Zevi Scharfstein:
Arba'im Shanah BeAmerica
(Forty Years in America):
A Translation and Annotation of Five Chapters
and a Summation of the Remaining Twenty-five Chapters

by

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I dedicate this work to my wife, Liz, and to my children, Avital and Jonathan, for giving me the opportunity to pursue a new path, and for their constant love and support while I have been away from home during the past three years.

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Digest

The Jewish educator and writer Zevi Scharfstein (1884–1972) was born in Eastern Europe and immigrated to the United States in 1914. In the center of Scharfstein's life was a Judaism symbolized not by religion, but by Israel's history, Hebrew, and Zionism. For him, religious life was more of a routine than a burning passion. Along with his interests in Hebrew education in America, Scharfstein was also interested and involved in Hebrew education in Palestine between the two world wars.

Scharfstein had been a Hebrew teacher and writer of textbooks in Galicia. In America he continued these endeavors with increased passion and devotion. He was a school principal in Stamford, Connecticut; a member of the staff of the New York Bureau of Jewish Education; and a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. Scharfstein was also an active member of the Hebraic circles that operated in New York in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century.

The main body of this thesis is a translation, from Hebrew to English, and annotation of the first four and final chapters of Scharfstein's autobiography, *Arba'im Shanah BeAmerica* (Forty Years in America), and a summation of the remaining twenty-five chapters. This work also includes an introduction, a biography of Scharfstein, and an evaluation of his autobiography.

Scharfstein's story sheds much light on the little explored field of the Hebraic activities in North America during the first half of the twentieth century, and it serves as an important historical document of that period. The translation of this autobiography makes it accessible to many more readers, who will benefit from the array of interesting information found in this book.

Table of Contents

[1] The word used in Scharfstein's original table of contents is "My," but in the first chapter's title the word is "Our." Since Scharfstein writes about both himself and his wife, I chose the word "Our" for the present table of contents.

[2] In the original, the title here is "The Outing in New York," but in the third chapter it is as printed above.

Part I

Introduction

Starting around the year 1870, a prodigious creation of Hebrew literature by Jewish immigrants in America opened a window on their new life in the New World. American Hebraica constitutes a remarkable body of literature that is still largely unexplored. Although its artistic and literary quality may be debatable, it has much to offer to the study of American Jewish history. The Hebraic circles in America are a part of the Hebrew culture in general, and of the cultural and educational streams that were begun in nineteenth-century Europe.[1] The huge output of Hebrew writings in America adds some valuable historical insights not otherwise obtained from the Jewish literature written in English. Hebrew memoirs and autobiographies constitute a particularly rich resource for scholarly research.

The notion of American Hebraica is indeed an interesting and curious one. Although for centuries the Hebrew language was confined mainly to sacred texts and the liturgy (with the notable exception of medieval poetry), we are dealing here with a new literary usage of the Hebrew language. These nineteenth- and twentieth-century American works in Hebrew represent every conceivable genre of writing, including novels; short stories; poetry; plays; political manifestos; historical, political, and literary surveys; journals; newspapers; advertisements; personal diaries; correspondence; memoirs; and autobiographies. From 1870 to 1918 many *maskilim*[2] had arrived in North America. A good number of these enlightened and highly educated Jews shared

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[1] Moshe Pelli, *HaTarbut Halvrit BeAmerica*, p. 19.
[2] In Hebrew: Jews strongly influenced by the Enlightenment in Europe.

tremendous zeal for and dedication to the creation of a modern body of literary works written in Hebrew. In addition, their intense interest in Hebrew was the catalyst for the formation of several Hebrew societies and organizations in America, such as *Aggudat Shocharei S'fat Ever* (Association of Those Who Love the Hebrew Language), *Zerubavel* (Zerubbabel), *Achiever* (Friends of Hebrew), and the umbrella organization *Histadrut Ivrit* (Hebrew Federation).

Many years later we can evaluate this feverish Hebrew creative work in America as an interesting experiment, a unique phenomenon unparalleled by any literary creation in any other national tongue, by any of the non-Jewish immigrants in America. It was part of a larger wave of Jewish pride that was created in large measure because of the momentum it received from the contemporary forces of Zionism and Jewish nationalism.

In the end, however—especially after World War II, and in spite of relentless efforts and much labor of love—most of the Hebraic creations in North America never gained the high stature and success as did those in Palestine, or after 1948, in Israel. Throughout its life the Hebraic movement in America had suffered from the ongoing ideological and material tensions surrounding the distribution of the meager financial resources among the Hebraic, educational, and Zionist organizations. Undoubtedly, however, what the Hebrew works in America do retain is their value as historical artifacts.

