei gezunt* and, there I was, alone in the operating room. Can't recall if Dr. Shah spoke to me. I was drowsy. One doctor told me I would be asleep in a few minutes and would awaken in the recovery room. *"Shema Yisroel . . ."*

My legs were like balloons, pumping air. There was a nurse at my side and every few minutes, she took my blood pressure. All night long - neither awake nor asleep. In the morning, they took me to my assigned room, #933. *I am not me.* Pipes and bottles were hanging over me; there was a tube in my nose. I couldn't turn without the help of others. There was a pipe here, a pipe there and branches of pipes hanging from a really big one.

Now, my friends, I must tell you how our great *Siddur* has more meaning than we realize. In the morning we recite a prayer, *Blessed are Thou, Lord our G-d, King of the universe, Who fashioned man with wisdom and created within him many openings and many cavities. It is obvious and known before Your Throne of Glory that, if but one of them were to be ruptured or but one of them were to be blocked, it would be impossible to survive and to stand before You, Hashem, Who heals all flesh and acts wondrously.*

TALMUD B'ROCHOS, PAGE 11.

I learned that things have changed in my body. Some openings were closed, and some new ones were opened. Early that morning, Jacob was in the hospital. How wonderful! To see my son and to know I'm alive. Three things had gone through my mind: first to make it, second not to be a burden to others, and third, if I don't make it, 'G-d forgive my sins. I also saw my entire European family marching before my eyes - Mom, Dad.

Despite all the lectures and briefings, I realized for the first time

when Jacob arrived, that I *actually could not speak.* How awful! If I wanted to say something, I had to write it.

All day Saturday, pain, pain and more pain. All day the children took shifts. Saturday night the entire family was there. How wonderful it was to see Naomi and the children. They hired round-the-clock private nurses. Harold sat up in the room all night long.

On the third day they made me stand up. Three times a day, the "treatment room." The nurse cleans out the pipes; puts a catheter in my throat - agony. I am choking– but I survive. Besides my own suffering, there are others— people with half a head, half a tongue. G-d! Seeing all those creatures, the story of Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones came to my mind. "Will these dry bones become alive again!" Is it possible for those people with half heads, with one cheek, with no nose, to live?

On the third day a gentleman, Mr. Washington became my neighbor, a wonderful man with a lot of tragedy in his life. This illness was the latest. His children had abandoned him. Only one adopted son and his wife came to visit him. He had the same operation. Unfortunately, the doctor told him the surgery was not enough. He needed radiation treatments as well.

I am the luckiest person in the whole world. My wife and my children, my daughter-in-law Dr. Lorelle Michelson, were constantly at my bedside. Oh, Naomi, what must have gone through your mind. I won't be able to give her an argument . . . she can't ask me questions or advice. I can't answer except by writing everything down. Even my prayers will always be silent, but, the Lord hears silent prayer as well. Everyone, every day gave words of hope and encouragement to me. People sent flowers galore. My room looked like the wedding of a rich man's daughter. We gave the flowers to the children's ward. There were get-well cards by the hundreds, donations by the dozens, gifts and so

many telephone calls.

I had a day nurse and a night nurse. The greatest feeling was knowing that I am not alone, that somebody is watching me, this pained and new and strange and unsure person. Especially at night. One of my daughter-in-law's friends brought a puzzle to keep me occupied. Well, life is a real puzzle and if you can fit all the pieces together in their proper perspective, you are lucky, indeed.

Visitors? We didn't expect anyone to come, but they did— starting on Monday immediately following the surgery. We ordered that no information be given out. I was in too much pain - full of pain. After the first week, though, my family would see people from Hartford wandering the hall, hoping to be find the right room! And I know they did this out of love and concern.

Something amusing. It was the second or third day after the operation, a very young Orthodox rabbi came in. He introduced himself as the assistant chaplain. "Oh Rabbi Lindenthal," said he, "how can you take it? It must be terrible!" He is lucky I wasn't able to answer him. But, he is young and will learn.

I do appreciate Rabbi Shulman, the hospital chaplain. Here you have a man of experience. His visits were so kind and caring. I especially thank him for arranging the *Megillah* reading on Purim. A young man, tall and handsome, came to the hospital and read the *Megillah* without missing a note. Afterward, I learned that he is only in high school– RAMAZ. G-d bless him.

A week passed and Dr. Shah's associate, Dr. Shahah gave me very good news. SUCCESS. No more cancer! "Oh G-d how great are Thy works oh Lord."

