MY LIFE

FROM A RUSSIAN SHTETL TO THE GOLDEN LAND



SAMUEL OSIPOW

Translated by Murray Sachs

"I loved the book... To live without an awareness of our past is akin in no small measure to self-chosen Alzheimer's. *'MY LIFE'* is a powerful and inspirational antidote—a magnificent recollection of the life of that great generation that successfully made the transition from the shtetl of Eastern Europe to the golden shores of America."

—Rabbi Benjamin Blech, Professor of Talmud
Yeshiva University

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Samuel Osipow
(Shnayur Zalman Osipov)
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Edited by Dan Levin
danolevin@yahoo.com

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My Life: From a Russian Shtetl to the Golden Land

For Sophie Osipow Levin and Benjamin Osipow, who didn't live to read their father's autobiography. And for the late Murray Sachs, a great translator who made the book available to others.

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A NOTE FROM A GRANDSON

The book that lies before you, Samuel Osipow's autobiography, *MY LIFE: From a Russian Shtetl to the Golden Land*, stood on my family's bookshelves for nearly 60 years, an enigma to all who encountered it. Samuel Osipow, *Zaidy*, was my grandfather. He wrote the book in Yiddish, and not one of us could read a word of that language. My parents could speak a few of its words and phrases, when they didn't want my brother Steve or me to know what they were saying about us, but *MY LIFE* could never be more than an occasional conversation piece. Someone would say, "We should have the book translated," and another decade would slip away.

Zaidy had been a very important person in my early life. I knew he was born in the early 1880s, in a Russian village called Liadi. He told me he had tended goats there, but as for details of his childhood -- his parents, his siblings, and his education; how he met my grandmother, Vera, *Nanny*; their journey to America -- his fabled Golden Land -- and their early immigrant lives, I knew nothing.

In 2005, as if suddenly alarmed by yet another decade slipping away, I procured a list of Yiddish-English translators from the National Yiddish Book Center, in Amherst, MA. Wanting to meet the person who might introduce me to Zaidy as a boy, I phoned the translator who lived nearest to my home at the time.

His name was Murray Sachs -- Professor Emeritus of Romance and Comparative Literature at Brandeis University. As we spoke, I soon realized that I was dealing with a true professional, but would I be able to afford his services? Hesitantly, I asked what his rates were. His reply left me momentarily speechless. "I'm not like most translators," he said, "in that I don't charge. I've had such a wonderful career that I feel it's time for me to give back."

I was invited to the Sachs home for brunch, a lavish, extended brunch turned out by Dr. Sachs's gracious wife, Miriam. When I left, many hours later, I did so with a promise; Murray -- we were friends now -- would translate *MY LIFE*, but because of previous commitments he wouldn't be able to complete the work right away. He said he would keep in touch, and, periodically, would issue progress reports, and he did that, each time with bits of news about the book ("richly idiomatic"), each time whetting my appetite for more, and I waited, patiently -- for nearly seven years. I didn't receive the completed manuscript until early 2012, but it was worth the wait. I hope those about to read it will agree.

Zaidy was not a professional writer, and when he was writing *MY LIFE* he had no editor, someone who could have told him, "You need more detail here," or, "This raises an unanswered question." I think of the chapter titled "MY BIRTH," in which we're introduced to Zaidy's father, *Reb* Nachum Lanes. "Lanes was the family name of my father's mother, and all of her children were given that name," Zaidy writes, so where did his surname, Osipow, come from? Your guesses are as good as mine, and there are other such concerns, but none of them need interfere with the enjoyment of *MY LIFE*, a book that opens a window to a time, a place, and a culture, that are lost forever. It deals with Zaidy's life, of course, but also with the life of an extinct generation, one that strove for "a modicum of light, education, and freedom," as the publishers wrote in *MY LIFE*'s Yiddish version; a generation that dealt with the dark superstition of small Russian towns, at the same time beginning "a battle against an even darker czarist

government, with its persecutions and *pogroms* against the Jewish masses." Finally, *MY LIFE* presents an account of immigrant life in America; it is a personal account, but one with universal applications. I'm certain there are millions of readers -- Jewish, and, possibly, otherwise -- who might recognize the lives of their ancestors in its pages.

Dan Levin
Shelburne, New Hampshire

PART ONE

LITTLE TOWN OF MINE

My little town, Liadi, where I was born and went to *cheder*, how long it's been since last I heard your students of *Gemara*, their sweet melodies wafting from your prayer houses day and night; since last I walked your muddy streets, and played in your cornfields. How long since last I saw your bearded Jews going to synagogue, prayer shawls beneath their arms; your kerchiefed wives on their benches, socks and knitting needles in their hands, sharing stories of your people and places -- gone now, forever.

The wild Nazis wiped you from the earth, as if there had never been such a place; desecrated and destroyed your prayer houses and synagogues, built with such care and effort; demolished your tiny, low houses; murdered your Jews; turned you into a cemetery. And yet, my beloved Liadi, there was so much life in you -- your rabbis and their congregations, such a beautiful chapter in your days on earth; your teeming market days; your peaceful Sabbaths and holidays, when the poor man and the pauper, full of cares throughout the week, greeted the Sabbath Queen, and felt in their souls a festiveness that transformed them into princes.

Come, memory mine, bring those people back to me. Spread your wings, memory mine, and carry me back 60 years and more. Bring back the days of my childhood. Grant me one more look at what is still so dear to me. Help me to erect a tombstone for my little town, my *shtetl* -- Liadi.

Miami Beach, Florida, 1953

MY BIRTH

I was supposed to have seen the bright world for the first time on *Purim*. How do I know this? Because by nature I am given to singing, to playfulness, to cheerfulness. So it was appropriate for me to be born on Purim. But since my mother was the true master in our house, she had no time to lie down and give birth then. She went about her work, ignoring any risk, and only when the Purim feast was ready did she lie down on the bed and start to moan.

When father recognized that mother meant this for real, he knew it was time to leave the house. That's what he did for the birth of each child. As soon as mother began to moan in the high octaves, he went to the synagogue and studied, until someone came and said, "Mazel Tov." That's when he knew it was time to go home.

When father left for the synagogue, they sent for the good midwife, my mother's mother, everybody's grandmother in town. When she arrived, with a Turkish turban on her head, I didn't allow myself to be coaxed for long. Immediately after midnight I came out of my hiding place. After that, they said that no sooner had I opened my eyes than I also opened my mouth, that I did so much crying and screaming that it lasted for three months. I could never decide whether I screamed so much because I'd arrived too late for the Purim feast, or because an unrighteous world was

immediately displeasing to me, and that with my screaming I had expressed my first protest against it.

This happened around *Shushan Purim*, in the year 1883. I was named for the *Chassidic* rabbi and great scholar, Shnayur Zalman [1745-1812], and I was the ninth child in the family of a poor teacher of Gemara, Reb Nachum Lanes. Lanes was the family name of my father's mother, and all of her children were given that name. My father was a Hebrew teacher, and court manager of the Chassidic Rabbi Duber Shnayurson, of blessed memory. At holidays, he brought home two or three poor *Chassidim* from the synagogue. He called out, "Well, Deeye (his name for my mother), I have brought very dignified guests. In their honor, we shall have an exceptionally joyous holiday."

My mother, as I recall from the years when I began to understand what was going on around me, protested quietly, and with tears in her eyes. She said to my father, when the dignified guests were not present, "Naturally, the prosperous Chassidim put down a sizeable payment when they leave the synagogue; the poor ones the rabbi gives to you."

My father replied, "You are a sinful woman; a Jewish daughter should not dare to talk that way."

With that, my mother's outward protest ended, but in her heart she protested all her life against the injustice she thought was being perpetrated against her. Quite often, around the holidays, when she had to, "cut off my fingers in order not to omit anyone's portion," one could read in her eyes a very great sadness. But later, when the guests began speaking about biblical sayings, and bit by bit they got into religious exaltation -- humming the rabbi's tune, often ending with a dance -- she stood at a distance, observing, and her face shined with joy.



My mother, Rishe Ranyeh, may she have a bright Garden of Eden

When I entered the world, there were six other children in the house -- Bera, Leah, Libby-Sarah, Harold, David, and Rachel. My oldest brother, Chaim Jacob, was already married, and was a teacher in Bobr. My oldest sister, Rashe, was also married, and owned a substantial shop in Bobr. My sister Rachel was three years old when I was born; later, I would hear she was so pretty that she was everybody's darling, and that no one took notice of me. As I understand it, my childish soul suffered from inattention, and I developed an inferiority complex. Sadly, and when I was still very young, God took pretty little Rachel to himself, but my complex remained for many years.

I BEGIN TO ATTEND CHEDER

During the *Chol Hamoed* days of Passover in the year 1888, when I became five years and one month old, teachers began coming to our house every day, begging my father to enroll me in their cheders. All five of the town's first grade teachers came, and each one praised his methods of teaching Jewishness to small children.

First to come was "Shloime Pupik," Solomon the Navel. People told the following story about him: Reb Shloime had once set to whipping one of his pupils, and the boy tried with all his might to escape. The two wrangled so long that the boy bit him on his navel, and from that time on Reb Shloime was stuck with that not very elegant name.

The next teacher was "Shimele Parachod," Simon the Steamship, because his body consisted almost entirely of legs. His legs were so long that no one could keep up with him when walking. He would take one step, and everyone else would have to take two or three.

Then came "Shepsl Still-Half-Daylight." Why such a weird nickname? Because the brim of his hat was always off to one side, so people said that with Shepsl it was always still half daylight.

When Reb "Itsele Kasoy," Izzy the Cross-Eyed, spoke to you, one eye would look up at the transom, and the other eye at the floor. People would say, "He speaks to the priest, and spits in the spittoon."

The last teacher to come was "Moishe Pierog," Moses the Sour Latke. It was said that on a certain winter night, when he returned from cheder, the kerosene lamp in his house had gone out, and the house was totally dark. His wife Roche's rheumatism was so bad that she could barely move, and she was lying on the warm oven. Moishe was hungry, so he opened the oven and grabbed something from the dark. As he sat, and started to chew, whatever he grabbed was impossibly tough. So he asked his wife, "Roche, what kind of pierog did you make for supper?"

Roche exclaimed, wringing her hands, "Woe is me, he has eaten the dish pan. Why are you dreaming pierog? I made you barley soup with milk."

When the village comedians heard the story, a majority decided that his name would be Moishe Pierog. But the few great Yiddishists among them wanted to make the pierog more Yiddish, so they proposed that his name should be Moishe the Sour Latke. Finally, after much negotiation, they reached a compromise; everyone would call him whatever they wanted -- Pierog, or Sour Latke, which is why he lives forever with two nicknames.

My father welcomed every teacher, honoring each with a pinch of snuff, but privately he had chosen Shimele Parachod. Shimele was a devotee of the same *rebbe* as my father, and they prayed together in the rebbe's house of study. When I was informed of my father's choice, I burst into tears, because Parachod had the habit of pinching his pupils, pinching them so hard that they walked around with black and blue marks. But my tears and protestations didn't help, and on two occasions Parachod did pinch me. When my mother noticed my black and blue marks, she cried out, "I'm going to Parachod and I'll tear out his beard."

My father quieted her down, saying, "What's the noise about? Now he'll remember better what he learns."

At the age of six, I began to study the *Pentateuch*, and it didn't take long before I found out how the whole world was created in six days. That story made a tremendous impression on me; though I knew that God could do everything, whenever I thought of all the things he had created in six days, I came to the conclusion that only our God could have managed such a thing; no other God would have been able to do it.

MY AUNT HADASSAH

To visit the house of my Aunt Hadassah was my greatest childhood pleasure. She was my father's only sister, a strongly built woman in her middle years who lived two streets from us, with my Uncle Yashe and their 13 children -- three girls and ten boys. When I was very young, their house was like a public fair. The uproar echoed up and down the street, and, in the middle of it all, I was at home as a fish in water

When I entered her house, my aunt always greeted me by announcing, "Now the real public fair will begin." She beckoned me to her side, and asked how everyone was at home, whether the cow was still giving milk, or if it had given birth to a calf.

I usually found her at the oven, pushing a pot or a bread inside with one hand, holding a tiny child she was breast-feeding with the other. A second infant would be clinging to her apron, crying and screaming for breast milk. Crawling around on the floor was three-year-old Lazerke; he still couldn't walk, and his favorite pastime was pursuing the chickens that were always walking around the house. As soon as a chicken released its droppings, Lazerke would pick them up and put them in his mouth. His tiny face would express great joy, as if God knew what kind of good fortune had befallen him.

Five-year-old Chaimke had a different pastime. The family's two cats were always fighting, and Chaimke was a peacemaker. After each catfight,

he would want the cats to be friends, to kiss each other, but achieving that goal didn't come easily. If Chaimke grabbed one cat, the other would run away, so he'd grab the first cat by the neck; then, while holding it, he'd crawl around beneath the beds, looking for the other cat. If God helped him, and he was able to grab the other cat by the neck, he would press the two together, mouth to mouth, at which point they would begin to attack each other with their feet. "Mama," he would cry, "they don't want to make peace."

None of this bothered my aunt, but when Chaimke cried, "Mama..." she would say, cold-bloodedly, "You'll get killed, together with the cats." Once, as she sat at the table eating, breast-feeding one child, another screaming for the same, and Lazerke cleaning up after the chickens, she smacked the screamer, grabbed Lazerke, and stood up and began dancing around the room with him. She called to me, "Health to him; he knows I don't have time for all my eaters, so he eats by himself." Meanwhile, she was sticking a finger in Chaimke's mouth, and yanking out everything inside.

Aunt Hadassah had three young sons about my age: Israel, born the same month as me; Are, a year older; and Laibke, a year younger. In all our games, we were the leaders, though certain others were not to be ignored.

There was "Itsele the Pitsele," Izzy the Tiny One, a few years younger than me. He was small, but more trouble than a wild dragon. I hated him the way a Jew hates pork. In the middle of every game, he would always play some nasty trick that would spoil the whole game.

Later there was "Chonale the Monale," Chonale the Monster. Monale was the nickname my aunt gave him. He was three years younger than me, but twice my size. If he landed a blow on someone with his little hand, for many days you walked around in severe pain. If any of the children had something that Monale wanted, it was already in his hands. My aunt would say to him, "A thief is growing up in our home. Why did the plague not take

you away?" She would pinch him, hard, on an arm or a leg, yet he never cried; he merely fixed the eyes of a murderous bandit on her, while pressing on his arm or leg with his hand. For some reason, he liked me, yet to this day I don't know why; he was always on my side. If any of the children did me harm or an injustice, he would take my side, and even the score.

When all of us played together, my aunt was in seventh heaven. She would urge Itsele the Pitsele and Chonale the Monale to join us, and then she'd sit down to catch her breath. If one of us stepped on Itsele or Chonale, she would grab the child, stuff its little mouth with her breast, and say, "Wait, you little devil; should your father come, you won't have any shortage of trouble."

The greatest holiday for me was spending the night at Aunt Hadassah's house. My mother always reminded me to read the *Krishme*, the prayer before going to sleep, and that if I didn't, ghosts would tear me apart. When I entered the house, all the children cheered; they embraced me, and began to sing, "Zalman is going to sleep here, Zalman is going to sleep here."

My aunt would say, "*Skotsl kumt!*" the greeting of welcome.

I would call out, "With great joy, auntie, I've come to spend the night."

She would reply, "You have really been missed."

We slept on the floor of a windowless bedroom. There was no bedding on the floor, but that did us no harm. There was a blanket, though it wasn't wide enough to cover everyone, and those of the five or six of us lying at the edges yanked it for a while, back and forth.

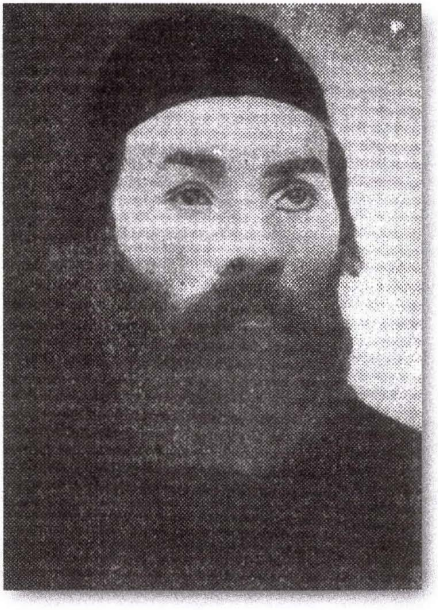
Then, and little by little, we quieted down and fell asleep.

MY FATHER AND HIS STUDENTS

My father, Nachum Lanes, was a remarkable man. All week he was quiet as a dove, with never an extra word. He rose before daylight, and after ritual hand-washing, and reciting blessings, he sat down to study. Sometimes it was the *Mishnah*, other times the *Zohar* or Gemara. He studied aloud, in a fine baritone voice. Around seven o'clock he took his prayer shawl and his phylacteries, and went to the rebbe's house of study to pray. He ate no food before leaving, but when he returned, my mother had left a tablecloth on the long table, along with some bread and salt. As my father finished eating, boys would be arriving at cheder, ten of them, to study Gemara. They would sit around the table with their open books, one reading the lesson aloud, the others listening, one after the other, each day a new lesson. My father gave whatever help was needed to the first boy, and sometimes a bit of help to the next two. As they read, he walked back and forth with his hands clasped behind him, holding a small red kerchief in his hand. When a boy stopped in the middle of his lesson, unsure about a particular passage, he would go to the table, set the kerchief on his Gemara, and help to extricate him.

The last three or four boys were expected to complete their lessons unassisted, but sometimes one had problems. That made my father very angry. It meant, to him, that the boy hadn't paid attention to the others. My father never hit such a boy, but he'd say aloud, as if to himself, that the boy's father was throwing away tuition money, and that the boy was

becoming "a complete non-Jew." He'd tell one of the other boys to help him. That's the way the day would go when studying Gemara, as well as when studying the Bible, or other subjects.



My father, Reb Nachum Lanes, the fervent Chassid, may he rest in peace.

After my father had dismissed the cheder, and we were eating supper, he rarely uttered a word. He rarely ever spoke to us children, but our mother, Rishe Ranyeh, spoke enough for both of them. On the Sabbath and on holidays, however, both in the rabbi's house of prayer and in our house, father glowed with Sabbath festiveness. On the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, returning from the ritual of *Tashlich*, the emptying of one's pockets in the river to wash away sins; or at *Hakofes*, when the rabbi carries the *Torah* around the synagogue to celebrate *Simchat Torah*, completion of the year's Torah reading; or at special Chassidic festivities, father was a real firebrand, and he infected those around him with his ardent enthusiasm.

One night after supper, instead of going immediately to a book and sitting down to study, he called me over, gave me a pinch on the cheek, and said, "You know, Zalman, you are already quite a big boy, and during the coming term, God willing, you will begin to study Gemara with me." The mere fact that my father spoke to me, and hearing what he said, made such an impression on me that for quite a while I walked around as if in a dream. With great anticipation, I awaited the day when I would begin to study Gemara, and when I finally began, I realized that I loved it very much. But I didn't love sitting all day enclosed in cheder, watching the gentile boys playing in the field,

Nevertheless, I was an observant, Orthodox Jew. I often went with my father to pray in the rabbi's house of study. I was especially thankful to him when he took me to the rabbi's for the festive evening meal that marked the end of the Sabbath. There, he repeated the passages of scripture that the rabbi himself declaimed on Friday night and Saturday morning. I was amazed, listening the whole time, though I understood nothing of what he was saying. But every time he uttered the words Holy Name, and he did so often, I felt a sacred shudder in my whole being, and my cheeks turned a flaming red. Afterwards, when the rabbi's wife offered a bit of whiskey and something to eat, the rabbi himself came in. It was thrilling to see him. When all present joined in his singing, my small voice rang out like a small silver bell, and often, after such singing, he pinched me on the cheek, and said to my father, "Nachum, my protégé is no disgrace to us." The rabbi called me his protégé because he had the honor of holding me during my circumcision ceremony. I felt exalted by his words, and for a while afterwards I prayed, with great fervor. While praying, I begged God, with tears in my eyes, to forgive me for my great sin of having a love affair with a girl.

MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH RACHEL, AND MY MOTHER THE HEALER

During that time, something frightening happened to me: I had a love affair with Rachel. She was very pretty, and a year older than me. She and her mother, Shaina Leah, a divorcée, lived in our house. Her mother ran a small bake shop nearby, and my mother was the women's healer of the village, so Rachel and I were often left alone together. The first few times this happened I tried to avoid her; I had been told that when you played with a girl you forgot everything you'd learned, but I couldn't resist the temptation for long. I was drawn to Rachel, and soon we were hiding behind a door, kissing. If we didn't get the opportunity for a few days, we felt as if we would die of longing for each other. It was, as I see it now, a beautiful, childish kind of bonding and love.

Meanwhile, as Rachel's mother baked, my mother dealt with various medical problems in Liadi. She never took money for this, but the gratitude and good wishes she received were, in her opinion, worth more than money. She had various methods of healing, which included:

1. Licking out an eye. When a particle of dirt, perhaps, was stuck in someone's eye, my mother grasped the patient's head with both hands, and with both thumbs she opened the eye wide.

Then she stuck the tip of her tongue into the eye, and with a sideward lick the particle was gone.

2. Squeezing out *zavalkes*. In America, zavalkes were called swollen tonsils. Mothers came with children in their arms, some nearly choking. My mother inserted a finger into the child's throat, and pressed hard against the zavalkes. The child emitted a scream, loud enough to split the heavens, but the screaming didn't last long, and the problem was cured.

3. Removing an inflamed, red birth mark -- a *rose*. For this my mother used a small, half-inch-wide wooden stick, made from wood of a variety known only to her. She stood with the patient near a door that contained a knothole. She inserted the stick into the knothole, and circled it three times. Then she dipped the stick into some kind of liquid, also of a variety known only to her, and then, rubbing it on the rose, she repeated, three times, an incantation that I can't recall. Most often, at that point, the rose was gone.

4. Removing a mole. A mole, or wart, could appear on the tip of a child's tongue, or the tongue of a hen. My mother cured both child and hen the same way, using two other varieties of stick and liquid, also of varieties known only to her. She dipped the stick in the liquid, and gently patted the tip of the child's or hen's tongue with it, all the while reciting another magical incantation. Then, with a thumb and forefinger, she grasped the tip of the tongue, and, with a fingernail, she loosened the edge of the mole or wart, and proceeded to gently remove it.

There was one healing technique that my mother hadn't mastered -- dealing with an *evil eye*. That was my father's specialty.

When a child began to burn like fire, it was clear that he or she had been given an evil eye. That's when the family came to my father's house, to have him talk it away. They always brought a little shawl with them, and my father took it in both hands, tightly closed his eyes, and began to repeat a magic formula. When finished, he spit three times, and said, "Let it be a cure."

I recall how many times my mother begged my father to teach her how to talk away an evil eye, but each time he would refuse her. That was not for any woman, he would say.

I AM CAUGHT STEALING

I've undertaken to tell of important events in my life, so I've decided to tell the following story, even though it's not very nice.

Who doesn't like little pears? Pears, with little red cheeks. The mere sight of them made my mouth water. How I loved little pears, especially those I could tear from the tree by myself. Not far from our house was the gentile street, and behind every cottage there were fruit trees. I would stand and gaze at them from a distance. I felt capable of swallowing both fruit and tree together, but go start something with gentiles, especially when they are half Jewish. Our gentiles could speak Yiddish better than the Jews could speak their language. They understood many Jewish laws and customs. They knew what was kosher and what was forbidden. Yes, they were half Jewish, so when my evil desires drew me to the little pears with the red cheeks, I would willingly have forgotten about going to heaven if I could have had some. I would have climbed the trees, torn off pockets full of little pears, and said the blessing of God, "who made the fruit of the tree." I would have relished being alive. Unfortunately, all the gentiles had dogs, angry, nasty dogs, and the dogs hated Jewish boys with passionate enmity. I was understandably very frightened of them. I would stand and look at the trees full of little pears, whose red cheeks drew me the way a magnet draws iron, but I'd be afraid to move from the spot. My brain would send a telegram to my feet: *Stay where you are, because the dogs are there.* But

the God who can feed a worm beneath a stone saw my great suffering, and He sent me a kosher gift.

I believed I had found a treasure, though when I recall how this episode concluded I realize it was no treasure. Near some birch trees on the gentile street there lived a Jew, though in the village he was considered half gentile. Behind his house he had a garden, with flowers and many fruit trees. In our village, that was reason enough to be considered half gentile. His attire, too, was not considered very Jewish; he wore lacquered boots over his trousers, and a hat with a lacquered peak, one that a refined Jew in our community would never have worn. Even today, his spoken Yiddish would not be considered very good. He couldn't utter more than three words without mentioning a non-kosher dessert that he liked to eat with his mother and father. It was said in the village that he had been a soldier in Czar Nikolai's army, and that it was in Nikolai's domain he learned what was not very Jewish.

In the second week of August, when the fruit on the trees was beginning to ripen, I would stand near the house of my two comrades, Zelig and Zalman, the younger brothers of the well-known Hebrew and Yiddish writer, Reuben Brainin. Their house was the last Jewish house before the gentile street began. From there, I could contemplate the little pears on the trees belonging to Czar Nikolai's soldier. Gazing at those little pears with the red cheeks, I would feel the strength ebbing from me. Finally, overcome by my evil desires, I proposed to my two comrades that we sneak into the orchard after night had fallen, and tear off enough pears for the three of us; once and for all, we would know what real living was like in this world.

We knew it was not a good idea for all three of us to crawl to the tree. We decided that only one of us should climb it, while the other two should stand guard behind the fence, to catch the pears picked by the climber. But which of us should do the climbing?