This creative phenomenon was followed by important research on the history and development of American Hebraica, mostly written in Hebrew, by such writers as Ephraim Deinard (*Sifrut Yisrael BeAmerica*), Jacob Kabakoff (*Halutzei HaSifrut HaIvrit BeAmerica* and *Shocharim VeNeemanim: Masot U'Mechkarim al HaSifrut VeHatarbut*

BeAmerica), Jacques K. Mikliszanski (*A History of Hebrew Literature in America*), and Moshe Pelli (*HaTarbut HaIvrit BeAmerica*), to mention just a few.

One of these Hebraists who immigrated to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century was Zevi Scharfstein (1884–1972). Scharfstein and his autobiographical book, *Arba'im Shanah BeAmerica* (Forty Years in America [Tel-Aviv: Masadah, 1955]), are the focus of this presentation.

Part I

Section A

Zevi Scharfstein: The Man, the Educator, and the Author

Judging by his autobiographical book, *Arba'im ShanahBeAmerica* (Forty Years in America), and by a variety of other testimonies and biographical sources, Zevi Scharfstein was an erudite and gifted man and a prolific writer. He was also well versed in the ancient Jewish texts, including the Bible, the Mishnah, and the Talmud. Still, it would be difficult to evaluate his literary or educational achievements as outstanding or indispensable. Among the *maskilim* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Scharfstein was well known and respected, but he never achieved the rank of a distinguished or dominant leader among his colleagues. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to underestimate this man or to dismiss his life's accomplishments.

Zevi Scharfstein was born in Dunivits (also called Dunovits and Dunayevtsy), now in western Ukraine, on March 15, 1884. His parents were religiously observant Jews, but very little is known about them. Even in his autobiography, Scharfstein mentions them only in passing. We know, however, that he studied in a heder and a yeshiva, and that from an early age he had shown great affinity to Hebrew, Yiddish, and teaching.

At this point it should be mentioned that as early as the 1830s, a Hebraic movement began to spread throughout Eastern Europe. It was launched by such pioneers as Abraham Mapu and continued with the great literary figures of Mendele Mokher Seforim, I. L. Peretz, Ahad Ha'am, Shalom Aleichem, David Frischman, H. N. Bialik,

and many others. By the time Scharfstein was born, many Jewish communities had already been heavily influenced by the Enlightenment, by early Zionism, and by the active circles of Jews in Eastern Europe who dedicated their lives to the revival of the Hebrew language, along with prolific and creative work in Yiddish. It was in this creative and intellectually stimulating atmosphere that Scharfstein spent his formative years. As early as 1900, at age sixteen, he was appointed as a teacher at a reformed heder in Tarnow,[1] back then in the Austrian province of western Galicia and now in Poland. Since 1903 he was determined to dedicate his life to Hebrew education. In 1908 he assumed the position of principal in the *Safah Berurah* (Clear Language) school in Brzeziny.

We learn from Scharfstein's autobiography that his financial condition was good. He managed to live well, dwelled in the better and greener parts of town, and enjoyed the respect of his students and their parents. This was quite the exception, as most of the *melamdim* (heder teachers) were usually incompetent and often ignorant men who had failed in every other occupation.[2] In fact, Scharfstein admits that he did not aspire to leave Europe, and that it was only because of the dangers and rapidly deteriorating conditions resulting from World War I that he was compelled to leave for America. A month before the war broke out, Zevi married Shoshanah, one of his former Hebrew students. The war forced him to leave Galicia before the publication of one of his textbooks, and the couple escaped to Geneva, Switzerland. Because of Switzerland's political neutrality, they were able to spend a few weeks there to enable Shoshanah to take advanced studies in French. During that time, Zevi began an intensive study of the psychological aspects of teaching.

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[1] See chapter 1, footnote 24.
[2] *Jewish Encyclopedia,* see *Heder.*

He and his wife arrived in New York in the early fall of 1914. Before his arrival, some of Scharfstein's early textbooks had already been known in America. He was now eager to meet other *maskilim* who, he was convinced, would help him to secure a teaching position. He was not mistaken. With the help of Daniel Persky,[3] one of the most active members of the Hebraic circles in New York, Scharfstein was offered a position as principal at a Hebrew day school in Stamford, Connecticut.