When Dr. Shah returned, he looked me over, "All looks fine." I wrote, "First you Doctor. Next the Lord." He corrected me, "No, Rabbi.

First the Lord and then the doctor." I hope G-d will forgive me.

Little by little I walked unassisted. They removed the pipe from my nose that gave me food. This was a test. They brought liquids (kosher chicken broth). I have a mouth that can't talk, but do I still have a mouth to eat?

Every day was a little bit better. . .some stitches removed. . . doctors pleasant and encouraging. Finally, Dr. Shah told me that on Friday, March 17, I will be able to go home. "Of course, in time for *Shabbos*!" he said. I got dressed like a normal person. Pants, a shirt, *tzitzis*. . . .

Coming to Rachel's for *Shabbos* was glorious, a special day. Hopes of returning to life had become a reality. The whole family danced around me like around a *choson* after the *chupah*. Less than an hour after my arrival, the doorbell rang. Four very young children came in - the Wassers. They kissed me; they asked questions about the machines I was connected to-- and most important, without even realizing, these little children immediately removed any worry I had about how people would react. G-d bless them.

Of course, away from the hospital, there was a certain fear— will Rachel be able to do the things that the nurses and speech therapists do? It is a very delicate procedure - so many things to remember: when to open my mouth; when to close my mouth (good for everybody to know)! Pipe #16; pipe #18 and the most delicate part- insert the prosthesis to the tiny opening. Rachel had to be my nurse, telephone operator, food strainer -my constant help in every possible way. G-d should only reward her. She learned fast, but was bothered that the patient was expected to remember all those details. She designed a placemat with a drawing of each item and the instructions. Dr. Shah was impressed; the speech therapist will use Rachel's placemat for all patients.

We were in Rachel's apartment for three weeks after the hospital; I

wasn't allowed to leave New York. A week before *Pesach*, Rachel took us to West Hartford to arrange all the machinery, went back to New York and in five days prepared for our return - to celebrate *Pesach*. What shall I say - 14 people to the *sedorim*. Jacob conducted each *Seder* while I sat beside him, choking with tears, trying to avoid my feeling of despair at not being able to say anything. The consolation and comfort were immense; how beautifully and completely Jacob conducted.

Pesach was over - back to West Hartford trying to follow instructions. Always a fear - am I doing things correctly? Several visits to New York - some planned, some sudden out of fright. The doctor is satisfied. "Things look good." But, I have also lost the ability to smell the pleasant fragrance of even the best perfumes.

May 9: Dr Shah says no more #16 or #18 and no more little "things" that always frightened me. I get a permanent prosthesis. Permanent until it breaks down that is.

There is always a little catch. Four times a day I have to fill the pipet with water, insert it in the little opening of the new prosthesis to clean it. I have a good mirror, a good flashlight and have tried to administer it sitting by myself. It does not work, so gravity comes to my assistance. I lie flat on my back holding the mirror and somebody else holds the flashlight. This way works well. But mind you, always an assistant? Life is complicated. A light and mirror combination is in the catalogue. It is wonderful - but must be plugged-in. Be near an outlet all the time? Better than needing a personal assistant. They should make a light / mirror that is portable. They do! The mirror is too small for the angle. Rachel returns to Hartford, slips the mirror from the plug-in version onto the portable flashlight. It fits! It works! *I can take care of myself.*

My right thumb is my helper. Take a deep breathe, press my thumb and I can speak. All in all, it is good to be able to breathe and to say a

few words. How we take things for granted.

Singing, Torah reading, *haftorah* chanting - I love them, but all this is gone. This is it for now and for the rest of my life. Is it worthwhile? Yes! Life is still beautiful.

A man tried to be funny. 'You see Rabbi, what happens when you talk too much?' *"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest thou become like him thyself."* PROVERBS 26:4

I have wrestled with the *Angel of Death* many times. I am still alive. *And thou shalt love the Lord thy G-d with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might.* I do. ◇

While in the hospital, I received hundreds of letters, all of them written so warmly. To publish all of them is impossible. Here is one, chosen at random.

17 March 1995

Dear Rabbi Lindenthal,

Words cannot express the depth of our concern and the fervency of our prayers for you at this time of trial in your life. We are confident that you will triumph over this adversity as you have so many times in the past. No one can comprehend why G-d tests man - especially the righteous the way He does. However, without challenges, without strife and without fear, there would not be courage and nobility of spirit. And what would mankind be without these attributes?