I enjoyed climbing trees, but I didn't want to climb this one. My heart told me it would result in a calamity. But to stand behind the fence was even worse. To do so was to stand in the cemetery, and I was frightened to death of that. So we decided that I should climb the tree, and Zelig and Zalman should stand behind the fence. Moments later, I was next to the tree. My heart was pounding, and I sprang to the first branch. Up I climbed, higher and higher, and soon I was within reach of the pears. I begin to tear them off, and throw them down. I tore and I threw, but suddenly, a lighted lantern appeared in the orchard. For one second I felt as if I had turned to stone, but I quickly decided, *I must get out of here.*

The lantern was approaching the tree. My partners behind the fence had run away. I plucked up my courage, and I leaped, but to my great horror I leaped into the pair of strong hands holding the lantern. A frightened rabbit in the teeth of a hunting dog could not have been more terrified than I was. A sickening feeling began to beat beneath my heart. Fiery wheels began to turn before my eyes. My head began to spin, and I felt as if I had lost my tongue. I wanted to appeal to my neighbor's Jewish heart. I would pay him for his pears. I would get some *kopek*s from my mother, however many he wanted, if only I might not have to suffer the shame of being caught stealing pears. But my tongue had turned to a stick of wood, and I had altogether turned to stone. There I stood, in deep trouble. The neighbor had put his Czar Nikolai paw beneath my collar, and he was waiting, probably until I started to cry and begged him to let me go. Then he lifted his lantern to my face, looked carefully at me, and said, "Oh, that's who you are, Nachum Lanes's brat."

I wanted to reply, but I couldn't make a sound. I gestured with my hands, as if to say, *Yes, it's just as you see.* But still I couldn't utter a word. "Oh," he said, "it's really a shame that such a fine father would have a brat who's a thief," and as soon as he said the word thief there opened up in me a well of tears. I cried like a beaver, but still I couldn't utter a word. Finally,

he released me from his grip. "You brat, you have such a fine father, it is really not fitting that he should have a thief for a son."

Woe was me; again the word thief.

"I will pay you," I finally managed to say.

"Oh, you fool," he said. "Do I need your money? I would rather have you not steal any more pears."

"Oh," I cried out, "I swear by my holy prayer shawl that I won't, ever again," and the tears poured out of me.

"Swear, why must you swear?" he asked. "I will take you to the other side of the fence, and dig a hole, and bury you in the cemetery." He said something else, but I could no longer hear him. My legs were buckling beneath me, my heart was constricting; I felt as if I was falling into an abyss, but from the abyss, thank God, I escaped with my bones intact, though with a badly battered soul. My dearly beloved mother had watched over me, with her love and motherly devotion. From that time on, I never wanted to even look in the direction of a fruit tree, and always in my prayers I begged God to forgive my sins.

I AM VERY PIOUS, BUT . . .

While praying, after my attempt to steal pears, I begged God to forgive me for my persistent thought that to be a gentile was better than to be a Jew.

I feared that thought as if it were fire. I went around frightened, for whole days. At night I had bad dreams. I imagined that my calamity with the pears had befallen me because my father kept me in the house at the Gemara from 13 to 15 hours a day. He wakened me at five, summer and winter, every day but Sabbath and holidays. I poured water for ritual hand washing, and said the blessings. He sat with me at the Gemara until seven, and then he went to the house of study. Usually, after supper, instead of studying by himself, he opened the Gemara and went over the morning lesson with me. His great ambition for me, his youngest son, was that I become a rabbi.

The truth is I had always been so enamored of the Gemara that my father never had to waken me. The moment I heard him arising I got up and got dressed. But that routine began to bore me; often, sitting in cheder on beautiful days, I looked out the window to a large clearing, and I noticed the gentile boys at play. No one was moralizing to them, no one frightening them about going to hell. My childish heart quivered, and I felt the urge to go outside.

But in the midst of my sinful thoughts I'd hear my father's punishment talk: "Well, my little rabbi, you're thinking about the devil knows what again? Maybe you know where we are in the text."

I felt such bitterness and pain, as though I had made my father very unhappy. I vowed to deeply regret my sinful thoughts. I again started listening carefully to my studies. But at tearing my thoughts away from "the devil knows what" I was rarely successful, and my whole childish being strongly protested against not being allowed to run around as freely as the gentile boys.

My unhappiness pursued me day and night. I was in fear of roasting in hell. At night, as soon as I fell asleep, a band of devils started dragging me off. I'd begin to shout and shriek, as if possessed. My good mother would run to my bed and start to waken me, and when I'd wake I'd be in a pool of sweat. The same thing would repeat itself, night after night. When my mother would question me about what I was dreaming, I wouldn't tell her. I was afraid that if I started to tell her, I might let slip about my great unhappiness. I had firmly determined that I would never tell anyone, not even my dearly beloved mother, but one night I found myself moaning, "Mama, I'm very afraid."

"What are you afraid of, my child?" she asked.

"Of God, Mama, I'm afraid of God," and I turned to the wall.

My mother sat beside me for a long time, comforting me, tucking me in. With a voice in which I could hear tears, she said to herself, "Woe is me, the child is wasting away," and with her common sense, and mother's heart, she began to think of a cure for me.

MY MOTHER SEEKS A WAY TO SAVE ME

Early one morning, I heard my mother say to my father, "Nachum, the child is wasting away." My father said nothing.

My mother thought I was sleeping, but I wasn't sleeping. I was lying in bed with my eyes closed. I was keeping myself from crying out, because the evil ones were starting to swirl around me.

"Nachum," she continued, "I am saying you're a robber of your own child; you're slaughtering him without a knife."

At that point my father was no longer silent. "Well, well," he answered, "if I obeyed you, I'd be bringing up a gentile."

My mother always had great respect for my father. When he was sitting and studying, she often wished she could be worthy of being his footstool in paradise. But this time she didn't submit. She fought like a lioness, because she felt that her child was in danger. She said, "Nachum, may God not punish me for these words; I'm really no more than a sinful woman, but what are you saying? What do you mean that I want you to be bringing up a gentile? Woe is me, one should never dare to utter such words." I could hear that she was weeping. Lying on my bed with my eyes closed, I wept along with her, but not because I feared she would lose her place in heaven. I wept for my own unhappiness, because I was going to burn in hell for my dreadful thoughts.

I overheard my mother's voice: "Nachum, in the Holy Bible it is written that a father has mercy on his sons. Do you hear that, Nachum? A father has mercy on his sons. The child is wasting away, and you only know one thing, to study with him from five in the morning until ten at night. Do you hear, Nachum? I won't let you do this." My dear, good mother wept, and I wept with her. I don't know which had more influence on my father, my mother saying, "A father has mercy on his sons," my mother's tears, or a combination of the two. But one thing was certain: my mother had won the war. My father resolved not to study with me any more, not in the morning and not at night.

A RIOTOUS TURMOIL IN LIADI

Have you ever seen a summer's day, when the sky was clear and fair, and no one had the least suspicion there could be a storm, with heavy rain, that suddenly the sky became overcast, with heavy, dark clouds, and thunder and lightening came out of nowhere, with such a downpour that it looked like the end of the world? In a sense, that's what happened in our little village, one 1890s Sabbath after Pentecost.

All was still and quiet. Everyone was sitting at the Sabbath table enjoying the Sabbath *cholent*, a meat and potatoes stew, and singing traditional Sabbath songs. Suddenly, there was an enormous uproar in the village. People were running around, asking one another, "Have you heard?" How terrible, and with a gentile! The rabbi's daughter, Sterke, with a gentile, on the Sabbath; that poor rabbi."

They all knew what had happened, but no one knew exactly how it happened. Everyone had a different story to tell, so I will tell you mine.

That famed and righteous man, the Rabbi Duber Shnayurson, had two sons, the eldest being Reb Schachne, who aspired to succeed his father, though Reb Shnayurson's followers claimed that Reb Schachne was not a great student of the Torah. Reb Schachne had a son and six beautiful daughters, the oldest being Estherke, or Sterke, as she was known in town. She was Reb Shnayurson's oldest grandchild, and the apple of his eye.

Sterke was about 18 years old at the time. The Reb had decided she would be betrothed to the son of one of his wealthy Chassidic followers. But Sterke had a seriously conflicting ambition: The son wore long sideburns and a long cloak; Sterke had been reading books in the Russian language, and she wanted to study abroad.

Finally, the day came when a marriage agreement would be confirmed, to be followed, with God's help, by celebration of an engagement contract. It was suspected that Sterke was not much pleased with this, so Yehudah, Reb Shnayurson's head servant, had been asked to keep an eye on her. But even Yehudah didn't know that Sterke was planning to run away from home.

How, in our tightly-knit little community, would she be able to do that?

Apparently she knew that to attempt it in mid-week would have led to the sounding of an alarm; she would have been pursued, and brought back to Liadi. So Sterke determined to flee, on the next Sabbath morning; everyone would be occupied with prayer then, and after prayer, with listening to the rabbi speak about Chassidism, so on that Sabbath morning Sterke went off for a walk. Behind the village, it had been prearranged for a gentile farmer with a horse and wagon to be waiting for her. That's what I heard. The farmer took her away to the Krasnaye station, where she boarded a train and was gone.

The talk in the village was that Reuben Brainin, the famous Hebrew writer, the fellow townsman who had emigrated to Vienna, had assisted in Sterke's escape. How much truth there was in that I cannot say, but Sterke was the sensation of the day. The whole village went topsy-turvy over her. And as I've said, each person told a different story.

The next day, fastened to the doors of all eight prayer and study houses -- including that of Reb Shnayurson's court -- handwritten accounts appeared, of how Sterke ran away on the Sabbath. Also, one of the village pranksters wrote a song, which began like this:

> *"Sterke, you Sterke, why did you do it?*
> *It's your Grandfather who will rue it!*
> *Sterke, you Sterke, you dearest next of kin*
> *Your Grandfather will suffer for your sin!"*

Throughout the village, kith and kin sang that song: apprentice tailors at their machines; young shoemakers pounding nails in the soles of shoes, beating with their hammers, singing out, "for your sin, for your sin." They would never have stopped singing if another such great sensation hadn't occurred in our village; this one made everyone forget Sterke and the gentile. A new hullabaloo became the order of the day.

AN EXCOMMUNICATION IN LIADI

Immediately after *Shavuos*, when the late spring sun had begun to pleasantly warm the earth, and the mud in the streets was drying up, a new kind of trouble came upon the village; may it not happen here, but small children began to die. They were literally falling like flies, and no one knew why. There was barely enough time to bury one child, when Yankel, the head of the burial society, could be seen carrying another bundle.

People did what little they could do. If a mother had a child who was burning like fire, she wouldn't let the child burn. She went running to my father, so that he could exorcise an evil eye. People went racing to their houses of prayer, opening the Holy Ark, weeping and shouting that the heavens had split open. They recited psalms, and distributed charity. They did everything a good Jew should do in such a case, but it didn't help; children were falling like flies.

We had tenants in our house. The mother, Rashe, a legendary beauty in our village, had two young sons, five and six years old, and one day the boys began to burn like fire. I recall this as if it were yesterday. All the cheder boys were studying our lessons at the long table. Nearby, on the floor, Rashe's two boys lay on a mattress, and she kept bending down, tapping on their heads, and crying out, "Help, my boys are burning up."

Every possible thing was done to help them; my father exorcized their evil eyes -- three times, and with great fervor. At noon, he departed from

cheder, went by himself to his prayer house, and sat down with a holy book. Others raced off to their prayer houses, but all was to no avail. The children were burning like fire, and God, in one fine day, took from both their tiny, pure souls.

Rashe, my mother, and I, and everyone else in the house, walked around with swollen eyes from weeping. The weeping and screaming in the house was unbearable, and the same could be heard from a nearby house. A man lived there who suffered from tuberculosis. He was always so pale that he appeared to be dying. But suddenly his face turned to crimson, and he began to burn, at which point he picked himself up and called out, "I have sinned with a married woman, with Rashe." Then he fell back on his couch, and gave his soul back to God.

The news spread through town like lightning. It was clear to everyone why children were falling like flies, to everyone but Zalmanke the heretic. He was a rabbi, but no one would ask him about religion; his coat didn't reach his knees, his sideburns were short, and his son, my comrade, Shloimke, committed the sin of playing the fiddle during the nine days of mourning in the month of *Av*.

It's easy to see why people in the village had a low opinion of Zalmanke. People didn't listen when he said, about the dying boy and Rashe, "If Rashe had wanted to sin, she could surely have found someone better than that consumptive; he was just ranting, under the influence of a fever."

Zalmanke claimed there was a sure way to stop the plague. In the synagogue, after prayers, he shouted out, "You are all madmen. When a child is burning like fire, it doesn't help to exorcise the evil eye; you have to call a doctor."

This made it clear to everyone that Zalmanke was a heretic, and that there was no use talking to him about anything. It was decided that there

had to be an excommunication. In Benjamin Chaim's synagogue, black candles would be lit. Rashe would be brought there, and, with God's help, should she confess her sin, or should she drink from a glass of muddy water and her stomach not swell, then God would help and the plague would cease.

Notices were attached to the doors of all the prayer houses. A feeling of deep sadness and fear came over everyone, adults and children. People walked around half dead, without the energy to even work. No one played and no one joked. I even forgot about the bird's nests I used to crawl over roofs to gather. And as dark as the melancholy was in the entire village, it was even darker in our house.

My father shouted that he did not want "that impudent woman" in the house. But my mother stood up for her, saying she was a proper Jewish daughter, that she had been sufficiently punished by God, and that people didn't need to draw any more blood from her. For once, she agreed with Zalmanke; the sick man, the accuser, had been under the influence of a fever.

Rashe walked around in a daze. She stopped weeping, tearing her hair from her head and banging her head on the wall. She wouldn't eat. My mother, with great difficulty, got her to swallow a few spoonsful of food, but she became a shadow of "Rashe the great beauty," as she had been called in the village.

Then the day of the excommunication arrived. Everyone fasted. Even the ninth day of Av, a day of mourning, had never plunged our village into such heavy sadness. My mother threw a shawl over Rashe, and said to her, "Come, daughter, and may God help." Rashe walked behind my mother. I kept my eyes on both of them. I was certain that Rashe hadn't heard my mother speak to her, and that she didn't know where they were going.

The synagogue could not have held one more person, but it was silent. The Torah was carried to the platform and placed on the lectern. The chapter of curses was read, and the *shofar* was blown. The rabbi lit two large black candles, put his prayer shawl over his head, and said to Rashe, who stood beside him on the platform, "Sinful woman, small children are dying in the town because of your sins. Confess your sins, and God will stop this plague."

Everyone present, women and men, were weeping at the top of their voices, all except Rashe. She stood as if turned to stone -- not a tear, not a word. The rabbi repeated the accusation of sinfulness, but instead of calling upon her to confess, he held out the glass of the muddy water, and shouted, "Sinful woman, if you do not wish to confess your sins, then drink this impure water, and if your belly does not swell up we will know you haven't sinned."

Everyone in the synagogue had become very tense; one could hear every breath. I was standing on a table, closely watching the whole scene, and when the rabbi held out the glass I felt hot and cold flashes run through my body. My teeth were chattering, out of great fear that Rashe might drink the water.

Rashe didn't blink. She didn't move a finger. The rabbi repeated his demand that she drink the water. Finally, she stretched out her hand and took the glass. No one took a breath. She looked at the glass, at the rabbi, and again at the glass, and in a strong but muted voice spoke out. "Rebbe," she said, "you have certainly not sinned, but if you were to drink this water, your belly would swell." Then, flinging the contents of the glass in the rabbi's face, she shouted, "Robbers! Give my children back to me." Then she was silent. Still, no one moved.

At that point, there was an outburst of laughter; Rashe laughed. I will never forget it as long as I live.

She never came back to our house. She ran around in the streets, her hair disheveled, her clothes torn; she looked as if she were starving. But often she could be seen smiling; in her deranged condition, she had her children with her. She spoke to them, and sang to them, and told them stories.

They found her the following winter, frozen in the cemetery, near the graves of her two beloved young boys.

I GO TO THE CHEDER OF KULYE THE OX

Reb Jacob the Gemara teacher, Kulye the Ox, was a Chassid who prayed with my father in the rabbi's prayer house. He was an authority on the *Talmud*, but his manner was so severe that Jews without ambition to make rabbis of their sons would never trust him to be their guide or mentor. He acquired his nickname from the way he looked when showing anger to students who'd committed some sin, of learning or of behavior. He lowered his head, swung it left and right, and his sideburns, which were long and curly, began to resemble horns. In his right hand, he always held a strip of leather belt about an inch wide. Approaching his student-victim, he'd strike him with the belt, on the hand, the shoulder, or the head, wherever it happened to land.

One day, after my father had listened to my mother's punishment speech, he returned from Reb Jacob's prayer house with news: The reb had agreed to take me on as a mid-semester student. My good mother was not terribly satisfied with this. I understood that from what she said to my father: "You mean, of course, with Kulye the Ox? Well, a great, good fortune has come to you, my husband."

I didn't say a word about this to my father. One never said no when one's father said yes. Besides, I had made up my mind that I wouldn't study for long with Kulye the Ox.

I arrived at my new cheder at the time of Chanukah. The first thing I noticed, to which I took an immediate dislike, was the strip of belt in the rebbe's hand. But what could I do about that? He never let it out of his hands, not for a second. I soon realized that God himself would assist. The poor man's eyes had begun to fail him; as soon as night fell, a film seemed to cover them, which is what he told his wife, the *rebbitzen*.

The first thing we did was to turn the hands of the wall clock, from 20 minutes after seven to eight o'clock. When Reb Jacob heard the clock strike eight times, he let out a roar, since only a short time earlier it had struck seven.

The rebbitzen rushed in, looked at the clock, and confirmed that, indeed, it was eight o'clock. She brought in a small bowl of goat's milk, the best remedy for bad eyes, she said. The rebbe set his belt on the bench, and began tending to his eyes with a small cloth. It was in that kind of bright moment that I pushed the belt from the bench and kicked it under the table. The rebbe never saw the belt again. When he began looking for it, tapping on the bench and not finding it, he let out a roar like a slaughtered ox. But it was no use, and that night the belt was cut into small pieces. The rebbe strongly suspected that I had tricked him, but he spared me, though I never knew why.

On the next Sabbath, something happened that put an end to my studying in the cheder of Kulye the Ox.

It was the custom on the Sabbath, after the main meal of cholent, that the older generation would lie down for a nap. When they arose, they drank some tea from a kettle kept warm on the oven. Mother picked up her *tsenerene*, a Pentateuch designed for women, and read, and we boys were required to go off to cheder. But where was the decree which said that while going from my house to the cheder I was required to bypass an

outstanding chance for a few slides on a nearby patch of ice? Who was strong enough to resist that temptation?

I swear by my Jewishness that I had nothing more in mind on this Sabbath than to take a few slides, and that I would then run straight to cheder. But how does the proverb go? "A person thinks, and God laughs." The slide must have had some magic in it, nothing less; the ice was smooth as a mirror, my blood so hot, my feet so light and fast, that it was a pleasure for my soul to slide back and forth. With each slide there grew in me the eagerness to slide some more, and, may it not be spoken before God, I completely forgot the cheder and the rebbe.

I must have gone on sliding for a long time, but finally, I remembered the cheder. With all my strength, I tore myself away from the enchanted slide, and I fled -- like an arrow from a bow. I didn't run into the cheder; I fell in, straight into the kosher hands of my rebbe, and he attacked me, with such savagery I had the feeling that my end was near. He wanted to punish me for my tardiness, but also, I think, because he suspected I had hidden his belt, so he beat me, but I would have forgiven him everything, because the truth is I felt guilty for being late. When he began pulling at my ear, however, pulling the soft part upwards with such force that I began to see pinwheels before my eyes, I simply could not endure the pain. I pushed him away, though God forbid I didn't have in mind to harm him. I only wanted to get rid of him, to catch my breath, but my young, healthy hands were a bit too strong for his old, weak feet. He took a backwards fall, and with his head he broke through the glass door of a closet.

When I saw the broken pane of glass, and the rebbe's bloodied face, I became quite frightened. I immediately ran outside, for the first time thinking seriously of what I had done. My healthy instinct told me that I must go home at once and tell my mother, even before my father came home after evening prayer, his having heard the story in the prayer house.

After hurrying home, I found that my instinct hadn't deceived me. My bloodied ear, nearly torn off by the rebbe, helped me to plead my case. When my father returned after evening prayer, and he wanted to punish me for having harmed the rebbe, my good, dear mother cried out such a complaint against the "wild ox," as she called him, that my father made a gesture with his hand, as if to say, *Oh, nothing good will come of him anyway*, and with that the incident was closed.

WITH LUCK, I BECOME A YESHIVA STUDENT

My father didn't want to teach me anymore, but to find another teacher in mid-semester was impossible. When my mother said, "Well, Nachum, what is to become of our young man?" he groaned, "Ach," and made a waving motion with his hand, as if to say, "No one would be able to make a decent person of him." But both my mother and I knew, though my father never told us, that he had been conducting negotiations with a rebbe named Moishe Nashkes, so that the following semester I would be admitted as a student in the yeshiva.

Moishe Nashkes -- some called him "Moishe Nashkes, the builder's son" -- was something of a legend in our little town. His father, Nashke, was a builder of houses, and prosperous Jews looked down on him. It embarrassed them to see a Jew in a long kaftan, with tassels hanging down and a skullcap on his head, standing with an axe and a chisel, building houses. But Nashke was an honest man; he prayed at great length, and with fervor, and he was widely recognized as "a man of his word," and his son, Moishe, had been known as a child prodigy.

At the age of 20, the son was ordained as a rabbi. When he sat and studied in the great house of prayer, his voice carried across the entire town. Some said it reached to the heavens. When the old head of the yeshiva died, the town decided that the new head should be Moishe Nashkes.

It was during the Chol-Hamoed days of Passover when my father took me to visit Moishe Nashkes, to be tested for qualification as a yeshiva student. Reb Nashkes was about 35 years old then, and as long as I live I will never forget the impression his appearance made on me. He was tall and slim; he wore a long, satin frock coat, and a woven belt around his hips. At the very top of his head he wore a tall, silk skullcap, which made him look even taller than he actually was. His handsome face was surrounded by a little blond beard, and he had a pair of eyes that looked at me with pain and love. As I see his unusual figure today, he was exceptional material for a Jesus figure. The impression he made upon me was that of an angel.

I don't know why, but in my childish fantasies, and in the way Moishe Nashkes looked, I saw the angels who came to our father Abraham to tell him that his wife, Sarah, would give birth to a son. I studied a Talmudic tractate on the Sabbath for him, and I delivered a strong performance. I still remember how my cheeks burned as I spoke, and my small voice rang out through the big house of prayer. When I finished, he said to my father, "Well, Reb Nachum, may it be with good fortune and joy, and God willing, immediately after Passover he may come here to study."

I saw a look of happiness on my father's face. As we were coming out of the house of prayer, my father, who was sparing of praise, said, as though to himself, "Well, thank God my efforts have not been in vain."

The yeshiva did me a great deal of good, and the rabbi continued to look like an angel. I wasn't quite 13, and my 15 and 16 year old classmates were top scholars, but even they asked for my help with their lessons. All this, in my new surroundings, made such an impression on me that I stopped letting foolish thoughts about gentile and Jew creep into my

head. I stopped having those terrible nightmares about ghosts and Hell. I began to eat normally, and, with God's help, I would become a grown up Jew, a bar mitzvah boy.

A MARKET DAY IN LIADI

Before I describe the great moment in my life of becoming a bar mitzvah, I feel the need to record something that in my very young years I looked forward to with great impatience.

A market day in town was a great event for all the town's Jews, but in me it called forth a joy of holiday proportions. One did not go to cheder on such a day, and immediately after prayers I headed for the market. I stopped at booths where merchants displayed a variety of attractive wares to sell. There were tiny horses finely fashioned from paper, with tails and manes of hair, and colored so beautifully it would take my breath away just to look at them. There were various small wagons or carts; different kinds of little whistles that made a crowing noise when you blew into them; and many other wonderful toys which caught my eye. I could never get enough of looking at them all, though there could be no talk of buying. They would cost two or three kopeks, and who possessed such a fortune? I had to be content with looking.

Market day was a spiritual pleasure for me, but for most of the town's Jews it was a day for making a living. Very few of them could resist the temptation to become merchants. Jews with just a few pennies in their pockets would head for the market to do business, hoping to avoid trouble. They'd cross the river on a crumbling little bridge that marked the boundary between two provinces -- Mohliev, and, on the other side, Smolensk, where the "Jewish Pale of Settlement" ended. No Jew dared live beyond

that point, unless he had a permit for residence there, and what Jew from Liadi had such a permit? Everyone knew Jews didn't even have ordinary passports, but that didn't stop certain unscrupulous officials from demanding to see those nonexistent documents. What easier way to profit from market day? Those merchants with a few kopeks in their pockets pushed them into the outstretched palms of the tyrants, and were allowed to pass. Those with nothing to offer were dragged off to a Mohliev jail.

The next morning, chained in a prisoner procession, they were led to another jail, this one in Smolensk, where they sometimes languished for weeks. Finally, they were led back to Mohliev, and eventually they were returned to Liadi, again in a prisoner procession. Such journeys sometimes took months, and when the prisoners returned to Liadi they were unrecognizable. They looked like plucked roosters: boots in shreds, feet swollen and bloodied. As the proverb says, "Better looking bodies than those are given burial in graves." Such merchants would often take to their beds, and never get up again.