Although the Scharfsteins enjoyed the tranquility of suburban life in Stamford, Zevi was frustrated with the conditions of Jewish education in America and the lack of support and real enforcement by the students' parents. In the American Jewish schools of that time, as opposed to those in Eastern Europe, the children were not submissive, and the teacher, who in most cases was unable to speak English, was more often a martyr than a tyrant.[4] Scharfstein also missed the company of his Hebraist colleagues in New York. Through his acquaintance with Shalom Ber Maximon,[5] another Hebraist, who worked for the New York Bureau of Jewish Education, Zevi was able to secure a position on the bureau's staff, which was under the general directorship of Samson Benderly.[6] Consequently, in 1915, only a year after they moved to Stamford, the Scharfsteins returned to New York, and Zevi began to work on his ideas for new Hebrew textbooks in the fields of language instruction, Hebrew literature, the Bible, and Jewish history.

However, both the shaky financial situation at the bureau and the administrative limitations that were imposed on him by Benderly prompted him to search for a more satisfying and economically secure position. In 1916 he began teaching Hebrew and

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[3] See chapter 1, footnote 21.
[4] *Jewish Encyclopedia*, see *Heder*.
[5] See part II, section B, chapter 14.
[6] See part II, section B, chapter 15.

Hebrew literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary, first as an instructor in its Teachers Institute and later, and until his retirement in 1960, as a professor of Jewish education. One of the most significant steps that Scharfstein had taken in order to promote his own books was the establishment of the Shilo Publishing House in Brooklyn. That way he no longer needed to depend on the favors, budgets, or business considerations of others in the Hebrew publishing business.

In 1919 the Scharfsteins became parents to their first child, a son, whom they named Ben Ami. A few years later their daughter, Shulamit, was born. Zevi made sure that his son received a good foundation of Hebrew and Jewish education. In his early years Ben Ami was homeschooled. He retained his skills and knowledge of the Hebrew language, and in 1947 father and son coauthored a book titled *Hebrew Self-Taught* (New York: Zionist Organization of America).

Along with his dedication to Hebrew education in the United States, Scharfstein was also extremely interested in the Hebrew education in Eretz Yisrael (Palestine). He traveled several times to Eretz Yisrael and was known for both commending and criticizing the Hebrew education there. In one of his trips in 1926, he expressed his concern that there were not enough good books in Hebrew for children to read, and that compared with other countries, the vocabulary of Jewish children in Eretz Yisrael was rather limited.[7]

During his fifty-eight years in the United States, Zevi Scharfstein had been deeply committed to and highly active in the Hebraic circles in America and in its organizations, institutions, and literary output. As early as 1917 he was elected to the executive committee of *Histadrut Halvrit BeAmerica* (Hebrew Federation of America) and was one

[7] Uriel Ofek, *Sifrut Hayeladim Halvrit, 1900–1948* (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1988).

of the signatories of the federation's initial proclamation. Scharfstein was reelected to this committee several times in subsequent years. He dedicates considerable space in his autobiography to surveying the annual conventions of the federation, other conferences, and special banquets in honor of Hebrew authors and poets. Scharfstein was one of the speakers at the first convention in New York (1917), in many of the conventions that followed, and in conferences of smaller Hebrew orders, such as *Aggudat HaGeulah* (The Union of Redemption), *Aggudat Masadah* (The Union of Masadah), and the students' Hebrew organization at New York's City College. Nineteen-seventeen was also the second year of the monthly *Shachrut* (Youth) that was edited by Scharfstein. In 1918 he was one of the editors of a new compilation under the title *Lu'ach Achiever* (roughly translated as Achiever's Bulletin). In 1920 he became chief editor of a new federation monthly, *Tarbut* (Culture), a periodical addressing the subjects of education, instruction, and the Hebrew movement as a whole.

In the same year, and in light of the federation's financial difficulties, Scharfstein proposed to establish a special cultural fund that would underwrite many of the federation's activities. The idea was accepted but was not implemented until 1922 and continued thereafter with inconsistent success. When the federation launched a series of Hebrew lessons for adults, Scharfstein was one of the series' teachers. He was also frequently among those who welcomed and hosted guest Hebraists in New York, such as David Yellin,[8] Shemaryahu Levin,[9] and Hirsch (Zevi) Perez Chajes.[10] At the federation's