Lorraine, Elyson, Ethan, Joshua and I are with you as we have always been with you for the last 13 years. We look forward to many, many more years of friendship and happiness with Naomi and you !!!!

Your devoted congregants and friends.

The Vogelhut Family

◆

Conclusion

When we finish a *tractate* in the *Talmud,* we make an *hadron.* Now that I have done my best to describe my experiences, I am making an *hadron. . . .*

Our Patriarch Abraham heard G-d command, *"Lech lecho!"* (Go thee). I, his descendant, was similarly commanded. Born in Poland, I went to Lithuania, Romania, Syria, Turkey, through the Dardanelles, lived in Palestine, stopped in Egypt, passed through Gibraltar and of course, for the last 56 years have lived in this blessed country, the United States of America.

Life has sunrises and sunsets and *"kulonu gyasnu l'chol ha-chayim,"* we [must be] mobilized to face all life's experiences. (HAGANAH HYMN) *"Zeh sefer toldos odom."* GENESIS V:1 Our lives are likened to a book; it is our obligation to fill each page with something worthwhile and not

to leave empty or wasted pages. If I would have my life to live again, I would do the same thing, hopefully without repeating my mistakes. The *Chumash* consists of 54 *sidros*, the last four being very short. If we are like a book, then 'The Book of Books' reminds us of our mortality. As *Bubbe Golde* said of herself, 'life flew away as fast as it took you to open and close the door.' How right she was.

Many beautiful things have happened to me. The fact that my life was spared so many times is by itself a magnificent gift. I have enjoyed many privileges as well and will always be grateful. . . for my Rabbinical Ordination from the revered HaRav HaGaon R'Shimon Shkop (Grodno) and *'Yoreh Yoreh Yadin Yadin'* from HaRav HaGaon R'Yechezkel Sarna (Chevroner Yeshiva J-m). . . for my distinguished teachers in Suvalk, in Vilna and in Mir . . . for my teacher-training by Rabbi Margolis (Horev) . . . for my *Shechita* and *Milah* ordinations from HaRav Pesach Tzvi Frank . . . and for the critical lesson taught by my father, the greatest teacher of them all- *"Mein kind, 'siz goote tzu zein a rov, ober ersht, zey a mensch"* (It's good to be a Rabbi but, first be a descent human being).

I am grateful for the privilege of having known the *Chofetz Chayim*, R'Chaim Ozer Grodiensky, HaRav Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog . . . of having met grand Zionist patriots including Menachem Mendel Ussishkin, David Ben Gurion, Chaim Weizmann, Yitzchak Ben Zvi, his wife Rachel Yanait and Moshe Dayan. . . of having addressed honorable United States Senators, Congressmen, Governors and Judges. . . of having heard in person the voices of talented cantors Moshe and David Kussevitsky, Mordechai Hershman, Berele Chagi, Sirota and Kvartin.

I am grateful for the privilege of serving pulpits in Roanoke, Middletown and Hartford . . . of teaching 19 young men to be *shochtim* . . . of *lerning Mishnayos* with my congregants. . . of bringing 9,000 babies and 279 [the majority Russian] adults into the Covenant of Abraham through *Bris Milah* . . . of working with Dr. Barry Lazarus, the

proud Jew and skilled urologist whose assistance made many of the *milah mitzvos* possible. . . of associating with colleagues as a member of both the Massachusetts and Connecticut *Vaad Harabbonim*. . . of being Vice President of the Rabbinical Alliance of America. . . of upholding my community's trust as a member of Hartford's *Vaad Ha-kashruth*.

I am grateful for the privilege of befriending all Rabbis of my community, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform. Although I don't always agree with their ideas about Judaism, this doesn't diminish my respect for them. To me, a Jew is a Jew and most important, is a human being created in the image of G-d.

No question, life has also brought much sadness. . . . the enormous loss of my entire family in the Holocaust. . . years later the death of my sister Anna at the age of 54. . . later yet, the death of her daughter Gloria, a 37-year-old mother of two small children. . . the loss of several members of Naomi's family, especially two sisters whom I loved dearly, Eva *Chava* Stoltz and Ida *Chaike* Lapp. . . the death of my beloved brother-in-law and friend Bennie Gavrieli in Israel. Indeed, I wrestled with the *Angel of Death* a number of times and so far have won, but the *malach ha-movess* has taken some beautiful people from me.