I BECOME A BAR-MITZVAH BOY

When I look back to that time of becoming a bar mitzvah, I see one of the most moving experiences of my life. Preparing for my bar mitzvah eve took me into some very serious moods. For many weeks, the thought never left my mind that soon I would be a grown-up Jew, that soon my father would be relieved of all responsibility for me, and that I would be answerable to God for all my deeds. As soon as I opened my eyes in the morning, I would sense the presence of God around me -- with a tremble in my heart. I began to utter blessings, with great fervor, and to inspect the tassels on my undergarments, making sure they hadn't lost their virtue of holiness. I prayed, at great length, and with enormous respect, repeating each word until I could sense the true flavor of their meaning.

My father and mother were full of pride, watching how their youngest son was preparing himself for the greatest event in his life. Finally, the great day arrived. I was in the rebbe's house of prayer, and he called me to the Torah. I started walking to the platform, but my feet were trembling as though I was a drunkard. I saw around me a thick crowd of people, but I could only pick out beards, and eyes that dug deep into my soul. A bit shaky, I walked to the lectern, and now I was near the Torah. But I was no longer on the platform of the rebbe's prayer house; I was near Mount Sinai, and God was giving the Torah to the Jews, with a loud voice, and thunderclaps. The beards and the eyes distanced themselves from me. They were far, far away. I was standing near Mount Sinai, and listening to

God's voice -- "I am *Adonai*. . ." Then I felt a poke in my side, and a voice in my ear: "Say the blessing."

For a long time, people in town spoke about this astonishing event, how Jews stood in amazement when I said the blessing, and when I sang out the *Haftorah*. What happened to me I do not know. I only know that when my father was finished with the traditional blessing, *Baruch Shepatarani* -- "Blessed is He who has rid me of this responsibility" -- I felt as if he had placed all of Mount Sinai on my shoulders. I had put all of my broken spirit, and my deeply shaken soul, into the blessings and the Haftorah.

I BECOME A WAGE EARNER

One evening about a week after my becoming a bar mitzvah, there came to our house a delegation from Benjamin Chaim's prayer and study house. My father was sitting with a book, as was his custom after supper. My mother was sitting nearby, knitting a sock, and I was much occupied with my original sins. My teacher, the *Kurenitzer* -- his town was Kurenitz -- had strongly advocated the importance of Hebrew grammar. I was much more enthusiastic about studying Gemara, because of the content, and, especially because of the hearty melody that I could sing. To break my teeth on Hebrew grammar was not one of the things I wished to do, but I would say to myself: *It is, after all, a Jewish thing.* As for Russian grammar, which I also had to learn, that was a nuisance of the worst kind -- *Ya tshitayu, Ti tshitayesh, Mi tshitayem, Ani tshitayut*, for example. Why did I need such nonsense?

When I would cram for an exam on Russian grammar, I would translate the conjugations in my head in the following fashion: *Ya tshitayu*, I don't care; *Ti tshitayesh*, you don't care. . . But my mother, who in her old fashioned way was a modern woman, insisted that besides learning Jewish subjects I should also learn Russian. "Later on, it will be useful to him," she would argue with my father.

My father would give the short and sharp answer, "Oh, foolishness and nonsense," but my dear, beloved mother always had the last word on such issues.

When Benjamin Chaim's delegation came that evening, my father set his red kerchief on his book, my mother stopped her knitting, and I, with a harsh word from my teacher's grammar lodged in my throat, remained seated, with an open mouth. After the conventional greetings, my father treated the guests to a pinch of snuff. They all inhaled copiously, and sneezed thoroughly. Then they began to talk and get down to business.

One of our guests spoke of "our delight with how this young man handled himself when called to read from the Torah," and of "our pleasure with the sound of his voice as it resounded in the great synagogue, so that God and all decent people enjoyed it greatly. Why should we wait until strangers snap him up? Benjamin Chaim's synagogue is just a few steps from your house, Reb Nachum, so we ask your permission to let him become an official Torah reader for us."

I paid close attention to what they were saying, and when they were finished I glanced towards my father. I couldn't discern his reaction, but my mother was obviously very enthusiastic. I could tell because she pulled out the fifth knitting needle, which she slipped beneath the stitches while knitting, and began scratching her head with it.

For a few minutes there was silence. Then my father said, "I am thinking, 'What is this, a young shrimp a Torah reader? That is unfair to your Rabbi Itche.'" All three members of the delegation began to speak at once, rushing to clarify this difficult issue for my father.

The gist of their response was as follows: What do you mean, Reb Nachum, that it is unfair to Reb Itche? He is already an old man, and lately he has developed some kind of strange cough. It starts in the middle of reading, and the Torah lies there unread. That's an insult to God. They said that in order not to humiliate Reb Itche they would have me read for only three Sabbaths, and on the fourth Sabbath Reb Itche would read.

On that Sabbath I would chant the Haftorah. That was when I'd earn my salary.

They spoke for quite a while. Finally, my father offered them another pinch of snuff. He promised that the next day, God willing and without fail, he would speak with Reb Itche, and then he would give them his answer.

The truth is that neither I nor my mother was satisfied with my father's response, but who would have the nerve to say anything against speaking with a rabbi? Wasn't that the only logical way of dealing with a difficult problem?

The next morning, after my father came back from speaking with Reb Itche, he said nothing. I very much wanted to accept the position offered me, so my heart was pounding. My mother remained in the kitchen, preparing dinner, and I was sure that her heart was pounding as fast as mine. She began to set the table. My father washed his hands, wiped them dry with a towel, and began to say a blessing.

Woe is me, I was thinking, *why is everything taking him so long today*? The blessing was taking an eternity.

My father went over to the table, cut a slice of bread for the blessing, and started looking for something; my mother, in her excitement, had forgotten to put salt, *melech*, on the table. Finally, my father spoke: "Well, well -- melech."

My mother seemed startled, as if she had committed some sin, and she placed the salt on the table. My father cut off an olive-size piece of bread, dipped it in the salt, said the blessing, and proceeded to chew, very slowly. He always ate slowly, but on this day everything seemed to be taking an eternity.

My mother came to the table with a plate of hot food. Wonderful aromas rose from it, but I didn't care about food.

Suddenly, my father said, "Well, so what do you say?" I didn't know to whom he was speaking, but I was certain he had referred to the previous day's discussion.

'Anyway," he added, "may it go well."

When my mother heard his good wishes, her face flushed and she asked, "The rabbi said yes, Nachum?"

"Oh, woman," he said, "when the rabbi says no, I do not offer good wishes."

That was how I became a wage earner and gave my mother a lot of pleasure, both with my reading of the Torah and with my chanting of the Haftorah.

MY FATHER, THE PASSOVER MATZA ENTREPENEUR

My father always had ten boys in his cheder, but from teaching alone it was difficult to make a living. The tuition for a six-month semester was ten *rubles* for each boy, which came to one hundred rubles, more than enough for a family to get by on. The house belonged to us, so we paid no rent, and for a few rubles each year we rented a room to a neighbor. What's more, we always had a cow or a goat, so we had plenty of dairy food.

All would have gone well, if the tuition was being paid, but who had ten rubles for a teacher? Not Jews, with two or three boys old enough for cheder. One needed to be almost a Rothschild to afford 20 or 30 rubles a semester, and how many such parents were there in Liadi? We felt fortunate if there were two or three. The others paid a few rubles each semester, and that was the end of it. My father, peace be with him, never demanded tuition money. And when my mother said to him, "Nachum, that one, and that one, they owe you so much money, and a holiday is coming. We need a garment for yourself, and for the child, and the roof is leaking and needs repairing. Maybe you should remind them about the tuition?"

When my mother said that, my father would answer, and not without some contempt, "One does not ask for tuition money. If they don't send money, they don't have any."

On hearing this, my mother would get very angry. Running to the long table, where the boys were sitting and studying, she would point a finger at those who owed a lot of money, and she would angrily call out, "You, and you, and you, all of you, should not come to cheder tomorrow if you don't bring tuition money."

My father would shrug his shoulders, and shout, "Oh, you are an enemy of Zion, out of your mind, and to what purpose? Because of you, I will be left with no one to teach."

Most of the boys came to the cheder next day without money. Their fathers prayed with my father in the rabbi's house, and when they discussed the matter with him he would say, "Oh, there is no telling what a woman might say," and that's where it ended.

Once, after such a discussion with my father, my mother grabbed her shawl, and said, "If you won't ask for the tuition money, I will go alone and ask."

My father looked at her as if he wanted to say, "Woe is me, have you, God forbid, gone out of your mind?" And he shouted out, "Remember, you will lose your share of the world to come."

My mother was left standing there as though paralyzed. She threw down her shawl as if it were contaminated, burst into tears, and moaned, "It's not enough that I don't have this world. Must I be an enemy of Zion, and also lose the next world?"

Such scenes rarely occurred in our home; my mother was a pious woman, and when my father sat down after supper to study, she usually sat near him with a sock and knitting needles in hand, and listened to what he was studying. Quite often she would call out, "God, may I at least be worthy of being his footstool in heaven."

Both of them felt practically certain of reaching heaven, but teaching, in this world, was a less certain proposition. So my parents had a small business on the side; immediately after Purim our house was transformed into an inferno, a *padriad*, where Passover matza was baked -- for the prominent people of town. On the day after Purim, long, wooden boards were dragged out. They were washed, made kosher, and spread on a long counter on which 15 local girls had been hired to roll out the matza. Each girl was paid from 15 to 20 kopeks a day. My mother knew which ones were worth 20 kopeks. Two additional girls were employed, one to pour flour, one to pour water on the flour. The one who poured water had to be careful not to touch the flour, and the other careful not to touch the water; an accident would have rendered the matza no longer kosher for Passover. There was also a tool, an iron half-dial for making holes in the matza, and a long-handled wooden spatula. When the rollers finished with a matza they would bring it to a girl who made holes in it with the half-dial; then she would place it on the spatula, after which the matza was placed in the oven.

The noise in our house was nearly unendurable. Fifteen girls with rolling pins made such a racket that one might have heard it ten blocks away, if the dialers hadn't drowned them out with their iron half-dials.

During those three and a half weeks, the baking of matza began at eight in the morning, and never stopped before ten at night. Sometimes, when they needed to finish fresh batches of dough, they wouldn't stop at ten; left overnight, the dough would no longer have been kosher come morning. But no one protested, because the customer might have been annoyed at the delay, and wouldn't have left her customary tip. The workers needed the extra money for holiday food, so they stayed very late, smiling despite their swollen hands and feet. The woman whose matza they were baking would be walking around giving orders, every few minutes saying, "Roll them out thinner, girls, so you'll get a good tip."

A day before Passover, when the house had been cleaned and made Kosher again, the wooden boards were brought back in the house, and *matza shmurah* (strictly supervised matza) was baked, for Liadi's strictly observant Jews. That was more like a great holiday, or festival, than a laborious process. The night before, a few Chassidim would come to the house, and they and my father would take brand new pails to the river for water, for the baking. On returning, they would pour the water into a new tub, and put a cover on it. They'd pour small shots of whiskey into little round glasses, my mother would put some baked potatoes on the table to eat with the whiskey, and then, wishing one another a kosher Passover, they would drink a toast. When finished, they'd begin singing the favorite tune of their rabbi, Reb Duber Shnayurson, and, placing their hands on each other's shoulders, they would go into a little dance that made the windows shake. The next morning they would bake the first piece of matza shmurah for their rabbi.

Reb Shnayurson himself would be there in the morning; he would knead the first batch of dough, and all the Chassidim would stand around him and listen to his Biblical commentary. Their faces were lit with great joy, their eyes burning with that fire only seen in people in a state of Sabbath soulfulness. The whole day would be spent in song and Biblical lore.

When I now recall those days of baking matza shmurah in our house, I am again suffused with the holiday joy that I experienced in those early years in my father's house, in my village of Liadi.

AN EVIL DECREE COMES TO OUR TOWN

And it came to pass, as the saying goes, "When anything comes to pass somewhere, trouble will be there."

One summer day, when the plague had begun to quiet down, there came to our village a new official administrator. *Stanovoy* is the Russian word. Some said the old had merely been exchanged for the new; that the old stanovoy was such a great bribe taker that he neglected his duties, and that was why the plague had come to our town. But others said they couldn't imagine how anyone could have prevented it, that it was God's will.

The new stanovoy was seen walking around the village with his chief assistant. One person saw him gesture towards a passerby and smile, so people decided that he wasn't a bad gentile.

The people did what was customarily required; they collected a few rubles for what we called "tuition money," along with some bread and salt, and they sent a delegation of the town's most respected Jews to the new man. The bread and salt were placed on the table, but the stanovoy pushed away the tuition, and gestured for the delegation to leave. He left the Jews with the impression that they would soon hear from him.

A few days later, a messenger arrived at Benjamin Chaim's synagogue. He handed the rabbi a piece of paper, said, "Here is the new decree," and

left. All present, expecting the worst, decided that the decree was an evil one, though few could make sense of its Russian script. I was asked to help translate, and soon I determined that another delegation had been invited, for a discussion of "village issues."

All present insisted on going, but when we arrived at the stanovoy's office he said, "Only two Jews do I need." We began to file out, and when two of us remained the stanovoy shouted, "You think you can pour your pails of slop right next to your porches? More plagues, is that what you want?"

We thought we had done everything possible to stop the plague, and everything we could have to avoid another, but the stanovoy ranted, for 15 minutes. He wanted us to dig sewers, on both sides of our streets and alleys, so that our slops would run to the river. We were also to dig wells for our drinking water. When it rained heavily, the mud was so deep that you couldn't walk in the streets, so after the sewers and wells were completed we were to lay down footbridges across the sewers -- two boards wide. The stanovoy didn't ask if there was money for footbridges. He just said: "Footbridges!"

Everyone in the village was stricken, with anger and fear. People shouted. They waved their hands, and raged. In the synagogues, before and after prayers, and day and night in their homes, they spoke of the new stanovoy, "that villain." It was decided to declare a fast, to protest the decree, but the rabbi kept getting messages, saying, *You must . . .*, *You should . . .*, *You'd better. . .* Finally, with the stanovoy still not silenced, Jews began to remove their traditional, long black capes. They set to work, each next to his own house, digging sewers.

Imagine the sight: respectable Jews, with beards and sideburns, underwear sticking out, tassels hanging down around their knees, standing and digging sewers. But the stanovoy was pleased by the sight. Walking the

village streets, seeing Jews digging sewers with their underwear showing, sweat running down in streams, he would say, "Well done, Jews, maybe you will have no more plagues."

For digging wells and laying down footbridges we had to hire gentiles. They dug the wells deep, and the water bubbled up. But footbridges were another story; the stanovoy demanded they be two boards wide, but to find wide, thick boards that wouldn't bend or tip, that would have required a king's ransom. Our "engineers" found thin boards, short boards, old boards, and cracked boards. They placed wooden blocks beneath them. Then the autumn rains came, and the mess that resulted was beyond God's mercy to help us.

Children often arrived home with one shoe, having deposited the other deep in mud. We all walked slowly, carefully, each foot on a bad board, and up between them would come a whistling sound, made by the mud spraying up. And when would that happen? When a marriageable young man was going to see a possible bride, in his best clothes, and suddenly he was wearing a new coat of mud. Or when a young girl had made herself as beautiful as possible -- with a pair of new galoshes and a brand new purse, to impress the young men with her proud beauty -- suddenly would come a whistling sound between the boards. It tore my heart out looking at the victims.

How does our saying go? "To trouble, one can also become accustomed." Bit by bit, people learned to walk with their feet separated, one foot for each board. And when they approached each other from opposite directions? They embraced, in a friendly manner, and slowly, very slowly, turned each other around. They said, "I beg your pardon," and each went his way.

Dear friends, that is how, in the 1890s, civilization began creeping into my village of Liadi.

SERVING ON THE FIRE WATCH

Serving on the fire watch was a Liadi tradition that young boys looked forward to with great impatience. It was a summertime activity. In the warm months, it was necessary to guard the village against the outbreak of fires. If a house went up in flames then, God forbid, half the village could have gone. I recall one such fire from my very early years, before the fire watch began. A house caught fire in the neighborhood near the river, and the wind was blowing away from the river, towards the village. It didn't help that people were wasting energy by running around and shouting, "Emergency, please save us, it's burning, it's burning."

It didn't help that local firemen were running around with axes in their hands, screaming to each other, "Why are you standing around doing nothing?" It certainly didn't help that the only real fire-fighting weapon was water in large pails, dipped from the river and carried to the fire. A tall man could wet a flaming house to a height of five feet, but the roofs were much higher than that.

Nothing that was done helped very much, and house after house crumbled in flames and smoke. The fire raged on until God turned the wind back to the river. It burned and burned, and then it stopped. How was the rest of the village spared? People told two stories.

It was Rosh Hashanah. The rabbi and his followers were going to Tashlich, and they had to pass through the quarter where the rabbi's

opponents lived. They would normally have passed quietly, meditatively, but returning on this day they were in a joyful mood, having washed away their sins. Suddenly, a hail of stones began to fall on them. One called out, "Help, rabbi, Jews are throwing stones at Jews on Rosh Hashanah."

The rabbi raised his head, looked at his congregation, and said, "Why all the noise?" He gestured towards the source of the stones, and added, "Don't worry, it will burn." And so it did. A short time later, a fire began in that quarter; it burned all the way to our house, and stopped.

Others, even more Pious Jews, said they had seen a cat on the roof; he was trapping the sparks that fell there with his tiny paws, then snuffing them out with his tiny tongue. It must have been no ordinary cat, they always added.

After a few more fires in our village, the stanovoy decreed that all summer there would be a nighttime fire watch; occasionally serving on it would be a duty for boys between the ages of 14 and 18, each one to inform authorities the moment a fire was seen. All the boys loved the fire watch. It was the most sensational experience of our young lives.

Merely staying up all night outside was a very big thing. Mothers gave their sons two kopeks of spending money for their all night assignments. On my nights, for one kopek I bought a large glass of seltzer water, which was very refreshing to drink; after drinking it down, it bubbled up in my nose and my eyes, so that a supper of meat, and a lot of potatoes and bread, became easier on my heart, and lighter in my eyes. I always felt so good at those times that I began to fantasize that God would help me, that I'd some day be a wealthy man, and that I'd be able to afford three glasses of seltzer water every day.

For the second kopek I bought sunflower seeds, in the same booth where the seltzer water and some sweets were sold. There were only two

such booths in the entire town. One, not far from our house, was the most popular of the two because the salesperson was a very attractive girl; all the boys brought their kopeks to her. They stayed at her booth until it closed, and then the real show began. I call it a show because for Liadi's young boys it was the equivalent of theater, or a circus.

It must be said that there was no tower on which to stand and watch for fires. There was no need for one. The buildings in our small town were low, the nights before electricity were dark, and a fire could be seen from many blocks away. All we had to do was be outside and stay awake, so while we watched for fires we entertained ourselves, and many -- though not all -- of our neighbors.

I can't explain why, but there were some shopkeepers in Liadi who the boys disliked, and, boys being boys, even then, sometimes, on dark fire-watch nights, they would take down a sign from one of the shops, and fasten it to the outhouse of a prominent homeowner. It often happened that during the night, if one of those homeowners had to relieve himself, he went to the door of his outhouse, saw a strange sign on the door, and became confused, not knowing what to do.

When people heard what had happened, the town had a good laugh.

Among the fire-watchers were those who played the fiddle, or wind instruments. There were pranksters, too, who entertained at weddings; some nights they joined the musicians, and stationed themselves beneath the window of a rich man. Then they performed a mock wedding, of the rich man's daughter to the son of an impoverished man. The prankster seated the bride, and the musicians played a melancholy dirge. Then they played a jolly tune, and all the boys, hands on each other's shoulders, performed a wild dance, with great energy and exuberance. Those nights were joyous, the air delightful, and the blood rushed through our veins.

Eventually, windows would begin to open. People begged the boys, "Please, enough already with the wild dancing; we can't sleep." But we knew they weren't angry, and that they looked with pleasure at our performances. When the dawn came we began to go home, but not without a bit of noise, and with a strong sense of regret that the night had ended so soon.

But not to be forgotten: We had also saved some houses from burning to the ground.

DURING THE NINE DAYS IN LIADI

When my memory takes me back some 60 years, and I see my village of Liadi, I realize that during the nine days preceding the ninth of Av, a Jewish day of mourning, the skies were just as clear or cloudy as on all the other days of summer. The dust in the streets still rose almost to the heavens when a wagon or van went by, or when a strong wind blew. But only on those nine days did both grownups and children walk around like mourners, as if only yesterday our great disaster had occurred -- the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem.

It seemed that we children were even gloomier than the grownups. Not being allowed to get a haircut during the nine days was a minor inconvenience, but being forbidden to bathe was a calamity. The summer sun burned like fire, and when we played strenuously, and the sweat poured down, it would have been a relief to jump in the river, to dive with our heads down and feet up, and to swim across the river and back. Would that have felt good! But the temples had been destroyed, and no one dared to swim.

But one Friday after cheder, a few of us boys decided to quietly go swimming. If our mothers were to ask why our hair was wet, we would all give the same excuse: we were playing near the river and we became perspired, so we washed our heads.

We slinked through back alleys to the river, our hearts pounding as if we were criminals. It was no trivial matter, bathing during the nine days. At the river, we threw down our clothes and leaped in, but half way to the opposite bank I began to sink. My hands had become stiff as iron, my feet dragged me down like lead, and I cried out for help. The other boys thought I was playing and they ignored me, but a miracle happened; a gentile was swimming nearby, and he dragged me from the water, half dead. My friends revived me, but down the length of my neck a blue vein had begun to protrude, from terror. I walked around with it for weeks, like Cain with his mark. My father said that I was growing up a complete gentile, that there wasn't a single Jewish hair on my head.

None of us, ever again, dared to bathe during the Nine Days.

The climax of those days came the eve of the ninth of Av, at nightfall, when the last meal was eaten before fasting began. Tradition decreed that the meal wasn't served at a table; my mother spread a towel on a chair, on which she placed some barley soup, hard-boiled eggs, and bagels with ashes. Boxes were used for sitting. My father dipped an egg in the ashes, and, while chewing, he grinded his teeth so hard that it sent a shudder through my body. After dinner, I was allowed to play outside for a few hours, and when I returned I was always overwhelmed by the scene that greeted me. The house was nearly dark, and more than a dozen women were seated on low boxes. My mother sat at the head of that group, with a candle burning near her. She was reading, aloud, the sad story of how the temples had been destroyed; of how, one at a time, Hannah had lost her seven sons. She wept as she read, and all the women wept with her.

In the house, there was wailing and lamentation, to high heaven. A fright would come over me. Where could one run to escape it? The only place was the prayer house of Benjamin Chaim, but it certainly wasn't cheerful there. Jews sat on overturned benches in semi-darkness, with

their shoes off, their big toes protruding from torn socks. The cantor wept the lamentations, and all present wept with him.

On such a night, I had terrifying dreams. I screamed and cried in my sleep, only quieting down when my mother wakened me and I saw her near me.

By the next day, the ninth of Av, we young boys had forgotten the destruction of the temples. We did have to chant the lamentations in the morning, but immediately after saying the prayers we received our compensation, when we went to the cemetery with the grownups. Prickles grew there; we called them berries. They were covered with sharp little needles. Picking them was no easy task, often bloodying our fingers, but after picking a few we crouched behind a large gravestone, and threw them into the beards of various adults. It was God's own pity to watch how they suffered, trying to pick out the berries. The most pitiable sufferer was Itse, caretaker of the synagogue; "Itse the One-Eyed," we called him. All year he chased us from the synagogue, and on the ninth of Av we settled the score. It took Itse days to pick the berries from his beard, and if, with God's help he got rid of them, he also had to pull out half the beard.

AVREML (ABRAHAM) THE YEAST MAKER; REB ABRAHAM THE REPENTANT HERETIC

Avreml the yeast maker was a legend in Liadi. With his appearance, alone, he made a most unusual impression; he must have been six-and-a-half-feet tall, and his smooth, pale face was always embraced by a neat little beard. As a young man, he had passed whole days studying in Benjamin Chaim's house of prayer, and since that place wasn't far from our house we always heard the sound of his voice. People in the village said he was well versed in the Talmud, with such wisdom and acumen that he had no equal. When he married, his father-in-law built him a house with a small shop; he taught Avreml how to make yeast, though his wife ran the yeast business. Avreml continued to sit and study. His house was on the same street as ours, with the town manager on one side, and all the horse thieves on the other.

Our village was distinguished for its horse thieves, not just for its rabbis, Chassidim, and other fine Jews. Some of the thieves were so clever that if they merely cast an eye on a pair of horses it was too late to save them; the horses were stolen. And if it was necessary to get the guards drunk, or to poison a few dogs, in the twinkling of an eye it was done; the horses were gone, and no rooster had even crowed an alarm.

Avreml had a young son of my age, and when I was ten years old I often went to his house. When I returned home, and my mother realized where

I had been, she asked, "So, my child, where did you play, in Hell or the Garden of Eden?" Why such a crazy question? Because Avreml's house was divided in half, and the difference between the two halves was as different as Hell and the Garden of Eden. One half consisted of a small shop, a large room, a kitchen, and a bedroom. It's difficult to describe how dirty all those rooms were. The children walked around in shirts all covered with dirt, caked on as hard as sheet metal.

The other half of the house was always closed, and when, on occasion, I opened the door to take a look, I was nearly blinded by the cleanliness. Inside was a huge room, with three windows looking out on the street. The floor was as yellow as beeswax. Opposite the door stood a large bookcase full of books. Avreml was always sitting at a massive table there, reading, as neat as everything around him.

One day people began to whisper that Avreml, that very great scholar, was no longer behaving politely to others. They were saying there was something not quite right with him.

For one thing, he rarely went to the prayer house anymore; that alone was proof something wasn't right. He did go on the Sabbath and holidays, but even then, instead of praying with his usual fervor, he sat in the anteroom and made idle conversation with young people of whom the village had a low opinion. And he began to say things that made no sense. He said that exorcising an evil eye was just like worshipping idolatry, and that the poor, pious people who left their wives and children to fend for themselves, and went to the rabbi's house for the holiday, were great fools.