[8] David Yellin (1864–1941), second generation to be born in Jerusalem. Member of the large and active Yellin/Yehudah family in Israel. David was president of the Teachers' Association; also founded and headed the Hebrew Teachers' Seminary in Jerusalem. Professor of Hebrew poetry of the Spanish period at the Hebrew University. Helped found *Va-ad HaLashon*, local *B'nai Brith*, and the National Library. Deputy mayor of Jerusalem, 1920–1925, and chairman of the *Va'ad Le'ummi*, 1920–1928.
[9] Shemaryahu Levin (1867–1935), b. Russia. Zionist leader; Hebrew and Yiddish author. Elected to the first Russian Duma, 1906. Member of Zionist Executive, 1911. From 1914–1924 in the United States,

ninth conference, in Philadelphia (December 1926), Scharfstein was especially critical of the many suggestions for improvements that had been brought up in the previous ten years, but of which only a few had been implemented. He proposed that the federation hire three enthusiastic Hebraists, who would travel across the country to sell subscriptions for many of the federation's and the other societies' Hebrew publications. The conference accepted another suggestion of his to publish a biweekly for the Jewish youth in order to prepare the next generation for the challenges that American Jewry faced and to assure continuity; after a few months the biweekly was published with the name *Ben HaDor* (The Generation's Son). At the tenth conference, in Paterson, New Jersey, he spoke about the condition of the Hebrew culture in the world and bemoaned the fact that although the number of subscribers to the weekly *HaDoar* (The Post) had increased, it had not been possible to publish a bigger weekly and a monthly dedicated to literature and science even with all the wealth in America.

In 1931, in spite of the financial difficulties that arose during the Depression, the first *Annual of American Jewry* appeared, coedited by Scharfstein and M. Shoshani, pen name of Menachem Ribalow,[11] *HaDoar*'s editor. At the fifteenth conference, in Atlantic City, New Jersey (1934), once again one of Scharfstein's proposals was accepted—namely, to establish an assisting committee that would support the *(Ha)Academia LaLashon Halvrit* (The Academy for the Hebrew Language). In 1936 Scharfstein was

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directing propaganda work on Zionism and Hebrew culture. Sharp-witted publicist; famed speaker and conversationalist. Settled in Eretz Yisrael in 1924. Wrote memoirs.

[10] Hirsch (Zevi) Perez Chajes (1876–1927), b. Poland. Rabbi, scholar, Zionist leader. Taught religion in Lemberg and was librarian in Vienna, then taught Jewish history, Bible, and Hebrew in Florence's Collegio Rabbinico Italiano. In 1918 returned to Vienna and became chief rabbi. Ardent Zionist and distinguished writer.

[11] Menachem Ribalow (1895–1953), b. Volhynia district, Russia. Hebrew editor and essayist. In the United States from 1921. From 1923 until his death, general editor of the Hebrew weekly *HaDoar*. Edited other publications, including an anthology of American Hebrew poetry in Yiddish. Was a leader of Histadrut Halvrit of America, and copresident of the World Hebrew Union.

elected to the board of the Israel Matz Foundation for the support of Hebrew authors.[12] In a 1941 issue of *HaDoar,* Scharfstein wrote an article in support of the idea to establish a summer camp "in an entirely Jewish environment." In that same year it was Scharfstein who was first with the idea of *Hagigat BeReshit* (renewing the old custom to celebrate the beginning of the annual study of the Torah in Hebrew schools at the beginning of the Jewish year). In 1943 a special conference of Hebrew writers was organized in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Hebrew Federation. Scharfstein was once again one of the principal speakers. In December 1947, just days after the United Nations' vote to create a Jewish state according to the Partition Plan, the Hebrew Federation of America organized a conference on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, and Scharfstein was one of the delegates. He also attended the First World Hebrew Congress in Jerusalem in the summer of 1950. In 1952 Scharfstein entered into a bitter debate with Dr. Judah Pilch,[13] in which Pilch supported teaching the Bible in English, while Scharfstein was adamant that it must be taught in Hebrew. Writing in *HaDoar,* he called Dr. Pilch's ideas "a witch doctor's medicine for Hebrew education." In 1954 the Hebrew Academy was founded and the federation marked two other major events: it mourned the recent death of Menachem Ribalow, and it celebrated Scharfstein's seventieth birthday.

Scharfstein remained active in Hebraic circles until 1969, when he was eighty-five years old. He was one of the most prodigious contributors to the Hebrew press. His regular column in the American Hebrew weekly *HaDoar* dealt with political and,

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[12] Israel Matz (1869–1950), b. Russian Poland. U.S. manufacturer, philanthropist, patron of Hebrew scholarship. Founded Ex-Lax Company, 1906. Published the Hebrew monthly *HaToren*, 1922–1925. Established a foundation for support of Hebrew authors, 1925.