People ask what in my life I will never forget. . . . my dear parents and family. . . my *shtetele* Wyzan and the cities where I studied. . . the wonderful people who shared their food with me . . . the fatherly pinch from the Suvalker Rov . . . my mother's tears when she said goodbye . . . my father's kiss when I left for Israel. *(Tateh, how I miss you and your advice).* . . performing the first *bris*. . . my arrival in America. . . *'Zei gezunt mein kind,'* my last words with a normal voice . . . *'It's wonderful,'* my first words with my voice reborn.

There is a story about a very poor man whose main meal was bread and onions. With G-d's help he came to America and became a successful businessman. He lived in a huge mansion and was driven

around in a big car. One day a friend came to visit and found the wealthy man eating only bread and onions for dinner. The visitor wondered why such a rich man would eat such a meager meal. Noticing his friend's bewildered look, the rich man explained, 'I can afford to eat the best and most expensive food, but once a week I make my main meal bread and onions so I won't forget my past.' I will never forget my past, but I am so thankful for the present.

I look back with awe. . .the two-room house with a straw roof has become a seven-room house with every luxury; the measured slice of bread is now a full loaf; the paper-thin slice of salami is a steak; the frozen dirt floor has wall-to-wall carpet; the night's darkness is now lit with automatic timers; the letter that took months to give us news is faxed across phone wires in an instant- like magic; my father's torn little *Siddur* has grown into a huge library including a real Torah presented by my beloved congregation Teferes Israel.

Above all, Naomi, my wife, has always been at my side to protect me, always looking out for my physical well-being. I lost my siblings but G-d gave me three most wonderful and devoted children. Jacob, the first born, is a great intellectual, fluent in four languages, holds three Ph.D's in fields for the betterment of humanity. Rachel, I call her *Mother Rachel* - Rachel who cooks more than she needs in order to feed the 'street people.' Our daughter who is so talented in writing and in art. People turn to her for her unique skill of comprehending things and putting them in the proper perspective. Our youngest, Harold, a self-made man, a lawyer and businessman, is brilliant in finance and is a walking library of books he has read. We are also blessed with a beautiful daughter-in-law. Jacob married Lorelle Michelson, a wonderful woman and skilled plastic surgeon. And the Almighty has allowed me the joy of a second generation to my family including Anna's son Albert and Cousin Polly's children Burton and Barbara. My cup runneth over. *"He raises the poor*

out of the dust and lifts the needy out of the dunghill to sit them with princes." PSALM 113

So many thoughtful, generous people have given of themselves to help me. I say with all certainty that the world owes me nothing; I am no hero. Those who survived the Holocaust are the real heroes and those who died *al Kiddush Hashem* are the martyrs.

The MIDRASH RABBO IN PARSHAS 'NOACH' tells us that Noah saw three worlds: *Olom B'vinyono*, a world complete, *Olom B'churbono,* a world destroyed and *Olom B'tikkuno*, a world rebuilt. I too, have seen three worlds including and above all, the fulfillment of our 2000-year dream to "return in mercy to Thy city Jerusalem and dwell in it as Thou has promised; [and] rebuild it soon in our day as an everlasting structure." Faith, my friends, has seen me through it all. "Poverty, sickness and terror are easier to bear with faith." IBN GABIROL Written in the twilight of my life, this book is also a *cheshbon ha-nafesh,* an introspection. I am grateful to the Almighty for enabling me to record the Pages of My Life and pray that these writings will help others never to give up hope and faith.

King Solomon finished ECCLESIASTES with, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear G-d and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

This is my story.