At first, it was only the men in our town who questioned Avreml the yeast maker's behavior, but then the women started in. They sat on our porch for days on end, working on socks with their knitting needles, working on Avreml with their mouths. "Have you heard, Dvoshe?" one woman asked. "Avreml, that great, pious saint, has become a recluse. Yes, yes, he

won't go near his wife, not even when she comes from the ritual bath." The women made quick movements with their hands on their knitting needles.

Suddenly, a second woman stopped, smacked her lips, and called out, "What does he need a wife for? People are saying that Avdatye, the gentile girl who washes and cleans his rooms, whose belly is up to her nose, is . . ."

The other women quickly interrupted her: "Sha, sha (quiet, quiet)."

I was still a small boy, so the women didn't try to hide their lurid stories from me, but I would listen; however young I may have been, I already had a taste for such stories. But I didn't understand the one about Avdatye's belly, because it stopped with "Sha, sha." Then a young, attractive woman named Chaye Rive said, "And I tell you, ladies, one cannot really blame him for not wanting to be close to his wife; he is always so neat, clean, and well groomed, but from her, that blighted thing, bits of living pieces are always falling off." That's when I began to understand. Chaye Rive had a husband, a school teacher, who was three times as old as she was, but since she was a poor orphan, people had taken pity on her and married her to that old teacher. On his half-gray beard, one could see bits and pieces of what he'd been eating for days. Chaye Rive, however, had blossomed like a rose, yet the women said of her, "Ghosts are looking out of her eyes." Whenever I saw her, I looked carefully at her eyes; I wanted to see the ghosts.

After Chaye Rive had spoken, the other women sat as if paralyzed. My mother stopped knitting her sock; she drew out her fifth knitting needle, with which one caught knots, she pushed it into her hair beneath her kerchief, and she stared at Chaye Rive. I understood that she was looking at the ghosts in her eyes. I immediately tried to look at her the same way, but I still couldn't see the ghosts.

The women started whispering among themselves. Then they began to laugh. Chaye Rive turned red in the face. She swore that she meant

nothing bad about Avreml's wife, which helped her the way cold compresses help a dead person. But soon the God who feeds even a tiny worm beneath a stone recognized Chaye Rive's pain and suffering; he sent a new bomb into our village. People began working on it. They forgot about Chaye Rive, and the ghosts in her eyes.

Avreml had been in the anteroom of Benjamin Chaim's house of prayer with the ill-reputed young people, criticizing the rabbi and his followers. He was saying, "Do you know what? They are worshippers of false gods. They believe in ghosts and evil spirits. They believe that the dead rise up at night from their graves and say their prayers."

Avreml didn't know it, but Itse the One-Eyed was nearby. Avreml's talk created a burning sensation in his head. He ran into the house of prayer, and he warned everyone that Avreml, "that apostate," was converting all the young people into non-believers.

Such a scandal could not easily be silenced. Present in the prayer house was Sholem Shaiye, a ritual slaughterer, a rich Jew who was also capable of knocking down an ox with one blow. People said that he was a very insolent person, but one with no tolerance for injustice. He set out for the anteroom, and all the Jews feared that he would kill Avreml who, it must be added, could deliver such a blow that no grass would ever grow again nearby. They tried to hold Sholem Shaiye back, begging him not to desecrate a holy place with a fist fight. And they knew that Avreml had his followers in the anteroom. But Sholem Shaiye pushed all of them away with one hand, saying, "What am I, a barbarian, that I will get into a fight? God forbid, all I want is a little discussion with him." Everyone followed him into the anteroom.

When Sholem Shaiye walked over to Avreml, they looked like two strong oak trees in a forest of tiny saplings. He said to Avreml, "You impudent man, you are saying bad things about the rabbi and his followers. If

you want to be a sinful man, and make everyone sin with you, I cannot be silent. Listen to me, you heretic. You say there are no ghosts, that no dead people come from their graves in the middle of the night. Alright, good. I will give you a walking stick. You take it to the cemetery in the middle of the night. Pound the stick into the ground next to the gravestone of the pious old rabbi, Reb Mendele. If you return healthy and strong, I will know you are right, but if you don't recover, I will make you into a corpse."

As Sholem Shaiye spoke, Avreml stood and stroked his little beard, while on his face and in his eyes there played a sarcastic smile. When Sholem was finished speaking, Avreml said, "You fool, you. Is that all? I will go to the cemetery, tomorrow night."

Suddenly, hearing of this, the women of Liadi stopped speaking of the ghosts in Chaye Rive's eyes. The men stood around in groups, tugging at each other's lapels, arguing for either Avreml or Sholem Shaiye. When my mother said to my father, "Nachum, what do you say about Avreml?" my father shrugged his shoulders and said, "Ach!" as if to say it was beneath his dignity to speak of the subject.

Avreml with his walking stick was the talk of the village. Even the farmers, none more than half Jewish, were deeply interested; they crossed themselves, and said, "May God have mercy."

Finally, the night of the great happening arrived. Avreml picked up his walking stick, and went on his way. A minute seemed like a whole year. An hour went by, and Avreml didn't return. Everyone's teeth were chattering from fear.

Sholem Shaiye the ritual slaughterer set out for the cemetery. He entered the cemetery grounds, and went to Reb Mendele's gravestone. Avreml was stretched out on the ground, in a dead faint. Sholem Shaiye revived him, but Avreml couldn't stand. When Sholem Shaiye began to

help, he saw that Avreml's walking stick had been pounded into the ground through the corner of his long cloak. In the dark night, he had tried to run away, and couldn't.

Avreml the yeast maker became Reb Abraham the repentant Jew. He went back to praying in the rabbi's shul again, and he became one of the most fervent of Chassidim in Liadi.

SABBATH IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

In our house, preparation for Sabbath began the evening before, as it did in all the Jewish homes of Liadi. Early that Thursday, Kushman, the manager of the town bathhouse, made the rounds of all our streets and alleyways, shouting, "Everyone to the bathhouse." When they saw him, and heard his call, all the wives began to rush around. Each wanted to finish bathing as soon as possible, in order to start ushering in the Sabbath.

This preparation was not an easy task. In our community, the difference between weekday and Sabbath was vast. I think of my mother's and father's faces, how the deep concerns of the week would suddenly be banished, and from their eyes would shine a holy glow.

The whole neighborhood rested: the non-Jewish neighbors, the horses and cows, the street itself, where the busy babble of our lives seemed gone from the earth.

Returning from the bathhouse Thursday morning, my mother bought the fish and meat. She never carried money on that day, but both the fishwives and the butchers always told her, "Take, Rishe Ranyeh, take whatever you need; we know you will pay." Returning home, she set to work at scrubbing and cleaning. On Friday, she rose before dawn, to start making the *challa*.

As my mother worked in the kitchen, my father carried wood from the shed. He split a few logs into thin sticks, and with each blow of the axe he let out a hoarse groan, "Ha! Ha! Ha!" I always thought "Ha! Ha! Ha!" helped him make the logs split. All this chopping pleased my mother; she didn't like the wood when he purchased it. He had never appreciated the difference between damp wood and dry, so the wood he bought refused to burn. My mother said to him, with tears in her eyes, "Do you hear, Nachum, if you knew about wood what you know about scripture, I wouldn't be torn by anxiety while waiting for the oven to turn itself on."

My father smiled at her and said, "Well, well, can any person know all that? The man told me that the wood was dry."

Until the oven heated up, my mother placed the kneaded challa dough beneath the featherbed, where it would rise properly. After she worked all day to bring the Sabbath into the house, after the challa was out of the oven, and after she removed the cholent, I began to have the feeling that Sabbath would soon arrive.

Soon the table was set, with both large wings open. My mother knew that my father often returned from the prayer house with guests for *shabes*; she called them idle persons. She spoke with compassion of the wives left home alone without a penny, but with faith that God would help them.

She said the blessings over the candles, and what a difference I saw in her then. My mother from before, preoccupied and overworked with bringing the Sabbath to the house, was gone. Another person stood before me, in a Sabbath dress with a hat on her head. Her face, always beautiful, now glowed, as if the divine presence rested on her. Once, unable to resist, I cried out, "Mama, you are so beautiful I want to kiss you."

My mother replied, with a pious countenance, "It isn't nice, my child, for a Gemara student to kiss his mother."

The Sabbath supper went on for hours. In the middle of eating we stopped to sing *zmires*, Sabbath songs, and if my father had brought home guests, they'd be discussing the rabbi's sermon. My mother always begged them to eat first; she said the food would get cold, but they didn't seem to hear her.

The next morning, shabes, my father rose later than usual. He washed his hands, and went over the day's Torah reading in the room where I slept. It was a large room, with four windows to the street, and when my father raised his voice to sing the reading I opened my eyes. Other than his voice, a shabes peace pervaded the house. In those early mornings I sometimes thought about the times, sitting all day in cheder, when an angry rebbe grabbed some boy by the ear and said something like, "A Jewish boy should want to learn," and I'd have the thought that to be a gentile was better than to be a Jew. I felt strong regret for such foolish thoughts. I repented, deeply, begging God to forgive my sins.

I compared the Jewish Sabbath to the gentile Sunday, when local gentiles, dressed in white fur coats, the girls and women with fine, colored scarves on their heads, passed our house on the way to church; and how, returning from church, some of them stopped at the tavern, or the liquor store opposite our house, to get drunk, sometimes to get in a fight, later to lie in the gutter, inebriated. How dreadful, I thought. How could those thoughts about being a gentile have entered my mind?

On shabes, Rabbi Shnayurson preached his sermons before prayers, so the prayers ended much later than in all the other houses of prayer. Afterwards, at home, my mother always gave me a bit to eat; usually it was a little rubbed radish with *shmaltz* -- chicken fat -- or sometimes a bit of *tzimmes*, a vegetable/fruit stew. "Take, my child," she said. "Eat something,

or before your father gets here you will have heart failure." Later, in the middle of eating a lunch of tasty cholent, my friends were already waiting for me outside. If it was summer, soon we would be playing, on the field behind the village.

The field was a tremendous attraction. Most such fields around the village were sown with corn, and in mid-summer, when the corn was high and ready to pick, and the wind was blowing over its surface, the field began to wave; it was so beautiful that I would stand and gaze at it. In the middle of a game, I would stop and cry out, "Look, children, how beautiful the corn is on the sea." But however great the attraction was for me, I never asked permission to leave the table early. There, a greater attraction awaited me. Right after the pudding there occurred a great spectacle; my father sang the zmires, praising the beauty of the Sabbath in the traditional Aramaic. I always joined in, praising the holiness of the occasion.

That singing of zmires was more than just a great attraction for us; it was one for the whole street. Those Jews who had already napped after cholent, and were out taking a walk, would, in summertime, walk to our open windows and join in the chorus, singing zmires with us.

Often, when the zmires went on very long, Reb Nachum Chozir crossed the street and called to my father, "Nachum, you are an enemy of the Jews; you don't let us have the pleasure of a nap after Sabbath cholent."

My father replied, "I am an enemy of the Jews? You are not a Chassid; you are only an opponent, since you cannot take pleasure from singing zmires." Their interchange ended with a pinch of snuff for each of them. Reb Chozir then joined the chorus in singing zmires.

On Sabbath morning, I was usually playing in the field, but I was careful to be in Rabbi Shnayurson's court before dark. After Reb Chozir and

my father went over the sermon the rabbi had delivered Friday evening and shabes morning, the rabbi's daughter-in-law handed out a little liquor and something to eat, and we would sing a rendition of the rabbi's melody. They said that my soprano voice was very useful for that singing. Reb Chozir never failed to give me a pinch on the cheek. He said to my father, "Nachum, your young boy is growing up to be a talent."

My father answered, "With God's help." For that reason, when I sometimes arrived after they had finished the evening prayer, my father said to my mother, "Your youngest is growing up to be a real saint; he arrived at synagogue late, and out of breath.

My dear mother, who always defended me, answered, "He didn't come in time, so he won't be a Chassid."

My father muttered, "Impious woman," and that was the end of it.

In winter, when it was very cold, and my mother didn't allow me out for the end of shabes service, I stayed in the house with her. We looked up at the sky, to see if there were stars yet. As soon as we saw a few, my mother wiped the windows clear of condensation with her hands, and said, "God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the dear, holy Sabbath is going away." Then I became very sad in my heart, but later I comforted myself; the Sabbath would soon come again.

THE TEN DAYS OF AWE IN LIADI

The Days of Awe, the ten fearful days from Rosh Hashanah through *Yom Kippur*, began with the month of *Elul*. We heard the first blast of the shofar, and everything in the village was changed. People were quieter, more reflective, gentler with one another, as we thought of the great day of judgment that would soon arrive. We felt with all our instincts that God would soon be focusing on our deeds, and that we would need to atone for our sins.

Even the horse thieves remained in their homes. "At the start of Elul, we don't do any work," they'd say. They would wait until the holiday had passed, despite the possibility that snow could fall by then, with hoofprints making their work difficult.

On the first day of prayers, my father was more talkative than usual, because Reb Shloime Chaim, a ritual slaughterer, came to our house that night, and he would stay for the holy days. Heavy rains often came at that time, and the mud could get deep, so Reb Chaim's coach was often late. My mother might say, "Well, Nachum, wash up for supper, Shloime Chaim won't come tonight."

My father insisted, "He will come. The coach is just late because of the mud." In the rain it was dark as Egypt, but soon we'd hear the sound of horses' hooves -- *tyop*, *tyop*, *tyop* -- slowly coming towards us in the deep

mud. Soon there was a stamping of feet, and my father, with great joy, called out, "Well, I told you he would come."

Reb Chaim was a follower of Rabbi Shnayurson, and at supper my father regaled him with accounts of the reb's recent sermons, with which of the reb's Chassidim had come for *Shavuos*, and who had married off a son or daughter. Their conversation lit up their faces with joy. My father, always stingy and sparing with words, could end a conversation with a single word, yet he and Reb Chaim spoke into the night.

I was forbidden to leave the table until they finished eating, and not before they said the triple blessings. My father gave the first blessing, Reb Chaim the second, and I was privileged to give the third. In doing so, I'm told I never did anything to embarrass my father, and never failed to explain a page of Gemara. As I studied a page, with all its twists and turns, Reb Chaim pinched me on the cheek and said, "Nachum, your boy is following in your footsteps." Both of my parents were very pleased to hear that.

Soon it was Rosh Hashanah, and the synagogue was packed with Chassidim. A few were from our village, but most were drawn from afar by Reb Shnayurson. At that time he was about 60 years old, with the majestic presence of a patriarch -- tall, and strongly built, his footsteps heavy and carefully calculated. On Rosh Hashanah, he wore a white, loose-fitting robe, a black, silk, woven belt around his hips, and white silk socks with black loafers. His long black beard and sideburns were flecked with grey, and on his head he wore a dark brown beaver *shtreiml*. Delivering a sermon, he always kept his eyes closed, but when he occasionally opened them, and glanced at someone, that person felt blood rush to the soles of his feet. Only chosen individuals could approach him, and my father, his court manager, was among them -- at all times.

At morning prayers, Reb Shnayurson prayed in privacy. A door led to the synagogue from his private prayer room, and when it was time to

read from the Torah the door opened and my father appeared. His eyes seemed to sparkle; his countenance shone, as though the divine presence had come to rest on him. He spread his hands apart, like two wings, and it seemed to me that at any moment he would begin to fly. He whispered, as if fearing that people would hear him, "The rabbi is coming." The synagogue was silent. My father went to the Holy Ark, and removed the reb's tiny Bible.

On the doorstep of his prayer room, Reb Shnayurson appeared. He stood there for a moment, glancing at the congregation. I couldn't tear my eyes from him. My little heart fluttered. I was certain he could conquer the devil. He walked, slowly, to the stage. I stood on the small steps that led to the Holy Ark, gazing at him, and I knew how Abraham looked when he led his son, Isaac, to the *Akedah*.

Then I heard the rabbi's voice, with the opening words of the Akedah. The sounds of lamentation came from the women's shul, and around me stood grown men, with tears flowing, fathers of children, with broken hearts. Tears poured from my eyes. I savored every word from the rabbi's mouth, as if they were pearls. I heard, in Hebrew, the words, "And Abraham arose in the morning to take his son Isaac to the Akedah," and my heart filled with fear.

A prayer came out of my soul: "God, when I grow up I will be pious, maybe so pious that I will be a rabbi, but I beg of you, God, that you will not make me sacrifice my children."

The Akedah had a profound effect on me, as did the ritual of Tashlich, which wasn't easy for us. From the rabbi's synagogue to the river was a long walk, and our congregation had to file through puddles of mud, hundreds of us, one at a time, but after emptying our pockets at the river we stopped worrying about mud, and, returning, we plodded through it joyfully. My father led the way, singing, but in the middle of singing he would

shout out, "What mud? There is no mud." And everyone would shout out after him, "There is no mud, there is no mud. . ."

I'd look at my father and not recognize him. All year he was such a quiet man, but not on the day of Tashlich. And not on certain other days.

On Yom Kippur eve, a long line of people would form at our house, both family and strangers, each there to get my father's blessing before going to synagogue. He would place his hands on each person's bowed head, and quietly say a blessing. In the house, there was an atmosphere of repentance, regret, and remorse, for sins committed during the year. Before leaving, each person would kiss the *mezuzah* on our door, certain that Reb Nachum's blessing would help assure him and his family a good year.

At the synagogue, he said every prayer with great feeling, but when it came to the line, "Do not throw us away at the time of our old age," he wept, several times repeating, "Ai, ai, ai, Lord of the universe, do not cast us away at the time of our old age."

I think it was then that I acquired a strong fear -- I would have it all my life -- that in my older years, God forbid, I would need to depend on friends, and even on my children.

After the evening prayer on Yom Kippur, my father never hurried to leave the synagogue. There was usually a full moon on that night, and if the sky was clear we would gaze at it and say, with great fervor, "A good sign, and good luck." Then we would slowly set out for home.

In the house, on the table, there was always a steaming teapot. Nothing tasted good to my father at the end of a fast, so he would drink three glasses of tea. Then he would go outside, to drive in the first nail for the *sukkah*.

As intensely earnest and thoughtful as my father was in the Days of Awe, that's how lively and cheerful he became in the seven days of *Sukkot*. I don't know where he got the energy. He'd go from house to house with a group of Chassidim, all day, giving blessing after blessing, and at each house, tradition decreed, the owners were required to serve cholent, and other holiday dishes. If a housewife objected, my father and his group actually prepared the food themselves.

I witnessed such a scene; they went to the home of Reb Shnayurson's younger son, Baruch, to deliver a blessing. My father took me with him. There was every kind of good food on the long tables, but my father only wanted the rabbi's daughter-in-law to offer *kugel*. She refused, so he told her, "If you don't, I'll pour a bucket of water on the floor, and I'll slide on it."

She thought he was joking, so she didn't offer the kugel, but suddenly my father was gone. He returned with a bucket of water; he poured it on the shiny parquet floor, and then he began to slide. Everybody seemed amused; a few of the Chassidim even took took to sliding with him, though the rabbi's daughter-in-law said, "Oi vai iz mir," Woe is me, and she stood by, wringing her hands.

The climax of the holiday came with Hakofes. The synagogue was full, as was the prayer house. My father was hoarse, as always during Hakofes, but he was happy, and he made everyone else happy. My father -- Reb Nachum Lanes, the fervent Chassid, my dear, beloved Jew -- may he have a bright Garden of Eden.

MY FATHER UNDERTAKES TO MAKE A DECENT PERSON OF ME

One day when I was 15 my father began what would be a difficult conversation with my mother. Typically, he didn't address her directly; he spoke into a book he was reading. She was sitting nearby, knitting a sock, so he knew she would hear; he said, "I think it's time to make a decent person of our boy."

My mother looked directly at him, and replied, "What, he is not a decent person? It seems to me that all Jewish children should have his learning."

My father said, "As far as learning is concerned, he has a good grasp of many subjects, but he needs to spend a little more time with other people."

Already my mother wasn't happy. "You want to send him away to the yeshiva in Liubovich, so he can become covered with lice?" she asked. "You have in the house one piece of a young boy, so you want to get rid of him?"

"It's time for him to become a *mensch*," my father said.

This went on for quite a while, until it was decided to bring our two family authorities into the conversation. They were my older sister, Rashe, and my aunt, Rashe Yente, my mother's only sister. "They have masculine

heads on them," my father always said. Rashe was married, and lived in Bobr, 75 miles away. Rashe Yente and Uncle Coolye (Jacob) lived 15 miles away, in the village of Fiencave, where dozens of gentiles worked for them. For *yontev*, they came to Liadi, where they had a huge house, and a granary full of grain.

Aunt Rashe Yente wasn't very tall, but she had a glowing complexion, as if the sun were reflected on it. My dear sister Rashe was as beautiful as the sun. I loved her as much as I loved life. When she spoke, her voice was so melodic that it was a pleasure to hear. When she burst out laughing, I always wanted to kiss her.

The truth is that I had begged God for my parents to send me to a different town to study. I wanted to see a little of the world.

When my sister and aunt arrived at our home, they were in no hurry to make decisions about me. They drank tea with my parents, and deliberated, took pinches of snuff, and deliberated some more. Finally, they decided it would be a good thing for me to spend some time in an unfamiliar place -- the yeshiva, in Liubovich. The decision was unanimous. Not having known what awaited me, I was delighted. I would see the world.

My mother, with tears in her eyes, began to prepare me for going away. She washed my shirts, and readied a suitcase. Soon the day of departure arrived, but saying goodbye to my dear mother was very difficult for me. She cried a great deal, and I could never comfortably look at her when she was crying. My father said only four words: "Travel in good health."

Then I was traveling to Liubovich. It was quite cold on that day, and the little wagon bounced up and down on frozen lumps of mud. The 20 miles to the stop at Dubrovne seemed to be a hundred. Arriving there,

the coachman stopped, threw down a bit of hay for the horse, and went off somewhere. Meanwhile, wanting to look at the local market place, I moved to the rear of the wagon, and, with my backside facing the horse, I began to look out at the shops. Suddenly, I was flying off the wagon. The horse had eaten the hay near to him, and lurched forward to reach some more. I lost my balance, fell forward, and, hands still in my pockets, I landed on the frozen mud, nose first, bloodying my face and my knees. Worst of all was the terror of flying forward, with no way to stop my fall.

Finally, we arrived in Liubovich. I went straight to the prayer house, where the yeshiva was located. The sexton was poking around in the furnace, and he looked at me, considered my suitcase, and asked who I was. I told him that I had come to study in the yeshiva, and he said, "With a face like that, why does one let a boy go away?"

I had no idea what he meant, but when I saw my reflection in a window I was frightened. My nose and lips were swollen, one cheek was torn, and my knees hurt so much that I could barely take a step. When I told the sexton what had happened, that I flew off the wagon, I expected a little sympathy, but he merely burst out laughing.

"Really, you flew?" he said, and he laughed some more.

"Where are all the yeshiva boys?" I asked him. "And where is the head of the yeshiva?"

He hadn't stopped laughing, and he kept repeating, "You flew, you flew . . . ?"

He was laughing so hard he could barely explain that the boys had gone home for yontev, and that they would resume studies in a few days, but that the head of the yeshiva would soon return, for afternoon prayer.

I felt a little better. I washed up, and ate a small piece of challa and a hard roll that my mother had put in my suitcase.

Later, the head of the yeshiva arrived, and in my mind I compared him to Moishe Nashkes, head of my yeshiva in Liadi. Moishe Nashkes was tall and handsome. This man was small, his side whiskers and beard dirty, and yellow from snuff.

I showed him the introductory letter my father had given me. He read it and said, "Yes, I know your father very well. Tomorrow, after prayers, and God willing, I will give you a hearing." He told me nothing of where I might sleep, or what I might eat, and after praying he left. He didn't even look my way. I didn't see him again that night.

By now it was dark. I stood there for a while, a worried look on my face. In a little while, the sexton wandered by, and he said, "He forgot about you? It's too bad that after the prayer you didn't remind him you were here." Then he put on his coat. I had been afraid to be there alone with him, but I was even more afraid to be alone in the dark prayer house.

The sexton noticed my confusion. He asked if I had anything to eat. There was another piece of challa in my suitcase, and another hard roll, and I told him that. "Well, feel a little better in your heart," he said. "Soon, after supper, people will come to study. Then you won't be so sad." He set down one small lamp on the pulpit, and blew out all the others. Then he left. The prayer house was large, and the lamp made strange shadows on the wall. Some creature was standing next to the Holy Ark, and it stuck out a long tongue at me. My heart was pounding. I felt as if I was going crazy from fear. I thought, "*My God, how will I endure this?*" I cried out, "Hear, oh Israel!"

When a few people entered the prayer house after supper, they found me on the floor, where I had fainted. They poured water on me, and soon

I was sitting up, shivering, my teeth chattering. I was ashamed to tell them I had seen ghosts, but with tears in my eyes, I begged them to send me home.

They rented a wagon next morning, and sent me back to Liadi. My face and knees were still swollen. My mother began wringing her hands when she saw me, and shouting out, "Oh, woe is me. Who beat you up like that?" I told her what had happened, even about the ghosts in the prayer house. She put both her hands around my head, and cried profusely. My dear mother, may she have a bright Garden of Eden.

I BECOME DISENCHANTED WITH LEARNING

I was gone from Liubovich, but not from my experience there. I had frightening dreams, night after night; ghosts surrounded me, and the sexton stood with them, shouting, "He went flying. . ." I broke out in cold sweats, and I screamed in my sleep. My mother ran down from her bedroom, put her hand on my head, and cried out, "Oh my God, the boy is wet as a hen, and cold as ice. What is the matter with you, my child?"