❖

GLOSSARY

~ GLOSSARY ~

- Hebrew transliterations reflect use of Ashkenazi dialect -

Adon Olom	Master of the Universe - melody at Shabbos services
Aggadot	Stories
Agudas Yisroel	An Orthodox Jewish Organization still in existence
Ahava	Love
Aishes Chayil	Woman of Valor
Al Kiddush Hashem	For the sake of G-d's holiness; martyrdom
Alef Beis	Hebrew alphabet
Am HaSefer	People of the Book; the Jewish People
Am Yisroel Chai	The People of Israel (Jewish Nation) lives
Ani ma'amin	I believe (with perfect faith); 13 Principles of Faith by Maimonides
Arba	Four
Ashkenazi	Pertaining to Jews from European countries
Baal agoloh	Carriage or horse and buggy driver;
Baal Koreh	Torah Reader who chants with appropriate notes and punctuation; literally 'Master of the Reading'
Baal teshuva	A person who returns to or assumes the life of an observant Jew
Baal tokeah	Shofar (Ram's horn) blower
Badchon	Jester who performs for the bride and groom
Badekung	Covering the bride's face with the veil
Bar Mitzvah	Son of Good Deed- 13-year-old assumes responsibility for religious deeds/obligations; also refers to occasion of this rite of passage
Beis Din	A Rabbinic Court - House of Law
Beis Medrash	Synagogue; a house of learning; Hebrew-Beit Midrash
Beitar	City in Israel; name of right-wing political organization
Bench	Bless; Term used for 'Grace after Meals'
Bench licht	Lighting and blessing Sabbath/Holiday candles
Bima	Pulpit
Birkhas Ha-mazon	Grace after Meals
Bitochon	Security; used to express trust in G-d
Bris Milah	Ritual circumcision
Brocho(s)	Blessing(s)
Bubbe	Grandmother (Yiddish)

Bulves	Potatoes
Chalutzim	Pioneers
Chamsin	Hot wind in the desert that causes a sand storm
Chassidism	Orthodox sect founded by the Baal Shem Tov
Chasuna	Wedding
Chazzan	Cantor
Cheder	Hebrew School
Chevra Kadisha	Burial Society who prepares the bodies
Chevra Mishnayos	Group studying Mishna (collection of interpretations of Torah)
Chevra Shas	Group that studies the Talmud
Chinuch Atzmo-ee	Independent Religious Education System in Israel
Chochom	Wise person
Cholent	Traditional Sabbath 'stew' cooked overnight
Chometz	Foods with leavening agents; unsuitable for Passover
Choshech Mitzrayim	Darkness; 9th plague in Egypt
Choson	Groom
Chumash	Five Books of Moses; 'chamesh' mean 'five'
Chupah	Wedding canopy
Chutzpa	Nerve; gall
Dargo	One of the 'notes' used in chanting the Torah
Daven	Pray
Di bulves zeinen zees	'The potatoes are sweet.' Unsold potatoes froze & turned sweet
Drosho	Sermon
Duchenen	Pronouncing Priestal benediction (now) by descendants of Aaron, the High Priest
Eretz Yisroel	The Land of Israel
Erev	Evening (Hebrew); eve ushering in all Jewish days of importance.
Esrog	Citron family
Essen teg	'Eating days'; eating at a different place each day
Ezras noshim	Women's section in a synagogue
Feshcha	A post near the Dead Sea
Gabai	Synagogue Elder, Appointed leader of synagogue affairs - distributes the honors esp. at Torah reading
Gaon	Genius; used in reference to a Talmudic scholar

Gemillus Chesed	Acts of kindness- individually or as a group
Gemoro	Talmud
Get	Jewish divorce decree; document of precise/complicated requirements
Gevalt!	Exclamation used like 'Oh my goodness!'
Geveer	Yiddish- Rich man
Gezoras TACH V"TAT	Decree of 5408; massive pogroms especially in the Ukraine by Chmielnietski- may his name and memory be erased
Gittin (pL of 'get')	Talmud tractate concerning divorce
Goldene Medine	'The Golden Land'; refers to United States
Golus	Exile; Diaspora - variation of Hebrew Galut
Goote nishomeh	a good soul - Yiddish
Gribines	Chicken fat renderings
Grodno	A city in Poland
Groshen	Polish pennies
Haboray	The Creator
Hachshara	Preparation for agricultural work
Hadron; Siyum	Conclusion (ceremony) for study of a Talmud tractate
Haftorah	Chapter from Prophets chanted at conclusion of Torah reading
Haganah	Defense group in Palestine; pre-cursor to Israel Defense Force
Haggadah	Story of exodus from Egypt told at the Passover Seder
Halacha	Jewish Law
Hashem	Name for G-d; used to avoid sacrilege when not praying
Hatofas dam	Drawing drop of blood; token circumcision (for those previously circumcised without blessings or by non-observant person etc.)
Horim	Parents
Kabbalah	Mysticism
Kaddish	Prayer glorifying G-d's works recited by mourners
Kashrus	Noun referring to the principles of 'Kosher'
Kehillah	Congregation; community
Kibbutz	Collective settlement in Israel
Kiddish	Kiddush - spelling variation
Kiddush	Sanctification; glorification of G-d's holiness; blessing over wine chanted on Sabbath and holidays
Kinderlach	Little children (Yiddish); used as "my dear children"
Kippa	Skullcap