"Nothing, nothing at all, Mama," I'd answer her, but I was ashamed to tell her about the dreams. She began to argue with my father: "You have made a decent person of our boy? Oh, woe is me."

Soon I began to dream I was flying. Once, I was standing at the edge of our roof, hands in my pockets, when suddenly the house moved away from me; I was in the air, but before I could lift my hands I hit the ground with my nose. I had fallen out of bed, and I was lying on the floor.

Those dreams haunted me for months. I stopped going to lessons at the yeshiva. My father said, "Ha, he is growing up to be a gentile."

My mother answered, "He would be better off a healthy gentile than a sick scholar."

My father muttered to himself, "A woman is dragging me to hell."

I was certain I didn't want to be a gentile, even more certain my mother wasn't dragging my father to hell. She was a God-fearing Jewish woman, who every morning prayed from memory. She prayed while cooking a warm meal, while peeling potatoes, and while moving a pot in the oven -- at the top of her voice. She was a healer, and all her patients blessed her. Every Wednesday, she and Rubin Breinson's mother collected food for the needy. I was certain she would earn a golden stool in the Garden of Eden.

Meanwhile, a teacher came in every day for my writing, arithmetic, and Hebrew grammar. Occasionally, I looked at a Gemara, but I had lost taste for that study, though I still slipped into the prayer houses to hear the familiar melodies I loved so much. But my misfortune at Liubovich had changed me, and I had a new idea, one I was afraid to share with my mother. She couldn't be fooled, though; she told my father, "There is something not quite right with the boy." She said that I was going around like a lost soul. She begged me to tell her what was wrong.

I put off giving her an answer for a long time, because I knew the truth would be a hard blow for her, and even worse for my father. Only once did she insist; we were alone in the house, and I decided that now I had to tell her. I could see that her heart was breaking for me, so I told her that I didn't want to study any more, that I wanted to become a craftsman, or an artisan. I said my piece, and I ran out of the house.

When I returned, my mother was lying in bed with a wet towel on her head, and she was moaning, uncontrollably. My heart was torn apart because of the suffering I had caused her, but the deed had been done.

Soon after that, my parents summoned the family authorities again. They drank tea, took pinches of snuff, and talked about me. My father wasn't speaking to me, so my mother called me into the room. Aunt Rashe Yente asked, "What is to be done with you, Zalman?"

My father didn't wait for my answer. He said, "He wants to be a gentile."

I became very angry, and shouted, "I don't want to be a gentile! I will always be a Jew, but I don't want to be a bookworm. I want to be a craftsman, or an artisan."

My father took his beard in his hand, and asked me a question, "Tell me, what kind of craftsman do you want to become? Perhaps a shoemaker?"

"Father," I said, "Reb Yochanon was a shoemaker, but he was also a very great scholar."

My father answered, "The boy has become a totally different person since he came back from Liubovich. I don't recognize him." At that point, our meeting with the family authorities came to an end. We never met again.

PART TWO

DEDICATED TO THE BRIGHT MEMORY OF MY WIFE VERA, WITH WHOM I LIVED FOR 49 YEARS IN JOY AND HARMONY.

I BECOME A PROFESSIONAL CRAFTSMAN

Our meeting with the family authorities took place a few weeks before Purim. The family matza business would soon resume, and because I was a good rolling-pin worker it was decided I would remain in the house until after Passover. At that point some decisions would be made.

My father still was not speaking to me; he never even looked in my direction. I believed that now he hated me. I was very sorry about that, because I really loved my father, for his general decency, and for his good treatment of me. He had never laid a hand on me; he had never even shouted at me, except when I was insufficiently pious, at which time he would say, "He is growing up a complete gentile." But I knew he didn't mean that. I said to my mother that I thought my father had come to hate me. She said, "God forbid, no, but he is certainly very upset; he thinks you have shamed him. He hoped you would be a certain kind of mensch, but probably God willed it otherwise, so let Him lead where it is best."

On the first day of Passover, my brother David came to visit from Smolensk. He owned a cowhide shop there, and he told me that right after Passover he was planning to open a shop for making leather garments. Doing that was considered to be a gentlemanly occupation, and my father agreed that David could take me to Smolensk, where I would learn his trade.

On my day of departure, it seemed as if my mother said goodbye to me a hundred times, as if I were going to America. She said, "See to it, my child, that you don't fall off the wagon, the way it happened going to Liubovich." I told her that wasn't possible, that this wagon had a cover, but it seemed not to ease her mind; she cried so much. She told me not to forget her, to pray every day, and, especially, to write postcards. She didn't ask for letters because it cost seven kopeks to send one, a huge sum; a postcard only cost three kopeks.

My father said, "Travel in good health, and never forget that you are a Jew."

Smolensk is 60 miles from Liadi, and that was a major journey for us. The Krasnaye station, where I would board a train, was only 12 miles away, but in a wagon even that posed an ordeal; the mud was at its deepest of the year, and the horse was barely able to proceed. Half way to the station, we came to the Dnieper River, where a ferry crossing was necessary, but the ferry was on the other shore when we arrived. The operator lived in a hut there, and he was infamous for drinking and sleeping on the job, so we began to shout, "Ferry, ferry. . ." We might have shouted ourselves hoarse, but soon we saw a wagonload of travelers approaching the hut, bound for our side of the river, and then the operator was stumbling aboard.

That day on the train made a considerable impression on this 16 year-old yeshiva boy from Liadi. I was already bewildered before the conductor shouted, "Station Smolensk." Then I saw the swarms of people in the huge station building, and I heard the shouted voices, and the whistles blowing. My brother David was waiting for me, and right away I asked him, "How can you endure such noise?"

He said, "Never mind, you will get used to it." He hailed a cab, and in 15 minutes we were at his Navrieshere Street home, near his shop.

After hugging my sister-in-law, Yache, and their little girl, Sashenka, I left to see the neighborhood. Shops and homes lined one side of the street, while on the other a small park extended to the Dnieper River, which divided the city in two. David lived in the poorer section. The other bank was on a hill where, night after night, the glow from the fireplaces of elegant homes turned the city into a jeweled necklace. I would never be able to tear my eyes away from it.

Two bridges spanned the Dnieper in Smolensk. One led to a church, with a large door at its base. The church was called the Mother of God, and David said that in all of Russia there were only two churches of such holiness, here and in Kiev. He warned me, "If you ever go through that door, for God's sake don't forget to remove your hat. If you don't, a God fearing gentile will knock it off, with your head inside it." I would never forget that warning.

On that first night in Smolensk, David took me to the theater, to a performance of Nikolai Gogol's *The Inspector General.* I understood very little about the action of the play, but the characters Dobchinsky and Bochinsky amused me greatly, and that's how my first day in Smolensk played itself out. As I lay in bed that night, unable to sleep because of noise in the streets, I compared my first day in Smolensk with the one in Liubovich, and I was very much satisfied.

The following morning I began to learn my new trade, and I loved it from the start. In the course of the next few months, I became an expert, in sewing on the machine, which I always enjoyed, but also at cutting cloth. In order to legally work anywhere in Russia, I signed a three year contract as an apprentice boy.

My brother was highly satisfied with my work. He wrote home, and said I had taken to it with the same enthusiasm I used to have for learning Gemara.

The City of Smolensk enlivened me. I acquired new friends, and in a very short time I became familiar with every corner of the city. I especially loved the Lapatienski Orchard. Every night a military orchestra played there. Handsome officers strolled with their ladies, and sometimes there were displays of fireworks. That made me ecstatic, since the only fireworks I had ever seen were in Liadi, when Czar Nikolai was coronated. In those first days, I walked around the city as if in a dream. I described all I had seen in a letter home, and my father responded. He said that until he'd received my letter he had hoped that I would soon come home to become a mensch.

I played for a whole year in Smolensk; in summer, in the parks and woods on the days we didn't work; in the evenings, at the theater; and in winter, most of the time on a frozen pond. David bought me a pair of skates, and when I was out on the ice I couldn't tear myself away. I learned various tricks, and many people envied me. I had always been quick on my feet, and the blood seethed and boiled in me. When I returned from skating, I could have eaten half an ox. My brother would watch me eat, and he'd say, "The skates I gave you will make a poor man of me," but he would quickly add, "Eat, eat, my brother, I enjoy watching you eat."

All these lighthearted times lasted one year, but then came an end to my playing.

I SET OUT TO REBUILD THE WORLD

In one year, I had become more than just a craftsman; I had become a specialist. I loved the work; I really did take to it with the same enthusiasm I had when learning Gemara. When a shoemaker came with an order, he would tell my brother that only I should do the cutting. Hearing that gave me great pleasure, but one thing annoyed me: I noticed that the other workers kept secrets from me. If they were having a conversation, they became silent when I approached; they continued singing songs I'd never heard before, but when they came to certain passages, the words stopped and they began to hum. When I asked to hear the words, they smiled, and made excuses as to why they couldn't repeat them to me. We had been good friends all year, and now, suddenly, this.

One Sabbath day I went for a walk with one of the workers, and he began to tell me the reason for their secrets. He said they were starting "a great conspiracy;" they wanted to "bring down the kaizer."

I interpreted the word conspiracy to mean they had a great army, but I could make no sense of what he meant by "bring down the kaizer."

"What does that mean?" I asked, and I threw questions at him: "How will you do it?" and, "Will they let you?"

He answered, "We will make a *statshke*, and we will take him down."

"What exactly is a statshke?" I wanted to know.

He said, "A statshke means we will not work, until we have taken him down."

I didn't understand, but when he asked me to go with him to the forest on the next Sabbath, and there someone would explain, I agreed to go. When he said that until then I must "hold to the conspiracy," I was completely confused. What would I do with such a group, I wondered, but I realized I wouldn't get a satisfying answer from him, so I made up my mind to wait until the Sabbath. Then I would see what I could learn, but by mid-week I was wondering, *What will I do with such an army*? So I asked my comrade, "Tell me, I beg you, what will be with the great conspiracy?"

He answered, "In the forest, in the forest, and don't ask any more questions."

Finally, it was Sabbath morning, a fine day in the first week of May. The few miles from town to the forest were just a pleasant walk. The forest was proudly beautiful, the air a pleasure to breathe, and I was so young, so young.

I saw an army of boys and girls, so I concluded that this very army was the great conspiracy that I had held to for the whole week. Some of the boys and girls were singing a song in Yiddish, and after that a Russian song. I had heard the songs in my brother's shop, but in the forest they had a different sound; now the words were so cordial, the singing so hearty, that they warmed my young blood

A young girl took a stand on a tree stump. She announced the presence of a guest, one who would clarify why we had come to the forest. Then a young man walked up, and his appearance made a very strong impression on me. He was tall and handsome, with blond, wavy hair, and he began to speak in Russian; I could speak and understand it well by then,

and I listened to him as attentively as I had listened to the head of the yeshiva when he went over a new lesson with us. The more I heard, the more I was captivated.

He spoke of justice and righteousness. He painted a picture of how humans should live, how there exists enough of all the good things in the world so that all may live happily and satisfied. And he addressed the Jewish question; he pointed out how unjust the world had always been towards our people, especially in Russia, with its persecutions and *pogroms*.

My God, I thought, *who is this man? Is he an angel sent from God? Is he a prophet?*

I left the forest that day a different person from when I entered it. Things that had seemed self evident I now perceived in a different light. I began attending meetings and assemblies, but I wasn't able to get an answer to all my questions; no one knew any more than I did, so I remained unsatisfied. I took to seeking, searching, and reading good books. I read without choosing, whatever came into my hands. I was especially pleased to read a book that Russian authorities had declared illegal. I attended lectures by many high school and college students. I learned a lot from them, but I still wasn't satisfied. Many things were still unclear to me. Meanwhile, I accepted invitations to speak at many meetings, at which I received numerous compliments.

After one of those meetings, something happened that at first caused me a great deal of trouble, and later, long years of happiness and joy.

A tall, slender girl came up to me, grasped both my hands, and said, "Congratulations, my friend." Then she gave me a big kiss, on the lips. I was bewildered, but I can't deny that I very much enjoyed the kiss. I had admired that girl from a distance, but by nature I had always been shy, and since I had taken on the task of rebuilding the world, how did I have time for girls?

Her name was Vera Barisovna Shteinback, later my wife and dear companion in life, and after that kiss, and with the fire of my hot soul and young blood, I quickly fell in love, but at first that caused me quite a lot of pain and anguish; my Vera was a flirt by nature, and once, a bit shyly, I said, "You are causing me shame."

She asked, "What does shame mean?" I didn't want to tell her that the Yiddish word I had used, *bzion*, meant shame, so I told her the word meant embarrassment. Hearing that, she embraced me, and kissed me, again and again. I don't say all this to disparage her, but because, as I see it now, it was just a game for her; she wanted to tease me a little, so I would love her even more, but even without her doing that, I would have loved her with all the fire of my heart and soul.



Vera and Samuel in Smolensk -- 1902

On Friday evenings in 1901 and 1902, my group had open discussions with a group of Zionists. One of my philosophical opponents was a 60-year-old Jewish doctor, a distinguished older man who had risen to the rank of colonel in the Russian army. People said he was the only Jew in all of Russia who had achieved such a high rank. He wore his army uniform, and had a white beard. Compared to him, at 18 I felt like tiny David against huge Goliath, and from the start I was very nervous when arguing against his views on the subjects of poverty and injustice, but I gradually worked into my role, and I spoke with pathos, stressing that with all people free there would be no poverty or injustice.

He was one of many important people I met in those years.

Many years later, in Chelsea, Massachusetts, I heard the noted socialist and author, Dr. Chaim Zhetlowsky, speak, and I felt an electric current run through my whole body. I recognized him as the angel, or prophet, once with blonde, wavy hair, the young man who in the year 1900 I heard speak in the forest of Smolensk. I sat, riveted, throughout his presentation. Afterwards, I approached him and asked if he remembered that assembly in the forest. He looked at me with a kind smile, and said, "My dear, young man, I have gone through so much since then that it is impossible for me to recall all my public appearances."

I, too, had gone through much since then.

WE STAGE OUR FIRST PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION

In the summer of 1902, in various Russian towns, a traveling troupe of actors staged an anti-Semitic play called *Contrabandists*. In a tiny, illegal newspaper called *The Latest Reports*, accounts were published of crowds protesting the play; they had succeeded in hindering its performance. Then posters appeared in Smolensk, announcing a local performance in the hall of *Ovaryanski Sabranye*. When I saw that poster, I suddenly recalled what my father had said when I left Liadi: "... never forget that you are a Jew."

Some leaders of our movement met, to decide on a course of action. A few opposed a public protest; they argued we weren't strong yet, that if our leaders were arrested and jailed our entire local movement would suffer. We had spirited discussions on the subject, but finally, those who favored a protest won the day.

A plan was formulated. On the night of the performance, we would gather on the hall's small balcony. We would be equipped with many flyers proclaiming our protest of the play's anti-Semitism, and with a sizeable amount of snuff, wrapped in paper. We knew that in the middle of the play's first act there was a boring speech, and as soon as the speech began we would open the paper and release the snuff to the orchestra. Then we would follow with the flyers. At the same time, some of us would be seated in the orchestra, and, with the crowd sneezing and blowing their noses

from the snuff, our people would start protesting that the actors couldn't be heard. In short, we would make as much noise as possible.

Finally, the evening of the performance was at hand. We were in our agreed upon places, and the city's dignitaries were seated in the orchestra -- the governor, the chief of police, the pastor, all with their ladies in their best dresses and veils. The curtain opened, and the play began. In the orchestra, one of our members was prepared to deliver a loud sneeze, the signal for our protest to begin. We were starting to become impatient, when we heard the sneeze, and as annoyed playgoers in the front rows turned their heads, clouds of snuff were coming down. A growing chorus of sneezing began, which included sneezing by the actors on the stage. Women were screaming, the whole orchestra was covered with a blizzard of flyers, and soon everyone was scattering for the exits.

The next morning, a few people were arrested. The chief of police, as ignorant as a peasant, had heard that flyers with proclamations were a terrible thing, and as he questioned the arrested persons he kept on screaming that such flyers weren't allowed. But there was no evidence against those arrested, and after being detained for one day, they were released.

That is how our first openly public appearance ended. In response to it, a large group of Cossacks and government spies were brought to the city, so we had to give up our Friday open discussions. Our movement had become a great conspiracy.

THE BUND SEEKS TO ENTER SMOLENSK

By the end of 1900, there had been no question as to what kind of party our movement should connect to. We had known we were Social Democrats, so we chose the Russian Social Democratic Party, whose chief publication was called the *Spark*. The *Bund*, the General Union of Jewish Workers, was less well known in Russian towns.

Ninety percent of our members were Jewish, and when a young woman named Lisa Berkovich, and a few others, came to Smolensk from Minsk, and when Berkovich became a member of our committee, she argued for an alliance with the Bund; after all, she said, it concerned itself with Jewish matters, as well as with Socialist ones. She also urged both Jewish cultural autonomy, and communication with the Jewish masses in Yiddish, the language we knew best. I tended to sympathize with those views.

Once, to deal with important questions, we had a meeting, and we invited a local revolutionary whose advice we often sought. He brought a Polish man, who came highly recommended by the Bund. Later, when we became better acquainted, I learned that his name was Stanislav Goldberg, though, conspiratorially, we called him "Shloime." He was slightly built, with a neat, little black beard, and black eyes that seemed to pierce right through to one's soul. He stuttered slightly, but when he finished speaking we said that he was another August Bebel, the noted socialist writer and orator. His words were full of wisdom, and from that time on he was our leader and guide.

Shloime lectured to us twice a week, on a great variety of subjects, including what kind of governments had been instituted in Germany, England, America, and other countries; how the Belgian workers won their freedom; and how capitalism developed in England. We learned much from him, and we loved him. Under his influence, our committee affiliated with the Bund.

When an illiterate Jewish shoemaker attempted to assassinate the Governor of Vilna, Lithuania, and Jewish workers were flogged as a result, we wanted to stage a public protest. Shloime warned us not to, pointing out that we numbered only a few hundred, while there were many more Cossacks and spies than that in town. He said that our protest would lead to a bloodbath, which would then lead to a wave of anti-Semitism.

Instead of protesting, we decided to disseminate flyers, strongly announcing our support for the Lithuanian workers, hoping to convince local Christian workers to join our cause. Shloime promised to write a proclamation for the next day, but I decided I couldn't wait; I was full of rage, which I needed to transmit to the masses -- immediately. As soon as Shloime left, I sat down and began to write, and in my mind I was transported to the suffering workers of Lithuania. All of my rage came out on the piece of white paper that lay before me.

The committee met the next day, and Shloime read his proclamation. It was written very intelligently, and cleverly. Then I said that I, also, had written a proclamation. I started to read it, and when I finished, Shloime stood and tore up his copy. Then he put his arms around me, kissed me on both cheeks, and said, "This is the proclamation we will use."

We worked for several hours, on three hectographs. In the morning, four couples carrying bundles went off for what we hoped would look like innocent walks. They stopped now and then at neighborhood plants, and

distributed the flyers, and then, with rapidly beating hearts, they went off to work for the day.

The next morning there was considerable chaos in town. The Cossacks and spies ran around as if they had been poisoned, but no one was arrested, and there was no bloodbath. The Bund sent us instructions to organize the area's small villages. We were told how to make connections with important individuals in all of them, and we set to work. On every Sabbath and holiday, we traveled to a different village, to address meetings, and to hand out brochures provided by the Bund.

The first of May, 1903, was approaching.

The Bund had advised us not to stage any open demonstrations, and we decided to observe the next Sabbath in the forest. We stationed guards on all the roads, and all that afternoon a procession of young couples walked on the road towards the tall trees. The mood was festive, and as evening approached, the holiday began. We were singing "La Marseillaise," when, suddenly, we heard a signal from the guards: The police were coming.

We had brought a large number of recruits, and just before the police arrived we told them all to say the same thing, that they had come to the forest to celebrate May Day, which was customary in Smolensk. Then we were surrounded by police. Our good fortune was that the week before, the Cossacks had been sent to other towns, where demonstrations had been expected.

We were arrested, and held overnight in the large courtyard of a police station. At our interrogation, all of us said we had come to celebrate May Day. They released all but ten of us, but I was one of the ten. They took us to a jail outside town, and we were put in a single cell.

The stench from the slops pail was unbearable, but I was mainly concerned about one thing, that if they found my apartment I would be in serious trouble; all of our illegal literature was there, along with the hectographs, and special ink for printing. But I had hope that my landlady would not betray me; I considered her to be a friend of our cause.

For ten days, we banged on the walls, protesting that we were choking in the foul air. That, obviously, didn't help, and on the eleventh day the police came in with my landlady. They asked her if she recognized her tenant among us, and I thought I was finished. She looked carefully at each of us. Then she said that she had never seen any of us before.

The next morning they released us all. Vera met me nearby. She told me that I would have to leave Smolensk immediately. She had encountered my landlady, who told her that one of my neighbors, who had often seen me enter my apartment, knew me, and would identify me to the police.

I ESCAPE FROM RUSSIA

I went to my brother's house and washed up, and that evening I fled to Vilna, arriving hungry, exhausted, and cold; it was quite cool, and I had run off with inadequate clothing. I wanted to eat, and to go inside for warmth, but I was afraid to stop moving; my passport had been withheld in Smolensk, there were many policemen at the train station, and they all seemed to be looking at me with suspicion, so I took a horse-cab and went off to an address that was recommended to me by the Bund. I hoped that I would be able to get something to eat there, and to get some rest.

I found the man I was looking for at home. He read the introductory letter I had for him, and he said that, unfortunately, I couldn't stay at his place, but he offered to take me to the nearby country home of comrades. He was certain I could stay there until arrangements could be made for me to cross the border, but there was a problem at the country home, too; a servant had been poisoned, and police would soon be there to investigate.

Meanwhile, they noticed that my teeth were chattering from the cold, so they gave me a glass of warm tea and a slice of bread, and I felt better. Then they took me back to Vilna, to a house I still recall happily many years later. A woman lived there with her two grown daughters, and never had I seen three such beauties in one house. They welcomed me with

great warmth, and I was very grateful when they asked if I was hungry, but I'm afraid I must have made a terrible impression; I was so hungry that I ate like a wild man. Then I begged them to let me lie down and rest. I slept for more than 20 hours, and after that I felt much better.

My intention was to travel to America, but after weeks of complications, and with God's help, I only managed to reach Hamburg, Germany. I boarded a ship there for London, and let me tell you it was no *Queen Mary*. I had seen a tiny ferryboat in Smolensk, on the Dnieper River, but I had never seen a ship that went on the sea. This one was a huge, black, filthy trough, and I was one in a small army of emigrants led into its dark interior. Gradually, the dim light revealed rows of cots, with one big room for men and women. The air was foul with the smell of coal dust, but when I hurried outside, where coal was being unloaded, the wind soon filled my nose with the dust.

Finally, thanks to Him who lives eternally, they finished unloading the coal, and by then it was time for supper. We were called up to the deck, where each of us was given a huge salted herring, and a large potato in its skin. It took three days to reach London, and at every meal we got the same huge herring and potato. Finally, as we neared London, I stood on the deck, thinking, *I'm coming to a foreign land, I don't know the language, I don't know anyone, and I have only a few centimes in my pocket. What am I going to do?*

I must have looked confused. A man came up to me and asked why I was so deep in thought. He spoke Yiddish with a Polish accent, and I told him of my predicament. He comforted me, and said not to worry, that I wouldn't get lost. He said he was from Warsaw, that he was a tailor, and that he knew London very well. If I wished, he would take me to the place where he was going; I would be able to stay there overnight, and the next morning I could go looking for work.

I was certain he was not a Polish tailor but, rather, an angel from heaven. After going through procedures with immigration officials, which did not take long, I went with him, got off the ship, and took to striding the streets of London.

PART THREE

LONDON

1903 -- 1906

THE FIRST DAYS OF MY NEW LIFE

Early next morning the Warsaw tailor led me to Blek Lane, pointed to a shoe factory, and said, "There you will find work for yourself." It was Mindl's Shoe Factory, the only one in London's East End where the machines didn't run on human foot power, but I didn't know that. I thought all such machines required the use of pedals. I went upstairs, and the foreman, a Polish Jew named Patshinki, immediately sat me down to work. I started my machine, and it ran for a moment, then stopped. I didn't know what to do about that, and all the workers were laughing at me. I thought that surely all foreigners who worked were socialists, yet here, instead of helping out they were laughing at me.

One of the workers came over and showed me how the machine worked, but at one o'clock it wouldn't even start. It seemed to be broken, and again the workers were laughing at me. Finally, they explained that between one and two the power was turned off, and no matter how hard I pushed on the pedal at that time the machine wouldn't run; the pedal was only used to start the machine. I was beginning to have the greenhorn in me de-greened.

The man who showed me how to run the machine introduced himself. He said his name was Chaskl, and that he was a Socialist Revolutionary from Kiev. He lifted one pant leg, and said, "You see that cut on my foot? That was done during a demonstration, by a Cossack with a whip. I grabbed him by his leg, pulled him from his horse, and beat him thoroughly. Only

a Socialist Revolutionary could do that. A Social Democrat never would have done it. Are you a Socialist Revolutionary?"

I replied, "No, I am a Social Democrat."

"Aha," he said, "a dark-minded one, but no matter. As long as you are a socialist, I will enlighten you. And do you have a place to stay?" I told him that I had arrived only the day before, and that I had stayed the night in a place not far from the factory.

"Listen, I like you," he said. "Would you be willing to live in a communal house?" He said that he and five other young men lived together in one house, that they bought their food communally, and ate supper together, and that the atmosphere in the house was cheerful.

I was very enthused. I said I would like very much to be with them, and after the day's work we went off to his commune, at 27 Entcliffe Street. They had already bought all kinds of good food -- herring, onions, eggs, and chocolate to drink. I hadn't eaten food like that for a very long time.

Each night, a different person in the commune did the shopping, and on the fourth night it was my turn. They wrote out a shopping list for me, but what I really needed was the street number of our house. In that section of London all the houses looked alike, both inside and out; to mark the right one, I left the door open, but someone closed it when I was gone, and the door to the next house had been left open. I returned with the food, walked through the open door, then threw open the first door on the right. The room was dark. Where were the cheerful friends I left there? I called out, "I'm hungry; don't play jokes on me." Suddenly a door across the hall opened, and a very tall, very big gentile appeared in the doorway.

I was certain there was no such person in our house, and I thought I had crawled into the wrong house. I turned to leave, and the big gentile yanked on my collar. It felt like he was going to choke me. I had already learned some English, so I grabbed two words, "Mister, Please." I showed him the bags of food, but he paid them no attention. He just held my collar tighter, dragged me out of the house, and took me to Whitechapel Road. I gestured with my hands that he was choking me, but he wouldn't let go.

In one minute, we were surrounded by hundreds of people. A London bobby on a horse came over, and he was a giant. He wore a tall hat, which made him look even bigger than he was, and his horse was one of the largest I had ever seen, but thanks to the eternal God, the gentile let go of my collar and I began to breathe again. The policeman twirled his club cold-bloodedly, and I looked around for someone to whom I could tell my misfortune. Then I saw my landlady, Mrs. Green, as well as the whole commune, both coming towards me. They said they had been out looking for me. Mrs. Green rescued me, I explained to my friends what had happened, and that is how my first night of shopping in London came to an end.

THE KISHINEV POGROM CREATES A SENSATION IN LONDON

Bit by bit, as I became accustomed to my surroundings, I became my true self again. I joined the Ofer Machinist Union, and the Yiddish branch of the English Social Democratic Federation. On every street corner there was a small shop with an open window, and in the window, in a huge kettle, they fried fish and potatoes; and every day at noon I ate the fried fish and the fried potatoes. They presented a thousand new tastes for me. Only to one thing could I not get quickly accustomed: When I stood outside the shop at break time, and I read the latest news from Bund, or the Russian newspaper, *Iscrow*, or some other newspaper that was once illegal for me, and when I saw a policeman coming down the street, I quickly hid the paper. It took me a long time until I accustomed myself to the idea I was in a free country, and that no one cared what I read.

Then, suddenly, certain news spread through the streets of London; a pogrom had taken place in the Russian city of Kishinev. The newspapers described it in a way that made our blood boil; 49 Jews had been killed, more than 500 injured. A furor of activity broke out in all our organizations. Conferences were held, and an open demonstration was scheduled, starting with a march to Hyde Park. When the day of the march arrived, thousands of people assembled very early. What made a very strong impression on me was the bobbies on horseback, assembled in front of the crowd, and the dozens more, on horseback and on foot, peacefully keeping

the rows of marchers in order. For the first time I understood the meaning of freedom, and with all my heart I blessed it.

Then the march began. We expressed our anger at the Russian government, shouting, "*Dalae schmodierzuavyo, da zdravstvoyet, svabode*" -- Away with autocracy, long live freedom -- and other revolutionary outcries. We cooled our hot blood with them. In Hyde Park, the crowd grew so large that dozens of speaker platforms had to be set up. All of the speakers insisted that the Russian government was seeking to prolong its hold on power by spilling Jewish blood, but that its end was near.

In the evening, there was a mass meeting in a large hall. It was on Commercial Road, and I can't recall its name, but I had never seen the size and likes of it. There were many prominent speakers, but the highlight of the evening, for me, was when legendary Scientific Anarchist and writer Peter Kropotkin was introduced. He spoke slowly, and in a low tone, but with so much hatred of the Russian government that he instilled new life in me. The meeting concluded with a collection of a large sum of money for the victims of the pogrom. Then we all quietly separated, with hope that the czarist government would not long endure.

OUR MOVEMENT COMES ALIVE

In that summer of 1903, when the pogroms began in Russia -- first in Kishinev, later in Bialystok, Siedice, and other cities -- large crowds began coming daily to London. Every movement acquired many new members, including our branch of the English Social Democratic Federation. Most of our members were poor workers, newly arrived greenhorns, but none lacked enthusiasm, and everyone contributed to his fullest capacity. At every meeting we discussed the questions of publishing our own weekly newspaper, and of finding a People's House.

One day we received a report that the committee had found a suitable building. It was in the center of the Jewish neighborhood, and only three houses away from a house of prayer. It consisted of a long, very large hall, with a large cellar beneath. The hall would be used for meetings, lectures, and concerts, the cellar for a kitchen and printing presses. Many contributed their last few shillings to the cause, and soon the place was ours. In a short time, the building was ready, and everyone was overjoyed.

Soon it was yontev, holiday time, and our opening banquet began one of the great holidays of my life. Seated at the head table were the leaders of the English Socialist Democratic Federation: a member of parliament named Genosse Hindman, and other major figures. It's difficult to describe the importance of what began in that overfilled hall, with its great holiday spirit. We began to hold Sunday evening forums there, with very great speakers, and there was no shortage of those in London. We

heard Tsherhekov and Aladin, who was later a deputy in the first Russian Parliament, and many others. The great Kropotkin came on occasion, though not often, as he was very old by then.

One of the leaders of our movement was a remarkable man named Genosse Bec. There seemed to be nothing he couldn't do. Born a Russian, he had always lived among Jews, and he spoke and wrote Yiddish fluently. If we needed a chef in the kitchen, he could prepare Jewish dishes that people loved. He was a very good speaker, and from time to time he served as a lecturer. When we decided we wanted a choir, Bec put together 50 singers who were invited to sing for a number of socialist organizations; they were always well received. When we wanted an amateur theater, Bec organized that, too. We staged such plays as *God, Man, and Devil*, by Jacob Gordin, and other great productions, all with great success.

Later, when we decided to publish a weekly socialist newspaper, Bec was chosen editor. Our assistant editor was a highly intelligent young man named Chaim Tatorski, a former yeshiva boy. I became a close friend of Tatorski. When I wrote something for the paper, he would point out my mistakes, especially my tendency, while writing in Yiddish, to use too many Russian words. Later, he introduced me to writer I. J. Breuer. Breuer made a strongly negative impression on me with his gloomy appearance, though he paid me a big compliment; he said, "Write, write, young man; you will someday write something important, because you have the spark."

Our paper was called the *New Times*, and the first issue of our beloved child was set up in our cellar. We carried the setup plates on a pushcart, to be taken to the printer, but a disaster occurred: The plate for one page was dropped, and it shattered. There wasn't time to remake it, so we published the paper with one blank page, and we inserted an explanation. Everyone involved was in a Day of Atonement mood.

Now, when I look back 50 years, and I remind myself of what great joy we felt when we opened the People's House, and when we began to publish the paper, I doubt whether the greatest joy in anyone's personal life could compare to it. On shabes morning, I would bring a bundle of the *New Times* to Whitechapel Road. I would sell them there, and come back breathless with excitement. I would hand over the money, and take more papers, and experience the greatest pleasure that anyone could imagine. In my mind, each person who bought a paper was a recruit who would help us bring the social revolution. Ah, young years, dear years.

CHEAP TICKETS,

AND A LETTER FROM VERA

A few months after arriving in London, I was walking in the street and I met a movement friend from Smolensk -- Lazer Epstein. I was overjoyed to see him. He had been in London only a few days, and he wasn't yet employed. I brought him into my commune, and the next day I took him to the factory where I worked. The foreman offered to hire him, if first he would get a haircut. Lazer had a head of shaggy hair, like that of a sheep waiting to be shorn, and the next day he had a small amount of hair removed, enough to work, but no one could persuade him to do more.

We went, together, to see vaudeville at the Standard Theater. I had no idea it didn't attract the finest kind of audience. We bought the cheapest tickets, and went up to the balcony, where we stood and began to enjoy the show. Then our neighbors noticed my friend with the wild hair, and they began pushing him, from one person to the next. He became very angry, and he kept screaming, in Russian, "Leave me alone," and the more he screamed the more they pushed. Then, suddenly, they stopped pushing. A short time later Lazer said to me, "Zalman, do you know what those nasty people did? They urinated in my pocket."

I said, "It's time to go home," and we left.

A few weeks later, the great actress Sarah Bernhardt came to London. How could we not have gone to see her perform? She was appearing on London's fashionable West Side, so we had no fear of going. We bought balcony tickets again, but this time we had seats. A girl was sitting next to me, and one of her boots, beneath her seat, had a long, sharp rod sticking out of it. When Bernhardt appeared on stage, there was loud applause, and the girl stabbed me, hard, in the foot. I sprang up in pain, gave her a dirty look, and quietly said, "Please!" It didn't help. Soon she made another move, stabbing me in the foot again. Lazer asked, "Why are you jumping around like a goat?"

"What are you talking about?" I said. "I'm so overwhelmed by the performance that it's lifting me out of my seat."

At intermission, we went out to smoke. Coming back, I arranged for Lazer to sit next to the girl. The performance resumed, and soon he was springing into the air. I gestured towards the stage, and said, "Ah, yes, Bernhardt performs so well." Then the girl stabbed Lazer again. This time he jumped up, and shouted, in Russian, "What kind of madness is this?"

Everyone in the gallery turned to look at us, and Lazer said, "Come, I've had enough, of vaudeville and theater." We left in the middle of the performance, and for a long time, when we staged our own performances for friends, we told stories of our nights in the balconies of London.

At Purim time in 1904, I received a letter from my Vera, which I read and reread, but I still couldn't grasp its meaning. Vera said that I wasn't writing to her as often as before, and when she hadn't received letters from me she thought that I'd changed, that my feelings for her had cooled. She suspected I was in love with another woman, and she asked me to write and to tell her the truth. She wanted me to know that Stanislav Goldberg, the man we called Shloime, had separated from his wife, and that he was

pursuing her with declarations of love. She said she still loved me, but that if my feelings for her had cooled, maybe she would marry Shloime.

I immediately wrote back to her, said that I did have a beloved in London, which is why I'd written less often, but I assured her that my beloved was not a woman; it was The Revolution. That was all she needed to know. In May of 1904, Vera came to me in London. She was robbed at the border, and she arrived with empty pockets, the same fortune I had brought with me. But I now possessed the princely sum of six shillings. With only that, we began our married life, but there was no limit to our joy. We lived in a single room, but it was our palace.

NOW BACK TO THE PEOPLE'S HOUSE

Beside the great joy and personal comfort we derived from our People's House, we also experienced many problems there. The anarchist movement was thriving in London at the time, and the movement paper, the *Worker's Friend*, was selling well. I saw our movement in terms of spirituality, but in theirs I saw only sensuality. A number of their lectures were on the theme of free love. Among the anarchists were people as annoying as houseflies. We could never rid ourselves of them. They would slip into the People's House, and climb on a stool, and -- it didn't matter how many or how few people were in the room at the time -- they'd begin to preach free love, using such filthy language that I'd be ashamed to lift my eyes. They'd be armed with a heavy piece of iron, so it was dangerous to try throwing them out. The leader of their gang, Greenshtein, was a filthy creature who would barge in to our Sunday evening forums, and interrupt the lecture in whatever way he could. Afterwards, when he asked a question, he would deliver a lecture of his own, and call our speaker by the ugliest names.

One Sunday, a well-known Russian socialist revolutionary named Tshaikovski spoke. After the lecture, Greenshtein asked to speak. Tshaikovski said he wouldn't answer him, and that he didn't want to hear his insults, so Greenshtein started shouting obscenities. Our only reasonable response was to throw him out of the room.

It wasn't an easy thing to do, but we overcame him and threw him out. Before leaving, though, he managed to do one small thing. At the

entrance to the room there was a pipe that brought in heat; Greenshtein tore the pipe from the wall. Flames shot into the room, and blew themselves out, and gas began pouring out of the pipe. The room was packed with people, a tremendous stampede ensued, and we barely managed to get out alive.

We came to the reluctant decision to have a policeman at our forums, and to refuse entry to any more anarchists.

At that time, the Days of Awe were approaching. A question arose about Yom Kippur, whether we would keep the People's House open on that day. After all, we had a restaurant in the house. Many argued that to close on Yom Kippur would be dishonest to our socialist principles. But my father's admonition, about never forgetting I was a Jew, still rang in my ears, so I argued for closing. I used the biblical principle, "With your laws and customs do not tamper." I said that the anarchists made Yom Kippur into a joyous holiday, but that we must not do that, especially when our People's House was a short distance from a house of prayer.

My arguments and principles were rejected. For the *Kol Nidre* service, on the evening of Yom Kippur, a lecture was arranged. The room was full. Before the lecture began, people stood around at the buffet, most of them eating heartily.

Suddenly, many strangers rushed into the room. They went to the buffet, and started punching those who stood behind and near the counter. They broke and threw down the dishes and the food, everything that was spread out on the buffet. Meanwhile, outside, there was howling and screaming, and stones came crashing through the windows. There was panic in the room.

Our people were rushing out the doors, while outside, the street was packed with bobbies on horseback. They pushed at the crowd from all

sides. Whichever way the people ran, they were pelted with stones and bottles, and that was how Kol Nidre of 1904 came to an end.

A few weeks passed, and gradually people stopped talking about Kol Nidre. Our lives returned to normal, to attending lectures and concerts, and to raising money for our paper, the *New Times*; that demanded much of our energy, since every week there were the same problems -- too little money for the printer and the typesetters.

Every week each of us contributed his last shilling. Once, when I had no money to contribute, I took my one and only holiday outfit to the pawnshop, got 10 shillings for it, and, with great joy, brought the money as a contribution.

The anarchists were still preaching at every street corner; free love and the revolution still had not arrived.

Our People's House was like a beehive. Every Sunday there was a forum, with prominent speakers; every Sabbath evening a concert or theater performance, with many rehearsals during the week. Our choir had become highly reputed on London's radical East Side. We performed a few times each week. I recall one song, with a proud solo for a bass voice, that was especially stirring. It was requested at every concert. The words were in Russian, and referred to the Dnieper River.

Both Vera and I were employed, and we earned good salaries. After work we would meet at the People's House, eat a good supper with friends, and enjoy ourselves until late in the night. We had a new apartment, larger and more attractive than our first, and on free evenings it was full of friends -- singing, debating, and laughing. We no longer yearned for the childhood homes where we had lived such lovely lives, and we were deeply in love.

My friend, Chaim Tatorski, often said to Vera, "You know, your husband looks like a bourgeois. You need to look for a different man, one who looks like a proletarian."

Vera answered, "He may look the way he looks, but he has a proletarian soul, and a heart that responds to every cry of pain."

About that time, Russia entered into war with Japan. We all wished that the land of pogroms would have a downfall, and we hoped that something good would come of the war, but we didn't have much hope. Japan against the mighty Russian Bear looked like a fly against an elephant.

Then, suddenly, large headlines appeared in all the newspapers: The Russian Bear had received a death blow from tiny Japan; its navy was disrupted, its army badly beaten. The thoroughly rotten czarist government had begun to shake. The priest, Gafan, had led an army to the czar's palace. A new headline appeared: "The Czar Grants a Constitution to the Land!"

The first Russian parliament was called together, and our joy was indescribable. We embraced and kissed each other at every meeting. At every Sabbath we held a farewell for recruits that the Bund, and other Russian organizations abroad, were sending back to help with the revolution. As we said farewell we kissed each other, and in everyone's eyes there were tears of joy. I felt, with all my instincts, that I had to help in the battle with the Kremlin, but I had just become a father; Vera had given me a son, Benjamin, on the first of December 1905. *What will she do in London alone*, I worried. *Could she earn enough to live on with the child*?

Vera said to me, "What do you mean you will stay here, when you can make yourself useful there? Go, make the trip!"

On the next Sabbath, I signed up to be one of the recruits, but financial assets had declined at the Bund; it was expensive to send new people, a few weeks would pass until funds could be replenished, and during that period different news began coming from Russia. New pogroms had begun, demonstrators were being shot, the parliament was driven out. In our homes, a new mood reigned, as if a seriously ill person was lying there. In the People's House, the great joy was gone.

At that time I was chairman of the Treadle Machine Operators Union. The union was strong, and we decided to make demands to the bosses. Work hours were from eight in the morning to eight in the evening. It was decided to demand a ten hour work day, and higher wages.

Mani Laib, who later became a well-known poet in America, was a member of our union. He was a handsome, dear young man, and he spoke a fine Yiddish, with no Russian words. I envied him for that, but he seemed to look down on us, which was not to my liking. He was one of those who opposed making demands of the bosses. He said it would lead to a strike, and he thought we didn't have the strength to win a strike. It would turn out that he was right, but the union had made its decision, and soon a strike was declared.

Meanwhile, my brother, Chaim Jacob, lived with his family in New York, and for a long time he had been writing, urging us to come to America. I had always laughed at that idea. Wouldn't I soon be returning to Russia? But after more than 12 weeks, when the strike looked like a lost cause, I decided with Vera to write to Chaim Jacob, and to have him send us boat tickets. Yes, we would travel to America.

And that is how, on the 22nd of May, 1906, we arrived in free, bright America, blessed may that day be.

PART FOUR

WE TRAVEL TO AMERICA AND I FIND WORK THERE, BUT NOT WITHOUT SOME TROUBLE

Today, more than 47 years from the day we arrived in God's blessed land, I very well recall our journey on the ship *New York*, and the early morning when my brother Chaim Jacob met us at Ellis Island.

The ship looked like a palace compared to the dark, black bucket which took me from Hamburg to London. The trip took eight days, and on the first two we were so sick that we gave back everything we had eaten for many weeks before. Our tiny child, Benele [Little Ben], suffered so much it was God's mercy to look at him, but then we had three and a half days that were a genuine joy. The sea was smooth as a mirror, and the ship cut the water so majestically it was a pleasure to behold. We were in a festive mood, and we took to playing various games. Joyous laughter was heard all around. Benele, then six months old, had in a single day regained the healthy color in his cheeks. He became the main attraction for everyone on the ship.

Then, suddenly, the heavens turned cloudy. The ship's crew began unwinding heavy rope on deck. Everyone was told that a storm was coming, that if we needed to go on deck we had to grasp a heavy rope there, to avoid being washed overboard by a huge wave. And the storm arrived. A deluge, a terrible downpour, descended on us. It was

impossible to see the skies, or, sometimes, even the sea. Waves rose hundreds of feet in the air, throwing tons of water onto the deck. Our ship, which had moved so majestically through the water, was like a children's plaything in the waves. The back of the ship would dip itself in the sea, with the nose rearing up, its point to the sky. Then the nose would sink back in the sea. It seemed the ship would surely run aground, though suddenly it would turn on its side, and when I was sure it would turn over it would creep up from the deep water, and turn on its other side. With every turn, our stomachs turned as well. Women wrung their hands and cried. Elderly Jews sat quietly and prayed, while non-Jews constantly crossed themselves.

The terrible storm continued for two days and two nights, but as God grants years, one gets over everything, however terrifying. Twelve hours before our ship arrived in New York the storm calmed down.

People were shouting, "Land ho." I don't know whether Columbus was more elated than we were, but I cannot imagine a greater good fortune and greater joy than we knew. Here we were on Ellis Island. Chaim Jacob met us, and we all rejoiced, and soon we were traveling on a streetcar, driven by two horses. The driver was standing in the wagon. I was amazed at that. When I left Smolensk, in 1903, an electric street car was running, and here there was so much backwardness. But the East Side of New York made a good impression on me.

It was a bright day in May, and everything looked so shiny and lively. I saw Jews everywhere, and what a sight, I thought. Even the Jewish East End of London couldn't compare to this. There was the *Forverts* [Forward] building, where that newspaper was published, and I had the same feeling as if I had seen a brother of mine. Before entering the house I bought a *Forverts* and a *Tseit Geist*, the weekly paper that the *Forverts* published.

My brother's house, on Montgomery Street, was a big disappointment. If there was a window anywhere it looked at the wall of another building a few feet away, so the four small rooms were all half dark. They gave us one of them, and it had no window. My brother and his wife had six children, with a seventh on the way. In Russia he had been a teacher, and when he came to New York he chose to make his living the same way. He climbed four or five flights of stairs, ten times a day, to study Jewishness with each of his students. He was no Rothschild, of course. After our first night in his house my Vera said to her sister-in-law, "Chiah Sorah, cats were running around all night in the room. Why do you have so many cats in your house?"

Chiah Sorah replied, "Cats? We have no cats." A feeling of horror came over us.

In short, we were living in a real palace. There were eight families on each floor, and in the hall were two toilets. We always had to wait in line.

I had a quiet conference with Vera, and we agreed not to stay for a long time at my brother's, but we would have to suffer for a while. We had come to America with no money, and I still owed my brother for the boat tickets.

I looked over the job advertisements in the *Morning Journal*, but they weren't looking for shoemaker machinists. In the *Forverts*, I found an announcement for a meeting of the Bund. I went to the meeting, hoping that I might meet people I knew in London. I met a man named Valodcen, who I knew very well there. In America, he had already become a boss painter and paper hanger. He said he would teach me those crafts, and he would pay me according to the value of my work. I greatly rejoiced at this offer, and the next day I became a paper hanger. I quickly learned how to cut the paper, and for the first week Valodcen gave me six dollars, and car fare, because we were working in the Bronx. I worked for a few weeks at

papering old homes, and I was already a skilled craftsman. I was earning eight dollars a week, and I was very satisfied, when suddenly, Valodcen took on a very large job. A whole row of new houses had been built, and he had the papering contract.

I was very happy. I had struck it right in America. On the first day of the new job an agent for the paperhanger's union came around, and he asked to see my union card. I told him that I wasn't a member yet, but that with God's help I would become one. He said, "Non-union men we don't have on a job."

At that, I became totally indignant. "What do you mean, no non-union men?" I asked. "Thank God, I am a good union man," and I took out the recommendation letter that my London shoemaker machinist union gave me for America. The agent read the recommendation, and there was something about the way he looked at me that I didn't like.

"You're a shoemaker by trade," he said.

I answered, "Yes."

"And here you are learning?" he asked.

"Yes, and I like it very much," I said.

"Mister, get out of here," he said, "and I mean immediately. We don't take on learners. Go to your cobbler's union."

If an abyss had opened before me I would have jumped in, so bitter did I feel in my heart. So that is what they call brothers, I thought. Conscientious workers? That is how the American worker's movement treats a good union man, a revolutionary? I couldn't believe the union agent had properly understood me. How could such a good union man as

I was, and a socialist at that, be thrown off his job? I went to find Valodcen, and I told him what had happened.

"Yes, my friend, that's the way it is," he said. "You will have to step down from that job. If you don't, they will take down all of my workers in a strike."

If he had hit me on the head with a club, I would not have felt as terribly bad as when he said that because of me they could take everyone off the job in a strike. Off I went home, ashamed, bewildered, insulted, and with a broken heart. I didn't allow myself to take the elevated train; it wasn't worth the five cents fare. Not for the entire 150 blocks did it have any value for me.

When I came into the house, Vera was frightened. I must have looked dreadful, so strong an impact did the whole experience have on me. As always in the past, she comforted me, even though I could see that it had the same terrible effect on her.

I remained in New York until the end of August, whether working, or not working, or being sick from aggravation. Our child caught a cold, with whooping cough, and it was pitiful to see his suffering. More than once, carrying him in my arms in the middle of the night, walking around the streets, seeking a little fresh air, I was whacked on the head by a package of garbage thrown from a window. Then, on Labor Day, a young man from East Boston came to visit a friend in my brother's building, and I got to know him. His name was Mr. Shilow, and he advised me to go with him to Boston, because many shoe factories were located there.

I was more than delighted to get away from New York. I left Vera and Ben with my brother until I could send for them, and I went with Shilow to East Boston. He gave me directions to Jamaica Plain, where Plant's Shoe Factory was located. He said that if I didn't get a job there I should go to Volton's Shoe Factory, in Chelsea.

I didn't get a job in Jamaica Plain, but I did in Chelsea, and around ten o'clock in the morning I sat down to work there. I worked until five, I calculated my earnings, and I had made a dollar and a half. I felt lucky, but one thing I deeply regretted; I wanted to live near my friend Shilow. He was such a decent person, but it took more than two hours to get from Chelsea, to Jamaica Plain, then home to East Boston.

I left Chelsea that first evening after work, traveled off to Jamaica Plain, and from there to East Boston. I didn't arrive in East Boston until after seven o'clock. The Shilows were standing outside, looking for the greenhorn. I told them how lucky I felt to find a job in Chelsea, but I was very sorry that I wouldn't be able to live near them, because Chelsea was so far away.

Shilow smiled, but he said nothing. We ate a very good supper, and then I calculated my earnings again. I couldn't believe I had made a dollar and a half. I calculated, and calculated, and the total came out the same. From ten to five I had made a dollar and a half, and I wasn't even accustomed to the machine yet. When I became accustomed, I might be able to make three dollars a day, and five and a half times three dollars would make sixteen and a half dollars a week. We could become wealthy, and in a short time. And I only worked to five o'clock today. In London, we worked until eight. What could I do with that much extra time? Learn, read, write, what else?

I felt very lucky, except for one thing: to go from East Boston to Chelsea the next morning, I first had to travel to Jamaica Plain. If not for that, everything would have been wonderful.

Before going to bed, Shilow said that in the morning he would show me a quicker route to work. I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I had to be on the job at eight o'clock, but it took more than two hours to get to Chelsea,

so I decided to wake up at five, but I was afraid to fall asleep, lest I oversleep. At 2 a.m. the clock rang two times, but I still hadn't slept; at 3 a.m. three times, but still no sleep; 4 a.m. four times, still no sleep. At 5 a.m. it rang five times, but thank God it was time to rise. I got up and washed my face, but Shilow was still sleeping. At 6 a.m. he was still sleeping. I gave a loud cough, thinking maybe he would wake up, but he kept sleeping. By half past six, and a quarter to seven, my whole calculation of getting rich in America had disappeared. Because of that man I would lose my job.