Kiryat	City
Kittel	White robe worn by men on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and by groom during wedding ceremony
Klal Yisroel	Household of Israel; The Jewish People
Kloiz	Small prayer house; chapel
Kneidlach	Matzah balls
Ko-ach	Strength
Kohanim	Priests of the Temple and their descendants
Kohen Godol	High Priest of the ancient Temple
Kosher	Pure; fit for consumption according to Jewish Law
Kotel	Western Wall surrounding Temple in Jerusalem
Kre-as Shema	Prayer expressing the Oneness of G-d
Kugel	Pudding-like dish made with noodles or potatoes
L'chaim	Traditional toast meaning 'To Life!'
La-avodas Haboray	For the worship of The Creator
Lansleit	People who come from the same place
Le-hadlik ner shel–	To kindle the (Sabbath or holiday) light (candles)
Leitzim	Jokers
Lern	To study; Jewish concept in which teacher learns as he teaches
Levi	Levite
Linas Ha-tzedek	Literally 'righteous group;' org. to help the sick and disabled
Lubavitch(er) Yeshiva	Religious School of Chassidic movement from town of Lubavitch
Luft menschen	'Air' people who made a living by doing odd jobs
Ma'ariv	Evening Service
Ma-os chitim	Appeal for Passover provisions for the poor
Machzor	Prayer book specifically for holidays
Maftir	Honor of chanting Haftorah- Chapter of PROPHETS
Magid	Itinerant preacher
Mashgiach	Supervisor of Kashrus
Masmid	A fervent Talmud student
Matzah; matzoh(s)	Unleavened bread
Mazel tov!	Good luck; used as 'Congratulations!'
Mead	Drink made of hops

Mechayeh	Expression of delight; literally 'brings to life'
Mechinoh	Preparatory program
Medrash; Midrash	Homiletic commentary; interpretation of the Five Books of Moses, Prophets and Writings;
Megilla	Scroll; commonly refers to Story of Esther on Purim
Mein kind	Yiddish 'my child'
Mikveh; mikvah	Ritual bath
Mincha	Afternoon Prayer Service
Minyan	Quorum for full prayer service; traditionally ten men
Mir	A city in Poland
Mishmash	Confusion; mix-up
Mishna; Mishnayos	Collection of interpretations of the Talmud; Traditional Oral Law
Mishpocho	Family
Mitzvah	Good deed
Modeh ani	Prayer recited upon awakening; literally 'I am thankful'
Mohel	Observant Jew medically trained to perform circumcisions
Morim (plural)	Teachers
Morror	Bitter herbs eaten on Passover
Moshiach	Messiah
Nachas	Joy
Negev	Southern part of Israel - desert
Ner shel Shabbos	Light of the Sabbath: name of charity given before kindling candles
Oever botel	Senile
Olom haboh	The Hereafter; literally the 'world to come'
Omer	Measure of barley
Oneg Shabbat	Celebration or delight of the Sabbath
Oy vey!	Exclamation; 'Woe is me!'
Pesach	Passover; celebrates liberation of Jews from slavery in Egypt
Piaster(s)	Palestine coins
Pidyon Ha-ben	Redemption of the firstborn if male
Pidyon shvuyim	Redemption of hostages
Pinkos	Ledger; community record
Pirke Avos	'Ethics of the Fathers'
Pogrom	Rampage; wholesale destruction of property synagogues and people