Finally, there was movement in Shilow's room. He got up, dressed slowly, washed his face, took out his *tallis* bag, put on his tallis, and started to pray.

Woe is me, I thought, this man is crazy. I grabbed my coat, and started to run. Shilow was praying, but he gestured to me, pointing forcefully down with his finger -- *Sit down, right away*! I was thinking, too bad, I'm due for a disaster, but I sat down, though right away I felt the need to get up again. Then, thanks to the Eternal One, Shilow finished praying. He poured tea for us, but his tea didn't go down well in my throat. "Shilow," I finally said, "I am going to lose my job," and I thought to myself, *What kind of sick madman is this Shilow*?

We went out of the house, and a streetcar was stopped nearby. I started running to it, but Shilow grabbed my hand and wouldn't let me move. Then he started to walk, and he gestured for me to follow. We were walking over a bridge, and coming to a building, and somehow the building looked familiar. Shilow asked, "How would you like to work in this factory?"

I looked at him.

He said, "Yes, go in, this is where you worked yesterday."

Chelsea was across a footbridge from East Boston. I looked at the clock on the wall. It had taken 12 minutes to walk there. For a long time, we had something to laugh about, but for a while I hadn't felt like laughing.

The next day, after supper, Shilow and his wife led me to Wood Island Park, a five minute walk from their house. There was an outlet from the sea at Wood Island, where people went bathing in the summer. I even rejoiced when some mosquitoes stung me; there were no mosquitoes in London or New York, because the air in those places was a bit too strong for them. Only people and horses could live in such climates.

Now I must mention another little blunder from that time. Out of my first week's wages I sent Vera five dollars in the mail, and I wrote, "Hallelujah, you will be lucky here." I wrote in detail of my great good fortune. Having sent off the five dollars, I hid the receipt in my pocket, so that, God forbid I wouldn't lose it.

Vera received my letter, and waited, for one day, two days, three days, and still no money came. I received a letter from her, asking, "Where is the money?" So I became angry. I'd heard that in America you didn't dare believe anyone, but that the American post office would steal five dollars from me? That was a scandal.

I went back to the post office. The same man to whom I had given the money was standing near the window. I reminded him of my purchase from the previous week, and I told him that my wife still hadn't received the money.

He asked me for the date of the transaction. I took out the receipt, showed it to him, and he burst out laughing. "Why are you holding that?" he asked me.

"What do you mean, 'Why are you holding that?'" I said.

"You have to send it to the people who are getting the money," he said. "They present it at their post office, and that's how they get the money."

Go know everything. Had I ever sent money before? In London, if I had a few shillings in my pocket, I immediately gave it to the *New Times*, or for the People's House. They were always in need of money.

So I'd already learned two important things in America: first, in traveling between Chelsea and East Boston, one does not travel through Jamaica Plain; and second, if one sends money to someone, one must also send the receipt.

Finally, my Vera came with our child. We took a residence in East Boston, for seven dollars a month, and we purchased some furniture on installments. The house was not richly furnished, but there was cleanliness and light. From the back windows we could see Wood Island Park. From the front there was a sizeable little square, and no "cats" were running around in the house. Community-wise, we acquired a circle of friends, all of them simple but decent people. The shop where I worked was not a union shop, but I was entirely satisfied with that. I sent my brother in New York whatever I could afford, and when we had paid for the boat tickets we had a great celebration. There was herring with potatoes, and a little whiskey, too. That was how we lived for a whole year, and I was very pleased.

THE WOLF IS DRAWN TO THE FOREST

I was satisfied, but I couldn't live that way for long. I was too well informed about what was happening in the world. Every injustice committed against working men made me angry. I had soaked it all up -- helping the poor man, uplifting the fallen, opposing the tyrant -- first from the prophets Amos and Josiah, then in my years of revolutionary activity. I had also learned much in my father's house. Poor Chassidim would approach him with tears in their eyes; their grown daughters had no money for dowries, and they'd be saying, "First, God must help, and then you, Nachum."

My father knew how to obtain a dowry for a poor Chassid's old maid daughter. Wealthy Chassidic merchants, dealers in newly minted coins and forest property, would come to him. He might tell them, "We must provide a wedding for a girl, and you won't get away with a small contribution; you will have to give a hundred." There was no question of bargaining to reduce that figure, which is how the dowries were raised.

But with all that background I hadn't joined a political party. In my London years, our branch of the Social Democratic Federation wasn't as dogmatic as some other branches. We were mostly devoted to choir, dramatic organization, and clarification of socialist principles. Among our lecturers were Social Democrats, socialists, revolutionaries, and *Bundisten*. Kropotkin, the Scientific Anarchist, spoke a few times. We strongly respected his ideas, though we had no connection to the anarchists of London's East End; the gulf between us was too wide.

In America, I longed to be part of a certain kind of organization, a community, where ideas could be exchanged. I liked the varied membership of the Workmen's Circle of Massachusetts, soon to become the Independent Workmen's Circle (the Independent), and I joined Branch 10, in East Boston. There were Zionists, socialists, and anarchists in the group.

Most of us became such active members that our personal lives suffered. Sunday was the only possible time to spend with our families, but many of us spent most of the day at meetings. I was already the father of two. Our son, Ben, and our little girl, Sophie, were as beautiful as the sun, but late on Sunday afternoons, returning nervous and hungry from a meeting, often I was too tired for dinner with them. Sometimes Vera and the children had to eat alone. Or sometimes dinner was postponed, in hopes that after I had rested we would all sit down together.

I don't recall Vera ever complaining when I left her alone on Sundays, or when meals were postponed, but often, when I came home with a headache and laid down, she brought me a wet towel, placed it on my forehead, and said, "What will happen? I'm afraid you will get sick."

That routine continued for years. Aside from time with Vera and the children, my only respite from a week of strain were the Wednesday afternoons when I met my dear friends Morris Ossen and Morris Tubiash, in Boston. We had worked so long together in the labor movement that we were like triplets. On those Wednesdays, we sat with a warm meal, discussed our beloved Independent, and then went off for a walk. In summer, we'd go to Boston's Public Garden, and sit near the pond.

Ossen was a most unusual person. He was born in Lithuania to poor parents who couldn't send him to the university, so at the age of 12 he became a tailor. But as the saying goes, "Even from garbage a diamond can glimmer and shine." Six years later, in Vilna, he helped to organize the Bund.

I met him when we worked together in the Workmen's Circle of Massachusetts. I was about 25 then, he was about 30, and he sparkled with fine thoughts. He had been a stammerer all his life, but often when I spoke with him I'd think to myself, *If he had been born to a rich father in America, he might have become a successful professor in one of the great universities. But fate merely willed him to become a long-standing companion of mine.*

As for Tubiash, we lived in London at the same time, but he was an anarchist. I would see him on the Whitechapel street corner where I sold the *New Times.* He'd be selling the *Worker's Friend.* A tiny, thin man, he would sneak up as I was about to sell a paper, and slip his paper to my customer. I never spoke to him at those times. I merely gave him a piercing look, but though I had always been against spilling blood, I felt like killing him.

Later, in America, we met at an unlikely place, a convention of the Independent. He was a delegate, and when votes were cast for national officers he was elected. I couldn't believe it. I continued to regard him with suspicion, but I gradually understood. The Independent wanted representatives from all parts of the worker's movement, so Tubiash qualified. I began to see that we agreed on many issues, and we became close friends.

On Wednesday evenings, after my afternoons with Ossen and Tubiash, the Independent held an executive meeting. I attended with the same earnestness as my father, when he went to Rabbi Shnayurson's to hear Chassidic lore. We all loved the Independent with a platonic affection. When the three of us entered the office, everyone called out, "The holy trio is here; now we can open the meeting."

So many years have gone by, yet I see those evenings as if they were yesterday. We sat around a long, massive table, two dozen of us at times. Our general secretary always brought a pack of the week's correspondence, sometimes with news of an opportunity to organize a new branch. When we heard of such an item it was like hearing the most beautiful symphonic

music. It meant we were becoming stronger, with more ability to do all the things of which we had dreamed. We all had dreams, but we numbered only 1,500, so there was pain in our hearts. Each of us knew that against the rival Workmen's Circle of New York, with its tens of thousands of members and the *Forverts* as its official organ, we lacked the ability to attract the broad masses. So we took on the task of turning the Independent into a model organization for the Jewish Street.

Ossen was our greatest dreamer, though he spent all day sewing and pressing in his shop. He had to support his wife and children, but his thoughts were always as high as heaven. He dreamed about making the Independent so much finer than other Jewish labor organizations that anyone could see the difference.

One of his ideas was for an organizational family yontev, a holiday outing. All branches would assemble; there would be a picnic, and music, and games would be played, but we encountered much opposition to the idea. Most of our membership said that reminders of traditional Jewishness were verboten to socialists, and that a yontev was considered reactionary. In some branches, when I expressed enthusiasm for such a day, they said we were leading them back to the prayer house. They said it could lead to talk of Palestine, also reactionary to them, but we persisted. In 1915, at our ninth convention, we voted to hold the family yontev, on the first Sunday in August.

And we began. Some years there would be six or seven hundred of us -- members, families, and friends. We always went to a country place outside Boston, buses and trains full of Independent members, all of us laughing and singing. At day's end, prizes were awarded to the branches with the best games and entertainments, and always, from mornings of breathless excitement to subdued, sunbaked evenings, a great joy was felt by all.

HAVE I REALLY NEVER HAD A PERSONAL LIFE?

Writing of my life in those years, I've often thought that I neglected my family. But I did have a personal life. My wife, Vera, was still the most beautiful woman I've ever known, and I loved her with all the fire of my hot soul. Her devotion to me and our children often reached the point of completely forgetting herself. Her whole being was steeped in just one thought: how to make a perfect home for us.

I couldn't get enough of looking at my two dear, lovely little children, whose photograph from that time stands before my eyes as I write. When I look at them, I ask, *How did I persuade myself to leave them on Sundays and weekday evenings, and go off to meetings*? I loved them so much that workdays seemed three times as long as they actually were. I couldn't wait to come home and play with them, before going to another meeting.

And yet however much I loved my wife and children, my drive to do community work was so strong that many times, immediately after eating, I tore myself away from them and ran off to what was always "a very important meeting."

My little Sophie was two years old then, and little Benny was six. They waited, impatiently, until they saw me coming from a distance, and then, with great joy, they shouted out, "Papa is coming home." I embraced and kissed them, as well as my Vera, and the first question both children asked was whether I had to leave for another meeting after eating. When I told them, "Yes," their dear little faces became sad, but when I said, "No," they began clapping, dancing, and singing.

On those evenings or weekend mornings, when I didn't have a meeting and could spend time with my family, it was for all of us a great holiday. With a loving smile, Vera said to the children, "Today, Papale and his stories are ours. The Revolution will wait for a while."

My telling them stories was their life. They especially loved, when, on a Jewish holiday, all of us sitting around the table, I told them about the significance of each holiday, and of how it was celebrated by my mother and father when I was a child. They listened carefully through each story, and even today, when my grandchildren are grown, my children still remind me when a holiday is coming, and of how interested they used to be, hearing my stories of each one. And often, now, my daughter still asks, "Do you remember, Papa, early on a Sunday when you had no meeting, how we crept into your bed and played, so that feathers from the pillows flew around in the house?" Yes, children, yes, I remember. Such things are never forgotten.



My children, little Sophie and Ben

I TELL MY WIFE A WHITE LIE, AND . . .

We lived in Chelsea by then, having rented a four-room apartment in a building which was considered modern. The apartment was sunny, attractive, and clean, and the finest place we had ever lived. One floor beneath us lived a very intelligent couple who also had two small children, and we were all very friendly. When time permitted we would visit them, or they would visit us. Playing card games had yet to become popular, but we would read together, then discuss what we had read.

But however strongly I loved my home and my children, of course I was also very busy with meetings. One Thanksgiving eve I was attending our weekly meeting of the Independent's National Executive Committee, in Boston. Among the items up for discussion was a letter from Branch 40, north of Boston, in Peabody, requesting my presence at their annual holiday banquet. It was to be held later that evening, and I knew I had to be there. They needed me to speak to the group, but neither I nor any of my neighbors had a telephone, so I couldn't phone Vera to say I'd be late.

I decided to arrive at the banquet around 10, to deliver my speech, then immediately get on a train. I would be home by midnight, but when I arrived in Peabody the banquet hall was empty. When the first guest arrived, I learned that the banquet wouldn't start until midnight. Most of the members were shopkeepers, and they stayed open late on holiday evenings. What could I do? Vera would be frightened if I sent her a telegram, so there was no easy solution. I would come home when I would come home.

The banquet didn't begin until 1 a.m. The crowd was in a festive mood, but I wasn't scheduled to speak until the banquet's conclusion, and I was not in a festive mood. I kept thinking about Vera. She would be worrying herself sick. What could I say when I returned, that I'd gone off to a banquet, in Peabody, without letting her know?

I finished my speech at 2 a.m., but the next train wasn't until 6:30. I didn't get home until nearly 8. The gas light was still burning, and Vera was sitting at the kitchen table, sleeping, her head on her hands. When she woke and saw me, she burst into tears and asked, "What happened to you? Where have you been all night?" At the executive meeting, I said, explaining that the meeting had gone so late that the trains had stopped running. She accepted my explanation, but the next day the neighbor told her it was impossible, that trains from Boston to Chelsea ran all night.

I had handled the matter awkwardly, but I didn't want to reverse my white lie, so I said nothing, and Vera said nothing, but I knew she wasn't very happy about the matter. Many months later, I told her what had really happened on that Thanksgiving eve, that I'd been in Peabody, not Boston. I said that I was very sorry for her miserable night, and she said that she was very sorry for mine.

The months were running by, and our Ben was going to school. His first day was a great holiday for Vera and me, but not for our little son. He hadn't understood even one word of English at school. At home, we spoke only Yiddish. Our songs were sung mostly in Russian, and the children sang along. But when he came home on that first day, and I asked what he had learned, he said, "I don't know, Papa. My teacher told a story, but I couldn't understand it." With that, his little face became very concerned. We both gave him a big kiss, comforted him, and assured him that soon he would understand his teacher. My prediction came true. Soon, after school, he was repeating everything he had learned. We bought him a copy of the little book he was learning to read, and each day the first thing

he did after school was to pick it up and read. Sophie was not quite three years old, and she would listen attentively as he read. When he finished, she would take the book, turn to any story she wanted, and read, word for word, turning pages after the words that ended each one. Amazed visitors, watching and listening, would ask if she was really reading. I would answer, "Of course. Can't you see that she turns the pages correctly?"

A TERRIBLE DREAM

About that time, my father, may he rest in peace, was 72 years old. We exchanged letters, and often I would send him and my mother a few dollars. A few weeks before Purim, especially, I would never fail to send them ten dollars, and tell them that they should use it for Passover. I thought, *For God's sake, they should never again undertake the baking of matza for Passover.* I well remembered how badly all the work had affected my father's health, and the pittance he had earned for those efforts to earn a few extra rubles.

The lovely, dear letters he wrote me were in *Rashi* script, each letter of the alphabet as if it were printed by a machine; half Yiddish, half Hebrew, they were still as clear and precise as in his younger years. I keep many of them to this day, as if they are holy.

In each letter he assured me that he and my mother were in good health, but that it had become difficult for him to teach Gemara boys, those he called "the big boys." My mother always added a few words, saying she wanted father to stop teaching them, and to become a teacher for adults, but she said he didn't want to. About that time, a woman from Liadi came to New York, and she brought a greeting from my parents. I traveled to New York, and listened carefully as she read the greeting to me. She said that not long before leaving Liadi she was with my parents at a wedding, and that my father had danced on the table, among the dishes, as he had in his youth.

I listened to this with great joy. A few weeks later, I dreamed I was sitting with my wife and children around the table, and the door opened, and in came my father, but he remained standing near the door. I ran over to him, called out, "Father, father, why are you standing near the door? Such a guest, such a guest! Come in, meet my wife and children."

He answered, "No, my son, I have no time to sit. I come to tell you that I have died, and I want to beg that you not forget to say *Kaddish* after me, and that you not forget my *Yortzeit*, which falls on the tenth of *Thamuz*. Doing that, my son, you will live a long life."

He said those few words, and vanished. I began to scream in my sleep, "Father, father," and I began to cry. Vera woke me, and she asked, "Why are you shouting, 'Father, father,' and crying?'"

I answered, "Nothing, nothing, it was only a dream."

In the morning, at breakfast, I couldn't put a bite of food in my mouth. Vera begged me to eat something. I noticed how strangely she looked at my little boy, but I suspected nothing. One day a week later, after coming home from work, I found an envelope framed in black, containing a letter from a brother of mine in London. He wrote that on the tenth of Thamuz, our father went to take a dip in the river, and he drowned.

I LEAVE THE SHOP, START A BUSINESS, AND MAKE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE. BUT I SURVIVE

Months flowed by, and years. I lived my life in the Independent, in meetings, meetings, and more meetings. We lived from week to week on my salary, brought home every Saturday. If it was busy in the shoe factory, we set aside a few dollars for a rainy day. When it was slack, we spent the few dollars we had saved, but we were satisfied. We didn't know any better.

My co-workers represented many nationalities -- Armenian, Greek, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Polish, Russian, and Syrian -- but that was no problem. The problem was their lack of cooperation, as individuals, not as members of groups. We worked on a piece work basis; the more each worker produced the more he earned, but some of the work was easy, some hard, and the wage was the same for both. No one wanted the hard work when he could make more money with the easy work, and the forelady, who handed out the work assignments, had favorites among the workers. Some may have become favorites by slipping her a little money, but whatever their secret they got the easy work. I often complained to Vera that I couldn't stand it any more.

When I tried to speak with the workers, about the injustice they were committing against their fellow workers, they laughed at me. They said I

was a greenhorn, and a socialist, and that I would never be able to improve my situation. Meanwhile, some were earning an easier dollar than others.

I came home worn out every night, but I was afraid to quit; we were living week to week, after all. What's more, to clear up trouble was a principle of mine. Then, one Friday night, we noticed something unusual in the shop; the forelady was called to the office, and she returned in tears. She began to get dressed, and we learned that she had been fired.

All of her favorites were very upset; they said it was a scandal to fire such a valuable person. They suspected that someone had gone to the office, and told what was going on in the shop, and they developed a tremendous hatred towards those they suspected of doing that.

Meanwhile, the Boot and Shoe Worker's Union had long sought an opportunity to organize the shop. Now, learning of the discontent there, they held a series of meetings with the workers. They succeeded in organizing the whole shop, and it was decided to call the workers out on strike. Nearly all the Jewish workers went out, but only a small percentage of the other nationalities went out with them. The strike appeared to be doomed. I couldn't bring myself to look for another job, though, and I stayed with the strike. I attended more meetings, day and night. I informed the national executive of the Independent of our predicament, and the organization helped us financially, though very little.

We carried on the strike for 16 weeks, and then we gave up. I was $300 in debt by then, and I will never forget the heartache I felt, coming home from the meeting in which the decision was made. Vera didn't ask me anything. She could see on my face how I felt. I was totally confused, but my inborn optimism wouldn't allow me to remain confused for long. I immediately decided I wouldn't go back to the shop, or to any other shop. I knew that similar conditions existed everywhere, that anyone who wouldn't, somehow, flatter the boss, faced the same conditions I had faced.

But what I would do, and how I would take care of my family, was still unclear to me.

I didn't have the five cents for a streetcar to Lynn, so I set off on an eight-mile walk there, to the home of a dear friend. I was lost in deep thought, the thought of becoming a businessman, and I told this to my friend. He was always ready to help, if not with a few dollars, which he didn't have, then with a piece of advice. He had a small grocery store in Lynn, from which he made a living, and when I explained my problem he telephoned a friend with a store in another part of Lynn. He said that the friend didn't know how to run the store, and that it wasn't doing well, but he was sure I would be able to make a living there. He asked if the store was for sale, and the friend said that it was.

I decided to raise some money and buy the store, though when I told this to Vera that evening, I'm afraid she thought I was out of my mind. I was in debt, after all, but I assured her that everything was possible, and that I would soon have enough money. I immediately wrote a letter to my brother, Chaim Jacob, in New York, and told him of my plan. The next evening I went with my friend to see the store. I must say that I wasn't impressed. It was dark, and dirty, and with nearly empty shelves. When we added up the value of the merchandise it came to about $60, but the seller said he wouldn't sell for less than $100. My friend said that if I thought I could obtain the money in a few days he would give the seller five dollars as a down payment, and then I could take possession of the keys.

My heart was pounding. I very much wanted the store, but I'd never been in business, though I understood why the owner hadn't been able to make a living there; he didn't have enough merchandise. I was certain that I would soon get money from my brother, so the seller and I exchanged five dollars for the keys. My friend wrote on the window that the store would be closed for a few days, and that it would soon be open under new management.

By the time I returned home that evening, everything seemed delightful to me. Our neighbor came up to see what I had accomplished, and when I showed him the keys, and told him I had bought the store, he helped me with a loan of $50. With that, Vera became a little more enthusiastic. A few days later, I received $300 from my brother, with a prayer that God would help me to be successful.

It took a week for the move to Lynn, to clean out the store, and to fill it with goods for sale. Now we were business people.

Vera threw herself into helping me. However strange the whole enterprise was to her, she knew something about peas, beans, and barley, while such items were one great porridge in my mind. With her help, and bit by bit, we brought meat into the store, though I didn't know steak from roast beef, and when it came to pork I wouldn't even touch it with my hands.

A series of business dealings began for me -- borrowing, lending, paying interest, borrowing from one friend, paying off another . . . There seemed no end to all the dealings, but however difficult it was for us in those first days, I refused to think of the shop.

At the time, I was national president of the Independent, so even with the store there was no shortage of meetings, but Vera never objected. Our son Ben was in high school, our daughter Sophie was only four years younger, and both helped in the store after school.

Many months flowed by, and, believe it or not, we saved a few thousand dollars. It looked as if we were getting rid of the poverty with which we had struggled, but I can't say I was satisfied. I couldn't see a great future in owning a small store, and in working seven days a week. That was no plan for enjoying life with my family. I began looking for something better.

At the start of the 1920s, a large number of Jewish shoe manufacturers had entered the shoe industry, and I received offers for partnerships in several factories. The offer I liked best was from one of three men who owned a small factory in Lynn. Their products pleased me greatly, and this man was a socialist, a major figure in the movement, a man who wished to change the world on the basis of justice and righteousness. How could he not have been a fine person? His partners weren't socialists, but they impressed me as decent, honest people. Yes, they warned me that our partnership would always be three against one, and so what if my friends also warned me? They didn't understand human nature as well as I did, so I went into the partnership, putting in twice as much money as I had, borrowing from family, friends, and credit unions.

One day later, if I could have withdrawn, I would joyfully have done so. Each of us had agreed to contribute a prearranged sum of money, but something strange happened. The other three had their money ready the night before, and -- how do you like this? -- they said a nasty thief broke into all three homes, and he managed to find every penny; nothing was left. The thief must have had a good map, since the homes were far apart.

That's how our partnership began. In my naivete, I couldn't imagine that for the sake of a dollar a socialist could sell his soul. But every day at the factory there were similar occurrences. I realized that if they were to continue, then I was lost. Something had to be done, I said to myself, but I didn't know what.

I knew nothing of lawyers and courts, but I had an inborn feeling against them, so I decided to show, by means of my devotion to the business, how it should be run. My partners went home early each evening; I worked late into the night, to prepare work for the next day. In winter, the heat was turned off at five o'clock; I worked in the cold, alone. But with every passing day the attitude of my partners towards me grew worse.

When I spoke to them, they said if I didn't have the patience to wait until business improved, then I shouldn't be a manufacturer, that I should go back to groceries.

Vera saw how this was affecting me. She said that I should get back as much money as possible, and escape, as though from a fire. She said that in a short time I would have a breakdown.

Finally, I told my partners that for a sum of money I was ready to leave the business. A devilish grin appeared on the face of the man who wished to change the world on the basis of justice and righteousness. He agreed to pay me $1,000, and I left. The three partners believed they had gotten the better of me, but they were wrong; if they had offered me only $500, I would gladly have accepted.

A short time after I left they took in a partner who contributed $10,000. He stayed one year, then fled. The same thing happened with a third man, a fourth, and a fifth. My former partners wanted only to build their business on the backs of people with money, with the same agreement as mine, under the same conditions, and with the same ending.

Their end was not a good one. It wasn't long before the business collapsed, and two of the partners died, mostly, I believe, from guilty consciences. The only one who didn't suffer from a guilty conscience was the one who wished to change the world on the basis of justice and righteousness. He wandered around, like a shadow among the living, and what kind of life is that?

The hardest thing for me wasn't that I lost my money. It was having my belief in people badly shaken.

It took me three years of hard work to pay off my debts. I obtained a job at another shoe factory, but I no longer had to work at a machine;

I became a foreman, which paid not too badly. Still, from time to time I became bewildered, feeling as if a massive weight was dragging me down to earth, but my inborn optimism, and strong love of humanity, helped me to maintain my equilibrium.

WE THINK IT'S AN ANGEL, BUT FIRST IT'S A DEVIL

Every workmen's organization, on its way to becoming healthy and established, must first survive its versions of smallpox and measles. Even the Workmen's Circle of New York, with its large membership and friendly press, was not without its troubles. There were years of strife between its branches, its young and old members. Then there came a big, new problem -- its *right* vs. its *left*.

For many, it was difficult to choose sides. The right argued that the left wanted to break up the organization; the left, that it only wanted a variety of viewpoints, as did our Independent.

When some leftist elements in the New York group determined that they couldn't win their fight, they decided to leave and join the Independent. Some of us argued that we couldn't trust them, that they would try to take over our organization, and, failing that, they would try to break us up. Others said that we now had the opportunity to build a larger, stronger Independent.

Finally, it was decided to accept them as members, and our office was bombarded with applications. Soon, and as a result, many new branches were founded. All was going well, but this would be the silence before a storm. The Russian Revolution broke out, and who didn't want a free,

democratic Russia? Thousands upon thousands believed that true salvation was coming to their homeland, so it was understandable that our former members of the Workmen's Circle of New York were no exception. At our branch meetings, we began hearing talk of giving our organization a new face, but no longer an independent one, not one for many points of view. What was being foisted on us was, simply, communism. In a sense, a new Torah was being given to us from Mount Sinai.

Instead of the harmony that had previously reigned among our members, instead of the familial friendship that had developed over the years, the new members were calling us traitors, and counter-revolutionaries. We argued that for many long years we had ignored our personal interests, had worked, tirelessly, to build a fine, clean worker's movement, and that it was a crime to call us traitors and counter-revolutionaries, but they said if we couldn't see how truly non-partisan communism was, then we were traitors to the great Russian Revolution.

There was chaos in our ranks, though we wouldn't abandon hope that the zeal of genuine friendship, which we had cultivated for many years, would sooner or later take the upper hand. But again there came a period in our lives of no rest during the day, and little sleep at night. Who could attend to personal interests? We neglected our health, our families, and our businesses. There was only one thing left for us, to rescue our beloved Independent from "the great people's friend," the communists, who had attacked us like pirates.

THEY SEEK TO ADORN US WITH A NEW FACE, BUT WE ORGANIZE A COMMITTEE TO FIGHT THEM

We had long cherished our Independent, its great, good heart, its willingness to hear out people of good faith, but then Stalin's comrades came into our midst, with their fine talk and manipulation.

It's hard to describe all the nasty tricks they used to spread feelings of mistrust and hatred among us. In the name of revolutionary non-partisanship old friends became enemies. People who had long understood each other stopped understanding. At our conferences, instead of great friendship and a strong desire to understand each other, chaos and mistrust reigned. Our wonderfully fine meetings sometimes ended with physical blows. We began to neglect our families. We had meetings every night, often lasting until after midnight, trying to persuade our new "friends" that most of our members wouldn't let themselves be dominated by the Communist Party. But all our arguments led to only one response from the newcomers: Of course you want a non-partisan organization, they said, but true non-partisanship meant communism, because only communism understood the meaning of freedom and equality.

We were battling the sedition that sought to control us, but it was too late. In the midst of all the chaos, our 20th convention was coming up, in Chicago.

As always, our convention began on the train, but what a difference this one was. Previously, when delegates welcomed newcomers along the way, they greeted them like old friends, with joyful exclamations, hearty handshakes, and embraces. This time, when the New York delegation boarded in Albany, they immediately began spreading hatred and chaos among the delegates.

Our new friends, using tricks and manipulations, had succeeded in bringing a small majority delegation to the convention. Those of us for whom the integrity of the organization was paramount didn't believe they would use their majority to transform the Independent into a communist organization. How painfully we had deceived ourselves.

From the opening minutes of the convention until the last, there was nothing but chaos. We were confronted with a set of communist resolutions, and our appeals for them to be rejected didn't help. We were simply laughed at, and in that condition of chaos we left the convention, determined, though, to rid ourselves of the true traitors in our midst.

We had to act immediately. Our constitution decreed that resolutions couldn't take effect until surviving a vote by the entire organization, and we organized a committee of eleven non-partisans. It opposed the communist resolutions, and when they were sent to the branches they were voted down, by a large majority. A special convention to elect a new administration was convened.

Those who didn't attend missed what may have been the most hate-filled gathering in the history of the workmen's movement in America, but the hate was only from one side. For two days and two nights, the communists threw the worst kind of epithets and insults at us, but our reward and great joy came with the vote. Of 100 delegates, 48 voted with the communists, 52 for the Independent as it had been, and after the last vote the communists marched out of the hall. We remained to celebrate our

great victory, but as the saying goes, "One more such victory, and we will be lost." All of us felt like going to bed for a week. For too long there had been no time for earning a living, and many of us were ruined financially. The branches, too, were ruined, since the communists had emptied their treasuries. But the inner satisfaction we felt made up for everything.

After resting awhile, we all asked the same question: What should happen next? To rebuild wasn't possible. The strength and the will weren't there. What's more, after all that had happened there were still those among us who favored one Workmen's Circle in America. So what happened was meetings, and but one order of business: how to best further the work of an organization that had demanded so much of us. We even conferred with the Workmen's Circle of New York, and what came of that was a special convention, in Boston -- to discuss the possibility of uniting forces.

How, with all our history and bitterness, could that have happened?

It just happened. An unexpected atmosphere of friendliness prevailed, and a decision was reached to unite.

It was a healing experience for everyone involved, though I had never favored one Workmen's Circle. I'd always believed that small organizations harbor the best friendships, but I voted for uniting. I knew of the exhaustion that prevailed in our branches, and I saw no chance for us to continue as an independent organization.

In a contemplative mood, I expressed how I felt about this unexpected development in:

FOUND -- LOST

I found you in the trackless desert
Where death is present every hour
Where the air is fire, the sand is sterile
Yet you grew there, lonely, a friendless flower

I caught a glimpse of you, and marveled
Marveled as, maybe, only I could do
Were you a devil or an angel?
I'll never know; I never knew

I lifted you from the arid wasteland,
and planted you, firmly, deep in my heart
and so you'd be alone no more
I promised myself that we'd never part

I still remember those long gone days,
I can never forget how lovely, how dear
the times were when you strode with me
I was filled with such joy that it brought forth tears.

I'll never forget the words so tender
that I would speak and sing to you.
You vowed our love would last forever;
I was myself, and content, only with you.

Your words then were all of truth and love
The world would soon be a far better place
Is it possible, now, that you have deceived me
that your words were false, that you lied to my face?

So now I stand alone, and shattered
You've thrown away your promise so grand
But I'll never forget how much it mattered
When I found you that day, in trackless sand

THE ARK SETS SAIL

In 1922, the Independent had failed in a grandiose attempt to establish a chain of cooperative food stores. There were accusations of incompetence between old friends, and some relationships seemed permanently damaged. I brooded over this, wondering how to heal the rifts. I thought of forming a club for us all, for the purpose of enjoying occasional evenings together. I hoped with all my heart that we could forget our quarrels, and be whole again.

One morning in 1923, six of us were driving to Worcester for a conference. We were in good spirits, and after we babbled and sang for a while I presented my plan for a club. It pleased everyone, and later, at home, we started phoning our members. All were enthusiastic, and in October, two days before Sukkot, we gathered for our first festive evening together. We stood around a great table laden with delicacies, drinking toasts to one another, vowing that our friendships would never again be disrupted, and that our club would last as long as we lived.

Our dear friend Ossen suggested we call our club the ARK, and as Noah's Ark rescued humanity from the flood, our ARK rescued us from a flood of recriminations. But for too long it lacked yontevs, days for uplifting our souls, yet how could we create what we'd long been without as a matter of principle? We'd been involved in our various radical movements, and with radical piety we had torn up and destroyed the threads that tied us to the customs of our fathers and grandfathers. Now we wondered if

yontevs didn't have to be rooted in hearts and souls before they could be established. Perhaps, but we had no time to wait. Mankind is petty in its weekday lives, but in yontev moods people are transformed. We were creating yontevs for ourselves, to make up for the many years we had lacked them.

We decided to base our choices on days with roots in our hearts. I proposed a third *Seder*, during the first days of Passover, a revolutionary proposal for the time. No one had heard of socialists conducting Seders, even modern Seders. Some members were concerned that Osipov might be leading them to houses of prayer, but I insisted I was up to no such thing. Still, to the socialists among us, the idea of conducting a Seder sounded reactionary, but 31 years of third Seders have now passed, and for those who have yet to attend one it's difficult to imagine how wonderful they've been for us.

Witnessing an ARK celebration can be an uplifting experience for the soul; the choir of 50 women, clad in white, sings "Go Down Moses" at a third Seder; the lights dim, the choir leader sings the blessing, the candles are lit and, with a fine orchestra playing, the choir strides majestically to the great holiday table, covered with flowers, matza, and wine. A shiver of holiness passes through the audience. It is a beautiful and holy moment, not carried out exactly as our fathers and grandfathers conducted their Seders, perhaps, but beautiful nonetheless.

Sitting here more than 30 years after the ARK's birth, thinking of how it has exalted us, I recall this legend from the holy scriptures:

Somewhere in the heavens there is a palace for souls, and from time to time they drop to earth and settle in human bodies. There is a separate room for great souls, those too great for confinement to human bodies. On Friday evenings, when Jews acquire the soul of Sabbath festiveness, when they ready themselves to meet and greet the Sabbath Queen, those great

souls are sent down to earth. When the Sabbath has ended, most of the great ones return to the heavens, but the festiveness is so strong, for some, that they can't part from the other great ones they've met. They remain, in a permanent state of Sabbath festiveness. That kind of soul is what the ARK family is made of, and that's why our yontevs are so fine. Our songs may not be symphonic to a music critic, but they call forth heartfelt joy, and where such emotion reigns, there abides the divine presence.

A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS IN OUR LIVES

In the early spring of 1945, returning with Vera from a 12-week vacation in Miami Beach, I was not in a holiday mood. Physically, we were well, but when you are healthy you want to eat, and I didn't have a job; our bank balance was small, because our time in Miami Beach had significantly reduced it. I was no longer a young man, and I had always been strongly fearful that when old age approached I would, God forbid, have to ask friends or children for support. That fear had entered my blood when I was very young, when I would see how my father put a world of effort into the Days of Awe, especially when it came to this prayer: "Do not throw us away in the time of old age; when our strength is diminished, do not abandon us."

I knew that I would soon get a job, but still I was anxious, and Vera was even more so. A few weeks passed, and I did get a job, in Boston, that paid $150 a week, but I decided to look for some sort of investment that would make our financial futures more secure.

We owned a summer cottage near the beach at Nahant, on Boston's North Shore. Adjoining our backyard were two larger houses that were owned by an elderly woman, and I learned that the houses were for sale. I didn't have enough money to buy them, but I had hopes that if I made the woman an acceptable offer, God would help.

I went off to the agent and offered $10,000, though in my heart I was frightened; I kept asking myself, *What if the houses aren't worth that much?*

So I decided to seek advice from my old friend B. He knew more about real estate than I, and he and his wife had always been interested in my welfare, so I took them to the houses. I asked for B's opinion of my offer, but he declined to answer. Later, I recalled a saying from Liadi: "One should not show a dish of cream to a cat, and then leave it uncovered."

A few days later, Vera and I were visiting B, as we often did. We were sitting with glasses of tea, and he said, "I have something to tell you, friend Osipov. You would find out sooner or later, so it's better that I tell you myself. I bought the two houses you showed me, for eleven thousand dollars."

I didn't understand what he meant. My first thought was that he had bought the houses for me. How could I have thought otherwise? He was an old friend, after all, so he wanted to be sure that I wouldn't lose the property. Since I had relied on his real estate knowledge, he had taken his action as proper, but when I thanked him for his friendship, and said that tomorrow, God willing, I would give him the few hundred dollars of his down payment, he smiled quizzically, as if to say, *What kind of man are you?* Then he cleared up the matter, by saying, "No, my friend, I bought the houses for myself."

If he had hit me on the head with a club, I could not have been more confused. Heaven and earth had become so intertwined that for a few minutes I felt unable to move. Leaving my friend's house that evening, I don't know how I remained standing. I muttered to myself, "Woe is me, is it possible that a friend, especially an old one, should deal this way with a friend?"

Vera didn't feel as bad about the matter as I did. She never had my strong belief in people. The concept *crossing the line of decency* was alien to her, so she said to me, "Well, my husband, let's go home, and the next time you'll think it over before asking a friend for advice." I went home with

her, but with a strong determination in my heart to tear the houses back from B.

The next morning I arranged for a meeting with some true friends. When I told them what had taken place, they were shocked. A few couldn't believe that I'd accurately described what had happened. They asked to meet with me again, and this time they asked B to be present. He told them the story exactly as I did, though he added that he knew I lacked sufficient money to buy the houses, which was why he bought them.

My true friends shamed B into returning the houses to me.

I had $500 in the bank, and I was offered a mortgage of $5,000. Within 30 days I had to acquire another $8,000, but all I had was a job that paid $150 a week, with an understanding that if in three months they determined I was the right person for them, then my wages would be $200 a week. Then, one fine day, I bumped into a friend named Oscar Rosen, a member of the ARK. He said that my obtaining the houses from B made him very happy. When I told him I had to acquire $8,000, and that if I didn't I would lose the houses again, he said, "No, my friend Osipov, you will not lose the houses. Come to my shop, tomorrow at noon, and I'll be there with my lawyer. I'll lend you the money you need." When I asked if he would first have time to see the houses, he said, "No, I won't have time, but your name is warranty enough for me." In that minute, I saw not my friend Oscar Rosen before me, but the prophet Elijah in the person of Oscar Rosen. Heartily shaking his hand, I said to myself, *Not everyone is like B; there are still people for whom friendship stands higher than money.*

THE GREAT WORLD BECOMES VERY SMALL FOR ME

We owned the houses for five years, living in one and renting the other. During that time, I paid off the entire mortgage and had a considerable income, but one important thing was very bad: My Vera became ill. She had often said to me, "I don't need a doctor, my dear. Your kisses alone are enough to make me well." But neither my kisses nor the doctors could help her. On the 27th of February, 1953, she gave up her soul to God.



My Vera

I could never have imagined the bleak darkness I felt the moment my Vera closed her beautiful eyes forever. I felt as if I were falling into an abyss, falling, falling, with darkness all around. We buried her on Purim, the day I turned 70, a day she had awaited with a tremble in her heart; the ARK, with her assistance, had prepared a gala birthday celebration.

My daughter wouldn't let me be alone. She and my son urged me to sell the houses, and to settle with one of them. They were right about the houses; I couldn't go back, but living with my children was not in my heart. I understood that summer and winter do not make a couple, though for a while I stayed with my daughter in Boston. All my old friends were there, and my son was in New York, but for too long I didn't see my friends. I went to the cemetery, day after day. I spoke to Vera as I always did. I couldn't get used to her being gone. I felt as if I was losing my mind. I walked around my daughter's house all night. She would come to me in those hours, and together we would cry, but I couldn't bear her pain. I felt as if I was committing a crime against her; she had two young sons to raise, after all, so at the beginning of May I went off to Florida. I hoped the new environment might quiet my nerves, and it did, especially the beautiful sea that I had always loved so much, but after three weeks I began to get restless again. I visited my son in New York for a while, and then I returned to Boston.

Now my friends wouldn't let me be alone, especially my old friend Ossen. He had lost his own wife years before, and then lost a young son, a Boston physician with a fine reputation. Ossen, more than any of my other friends, commiserated with me. We met a few times each week in town, and we walked, and talked, as we'd done in the past. One day, we were sitting in the Public Garden, and the day was an especially fine one. The Swan Boats glided back and forth on the pond. The voices of happy children filled the air, while squirrels ran over each other, trying to snatch

the peanuts we threw to them. Ossen and I were sitting in the shade of a tree, and he said, "You know I am a good friend, and as one who often visited your home when your wife was alive, I know what she meant to you. I know how devoted she was to you; one doesn't meet such a woman every day, yet I want to advise you not to make the same mistake I made, deciding to remain alone for as long as you live. It's been ten years since my wife died, and I've done a great injustice to myself by not finding a suitable companion for my old age."

I thought my dear friend was losing his mind. I asked if he was feeling well, but he assured me that he was. Later that day, after we parted, I felt very angry. I knew that Ossen was a devoted friend, but I began to avoid him. When he'd phone to suggest we meet, I'd tell him I was busy. When my daughter started asking what was wrong, I had to respond, though I'd never discussed intimate matters with her. I told her how Ossen had hurt my feelings, but instead of agreeing she asked if I thought that not sleeping at night, and spending day after day at the cemetery, was a life. I had certainly not expected such talk from her; she had so loved her mother, and missed her every day, but after a while I began to see Ossen again. This livened me up a bit, but soon the restlessness conquered me again. My son had a summer home in the Catskills, and at the end of August I visited him. I stayed for ten days, and then I drove off to Florida.

Traveling 1,500 miles alone in a machine, I had plenty of time to think. Knowing what our people went through in Europe, with the wild Nazis in control, and also about life in all the totalitarian countries, I could not help myself from thinking what a God-blessed country America is for my people. *There goes a Jew*, I thought, *his machine swallows the miles, hundreds and hundreds of miles, and no one stops and asks who he is. Where he is going. For what purpose he is traveling. As long as he doesn't break any laws, he can do what he wants.*

With my whole heart, I blessed America, the land that took in millions of us, who years before escaped from our old homes, rescued from physical annihilation. Soon I would be in Miami Beach, at a private home whose owners had asked me to stay with them.

A BRAND NEW HELL BEGINS FOR ME, BUT SOON I ACCEPT MY FATE

Arriving in Florida, I was met by tremendous storms, in nature and among people. It was mid-September, hurricane season. Driving from Daytona Beach to Miami Beach, I was caught in a storm of nature. There was such a darkness, even in the middle of the day, that I thought I could feel it with my hands. The rain was torrential, the heat intense enough to make me choke. I had to keep one car window open, but when other cars passed from the opposite direction they splashed so much water through the window that I was soaked to the skin.

There were deep pools of water on both sides of the narrow roadway, so there was no place to stop and park. I thought I would never get out of that mess alive, but as God gives us years, we get over everything. After about 50 miles of driving that way I noticed a twinkling light in the distance. I decided that even if people eaters were there I would stop to wait out the storm, but there were no people eaters. The light was at a gas station, and the owner was a gentile from Boston who had settled there a few months earlier. When he saw my Massachusetts license plate he gave me a big hug, treated me to a cup of coffee, and didn't leave my side until the storm was over. I was in that moment certain that he was no gentile from Boston but, again -- as so often in my life -- the prophet Elijah, who saved me from catastrophe.

The real storm began in Miami Beach. News had spread that a widower was on the way, a potential candidate for marriage, and suddenly a deluge of widows appeared. One came to borrow a cup, another to borrow a spoon, a third lacked an onion for her chopped liver, a fourth brought a potato. From early till late there was a line of widows, waiting to see the potential candidate. If they didn't find me in the house, they sat and waited for me. They certainly wouldn't let someone else catch me. They all introduced themselves, and poured out their lonely, bitter hearts, never neglecting to say a few words about how their dear husbands had provided for them, so they would never, God forbid, have to beg their children for help. I soon realized that this game was for the devil, that if I didn't rid myself of it I would be destroyed, so I took to disappearing from the house -- for entire days and evenings.

It was hurricane season, so that wasn't easy. It rained heavily, every day, and often I would sit on a side street in my car, the windows fogged, and stay there for hours. Escaping was easier in the evenings, when I ate supper in the Ambassador Cafeteria, *The Playroom of Miami Beach*. I would kill the whole evening there, and that was where I met the noted Yiddish writer, Iser Talush. Soon we were deep in conversation, sometimes for hours.

Once, after we had become better acquainted, after I had given him a copy of the *ARK Jubilee Book* that I had written, with all my songs included, Talush said, "What you should do now, Osipov, is sit down and write your autobiography. You have enough time, you write well and fluently, and in writing you will forget your sadness. And he added, "Should you have need, I promise that I will help."

The truth is that I, too, had been thinking of writing an autobiography, but I lacked the courage to sit down and start. And what would I do about the deluge of widows? But when Talush kept after

me, I started gaining courage, and coming from breakfast one fine early morning, I locked myself in my room and sat down to write.

What does the Gemara say, that all beginnings are difficult, but only beginnings? I had hardly started when, from minute to minute, my ambition began growing. I was writing with tremendous speed. Thoughts and remembrances flowed so quickly through my mind that they wouldn't let me sleep. I began rising in the middle of the night, and sitting for long hours in a beam of light, writing, and writing.

Once, when Talush asked how the writing was going, and I told him of the tremendous speed with which I was doing it, he said that he would like me to come to his home, and read him a few chapters, and that he would give me an honest evaluation. I agreed, and at the appointed time he stretched himself out on his small couch, and said, "Well, Osipov, read, I am ready to listen."

I had brought three chapters, and I began to read, but from time to time I threw a glance at Talush. He was lying stretched out, as if in his father's wine garden. The look on his face showed me that he liked what he was hearing. I read over one chapter, and he asked me to read on, so I read all three chapters. Then he sat up, slowly. I couldn't take my eyes from him, and he said these words to me: "I assumed, Osipov, that I would have to take you by the hand, and lead you through the entire book; now I see that isn't so. You write beautifully, with a light humor, and what you write is very interesting. Keep it up, and if, with God's help, you finish the book, we will make plans to have it printed."

It's understandable that his encouragement helped me a great deal to keep up the pace. I'm very thankful to Talush for that. I wrote during the day, and I wrote at night, often in the middle of the night, and the more I wrote the more the memories came back to me. My whole life,

from my earliest youth, flowed through my thoughts, so that I saw each episode as if it had happened only yesterday. My mood became a great deal more peaceful. I was accepting my fate.



The author, Samuel Osipow, circa early 50s

Glossary Of Yiddish Terms

Akedah — A story from the Hebrew Bible, in which God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah. After Isaac is bound to an altar, the angel of God stops Abraham, saying, "Now I know you fear God." At this point, Abraham sees a ram caught in a nearby bush, and he sacrifices the ram instead of Isaac.

cheder — An elementary religious school, teaching the basics of Judaism and the Hebrew language.

Chol Hamoed — The period between the start of Passover and the end of Sukkot. *Days of Passover*

Days of Awe — The ten days starting with Rosh Hashanah and ending with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Forverts — The Jewish Daily Forward, a Jewish-American newspaper, which began publishing in New York City in 1897.

Gemara — The part of the Talmud that contains rabbinical analysis, and commentary on the Mishna portion.

Haftorah — A selection from the prophets read in synagogues on the Sabbath, following the Torah reading.

Hakofes — The seven rounds of marching around the synagogue with the Torah on Yom Kippur.

Kaddish — A prayer recited at funerals, at intervals in the following year, and on the Yortzeit, on the anniversary of the death of a loved one.

Kol Nidre	The prayer recited in the synagogue at the start of of evening service on Yom Kippur.
kugel	A sweet pudding, made from noodles, or, sometimes, from potatoes or matza.
mensch	A substantial, decent person; a person of noble character.
mezuzah	A small, handwritten scroll of parchment, containing excerpts from the torah, housed in a decorative container, and mounted on the door frame of Jewish home or establishment.
pentateuch	The first five books of the Old Testament
Reb	An honorific, like Mr.
rebbe	Rabbi, or someone learned in the Torah
Shabes	Sabbath
shofar	A musical instrument that sounds like a trumpet, most often made from the horn of a sheep or a goat, and traditionally blown on Rosh Hashanah.
shtreiml	A fur hat, worn on the Sabbath by many married, Chassidic men.
Sukkot	A joyous holiday, a harvest festival, as well as one that commemorates the Jews' wandering in the desert. It begins on the fifth day after Yom Kippur and lasts for seven days

sukkah — A temporary dwelling built during Sukkot. Often decorated with Autumn fruit and vegetables.

tallis — A prayer shawl worn at morning services, on weekdays and the Sabbath, and on the night of Yom Kippur.

Talmud — A set of books, consisting of the Mishnah and Gemara, encompassing civil and ceremonial law and lore

Tashlich — A traditional practice, consisting of casting off the sins of the previous year by tossing pieces of bread, or other food, onto a body of flowing water. Performed on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, but when that falls on Shabes it's performed on the second day.

yeshiva — An orthodox Jewish school, for the study of sacred texts.

yontev — holiday

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Finally, there would be no acknowledgements were it not for the author of *MY LIFE*, my grandfather, Samuel Osipow, or Zaidy. He and my

grandmother, Vera, or Nanny, were very important people in my life. Sixty years after the publication of Zaidy's book in Yiddish, they're still very important -- and always unforgettable. dl



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Samuel Osipow's Liadi, Russia, is gone now, leveled by World War Two. But in his lyrical, colorful autobiography, *MY LIFE*, it's still the 1880s of his Liadi childhood. Neighbors gather at the window as his father Nachum sings Sabbath songs in Aramaic. He visits his Aunt Hadassah with a house full of chickens, battling cats, and 13 children, including Izzy the Tiny One, and Chonale the Monster.

Osipow writes of a lost time, place, and culture, but one with timeless intergenerational conflicts and youthful idealism. His father insists that he study to become a rabbi, but at 16 he rebels. He leaves home, and at a rally in a forest he hears a speech on "justice and righteousness," source for the chapter "I Set Out to Rebuild the World."

Osipow starts rebuilding. He demonstrates against anti-Semitism, and is jailed; see chapter "The *Bund* Seeks To Enter Smolensk." He eventually reaches America, and a distinctive, occasionally tumultuous immigrant life ensues. Osipow's book is deeply personal, but millions of readers may recognize the lives of their ancestors in its pages.

Samuel Osipow (1883–1965) was born in the Russian shtetl of Liadi. Immigrating to America in 1906, he settled in the Boston area where the Independent Workmen's Circle became the great cause of his life. He wrote many songs and poems in Yiddish, and published *MY LIFE* in Yiddish in 1954. It would remain largely unread for nearly 60 years.

Murray Sachs (1924–2013) was a talented translator, and Professor Emeritus of Romance and Comparative Literature at Brandeis University. Because of his magnificent, generous effort, *MY LIFE* is now available to an English-reading audience for the first time.

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