Purim	Festival; celebrates saving Jews from death at hands of Haman
Pushke	Charity box
Rashi	Commentator of the Bible & Talmud
Rebbetzin	Rabbi's wife
Rosh Hashanah	Jewish New Year; literally 'head of the year'
Rosh Yeshiva	Head of the Yeshiva
Rov	'Chief' or most distinguished rabbi of a community
Russel	Stew-like soup
Sandek	Person given highest honor of holding the baby during 'bris' (ritual circumcision)
Schmaltz	Fat
Sedra; sidros (pl)	Section; sections (of the Chumash)
Sefer	Book
Sh'mira	Guard duty
Sha'alos	Questions regarding Jewish Law
Shacharis	Morning Prayer Service
Shalach manos	Gifts of two foods exchanged on Purim
Shamash	Sexton of synagogue who has religious duties
Shavuos	Literally 'weeks;' Festival for receiving Ten Commandments by Jewish People at Mt Sinai; - seven weeks after Passover
Sheva Brochos	Seven blessings said at ceremony and for six days after the wedding
Shidduch	'Match'; most commonly refers to match for marriage
Shir HaShirim	Song of Songs
Shiva	Initial week of mourning; derived from number seven
Shlof-banke	sleeping bench
Shmatte	Rag (Yiddish)
Shmeer	To spread as with cream cheese on a bagel; to bribe
Shnor; shnorrer	Beg; beggar
Shochet; shochtim	Observant Jew trained to do ritual slaughter of animals for kosher meat
Shofar	Ram's horn
Sholom	Peace; used as 'hello' and 'goodbye'
Sholom aleichem	Greeting - 'Peace unto you'
Sholosh Seudos	Third meal of the Sabbath
Shomrim	Guardians

Shtetl	Small village
Shtibl; shtiblach	Small synagogue; small synagogues
Shul	Synagogue; House of Prayer
Shulchan Aruch	Book of codified Jewish Laws
Siddur	Prayer book
Sidros(pl); sedra	Sections of the Chumash
Sifri	A commentary for one of the Five books of Moses
Simcha	Joyous occasion
Simchas Torah	Holiday; 'Joy of Torah;' last chapter read immediately followed by first
Slichos	Prayers asking for forgiveness or clemency
Succos	Festival of Tabernacles re: Jews' wandering in desert. 'Succos' - temporary branch-covered 'houses'
Suvalk	City in Poland; Suvalk (Yiddish); Suwalki (Polish)
Ta'am; tam	Taste
Tachrichim	Shrouds
Tahara	Purification i.e. ritual washing & dressing of deceased in preparation for burial
Taharas hamishpocho	Family Purity
Taleisim	Prayer shawls; plural of 'tallis'
Tallis;	Prayer shawl
Talmud	Oral Law
Talmud Torah	A religious school
TANACH	Acronym for Torah-Neviim-Ketuvim; Five Books of Moses-Prophets-Writings
Tante	Aunt (Yiddish)
Tefillin	Phylacteries; ritual adornments worn by men on forehead and arm during every-day morning prayers
Teg	Days (Yiddish)
Tehillim	Psalms of David
Tikkun	Two-sided book used to learn Torah chanting; one side with text as in Torah; the other guides student with notes, punctuation & vowels
Tisha B'Av	Ninth Day of the month of Av; Saddest day on Jewish calendar; both Temples destroyed in different years
Torah	Five Books of Moses
Tractate	A book of the Talmud
Treif	Forbidden; non-kosher; (adj)

Trop ('trawp')	'Notes' used in proper reading of the Torah
Tzadik; tzadikkim	Righteous person(s)- male form
Tzadik-a-Yid	A pious, righteous Jew
Tzidkonis	A righteous woman
Tzimmes	Dish made of carrots, prunes, sweet potatoes; 'Big deal, fuss' e.g. 'Don't make a tzimmes of it.'
Tzore(s)	trouble(s); problem(s)
Un'sanch Tokef	Prayer on Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur re: destiny
Vaad	Board; committee; council
Vilna	A city in Poland; Vilnius now the capital of Lithuania
Warsaw	Capital of Poland
Wyzan	Tiny town in Poland; 'Vizhan' (Yid); Wyzany (Polish)
Yarid	Farmers' Market
Yarmulke	Skullcap
Yeshiva	School for Judaic learning; also, rabbinical school
Yeshiva bochur	Yeshiva boy or student
Yibum	Levirite marriage
Yid	A Jewish person
Yiddish	Language of Eastern European Jews who considered Hebrew too holy for conversation; mix of Hebrew & German
Yiddishe kop pl:kep	A Jewish head; smart person(s)
Yiddishe mammeh	Jewish Mother
Yiddishkeit	Jewishness
Yidel	An unassuming Jew
Yohrtzeit	Anniversary of a death; literally 'year's time'
Yom Kippur	The Day of Atonement
Yom Tov	Holiday; literally 'good day'
Yontif	Yiddish of 'yom tov' - holiday
z"l	Of blessed memory
Z'chus	Privilege
Zayger macher	Watch maker
Zei gezunt	Be well (Yiddish)
Zemiros; z'miros	Sabbath hymns
Zloto; zlotys	Polish money