[13] Judah Pilch (1902–1986), b. Ukraine. Jewish educator. Ordained as rabbi in Turkey. In the United States from 1928. MA, Columbia University, New York City; PhD, Dropsie College, Philadelphia. Involved with many educational institutions, including HUC–JIR in Los Angeles. Early 1950s, organized the first Jewish Teachers seminar in Israel. From 1934–1938, vice president of the Histadrut Halvrit. Prolific author in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English.

especially, literary issues and events.[14] In 1940 he became editor of the educational periodical *Shevilei HaChinukh* (The Paths of Education), where his assistant and colleague for many years was William Chomsky (father of the renowned linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky).[15] Zevi Scharfstein died in New York on October 11, 1972.

There were two main themes that dominated and shaped Zevi Scharfstein's life story. The first was his love and passion for the Hebrew language, and the second had to do with his ongoing efforts to adapt to life in America. Reading between the lines, Scharfstein's frustrations emerge, and one can see that although a love and zeal for the Hebrew language was burning inside him, his enthusiasm was never contagious to his students. Throughout his autobiography one gets the impression that he strongly believed that the ignorance of Hebrew is among the greatest spiritual defects of American Jews; that unless this is remedied, and speedily, the Hebrew language is doomed to disappear from among the Jewish people in America, and that a Judaism without Hebrew is impossible. He believed that the knowledge of Hebrew is imperative for loyal Jews, since an ignorance of it precludes a decent appreciation or regard for Jewish values. Scharfstein probably realized that many would openly and even emphatically disagree with such strong feelings, and yet it seems that he believed there resides in the subconscious mind of the Jew a sense of remorse, perhaps even of guilt, about the neglect of the ancient tongue.[16] Scharfstein had something to rely on when he felt so strongly about this subject,

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[14] Most of the information on Scharfstein's role in the various conferences comes from Moshe Pelli's *HaTarbut Halvrit BeAmerica*, mentioned on page 1.
[15] William Chomsky (1896–1977), b. Russia. U.S. educator and writer; from 1913 in the United States; from 1922 on the faculty of Gratz College in Philadelphia, becoming chairman in 1949. From 1954 also lecturer at Dropsie College on Hebrew language, literature, and education.
[16] Ida Nasatir, book review of *Hebrew Self-Taught,* by Zevi and Ben-Ami Scharfstein, 1946.

because during his lifetime he had witnessed the remarkable growth of the Jewish community in Palestine. But as Hebrew language and literature blossomed in Palestine, Scharfstein's frustrations grew stronger as he realized that although such growth was occurring in Palestine, it was unlikely to materialize in America. His frustrations must have also stemmed from his own inability to ignite the flames of love and passion for the Hebrew language in his own students, most likely because he was first and foremost a scholar and writer rather than a charismatic teacher or a teacher who could easily relate to American Jewish youth. As a teacher in America, he could no longer rely on the customs and the social infrastructure of the Jewish shtetl that had helped him in elevating his position and authority as a Hebrew teacher in Eastern Europe. As a *maskil,* Zevi was exposed to and adopted the high intellectual and artistic standards of European high society. In New York he became an art connoisseur and a collector of paintings, some of which he bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (including *The Beach,* by Beatriz Milhazes, and *White Flag,* by Jasper Jones).

When Zevi arrived in the United States in 1914, he was already thirty years old. His age, along with his apparent introverted, low-key, and humble personality, had much to do with his difficulties in adapting to the dynamic and rapidly changing life in America. The general impression from his autobiography is that Zevi Scharfstein remained a Jewish transplant on American soil, one who remained an Eastern European Jew in his soul, in his habits, and in his worldview. Throughout his life, everything in the American milieu—skyscrapers and private lawns, the endless types of dogs and the colorful demographics of New York—never ceased to fascinate him. And yet he remained an outsider, an observer rather than a wholehearted participant. With his talents,

knowledge, intelligence, and creative output, he had the tools to become a leader. Yet decisive factors in his life and personality prevented him from becoming a significant one.

His outlook also remained deeply ingrained in the male-dominated Jewish society of nineteenth-century Europe. In his writings, for example, he repeatedly uses the expression "I and my wife" (or "me and my wife"), rather than the polite "My wife and I." It may be that Scharfstein did not use such language intentionally, but perhaps the culture of more than a century ago, when the man was the dominant figure in the family, subconsciously influenced his writing style. In chapter 23 of his autobiography, Scharfstein confesses that to the end of his life he himself had remained among those immigrants who related to life in America with ambivalence: although his previous criticism of the American lifestyle and values had somewhat abated, he never fully adapted to life in America to the point of total acceptance or patriotism. And in spite of the fact that he was glad his own daughter received Jewish education without resentment, he rarely mentioned or wrote on the topic of Jewish education for girls.[17]

Nonetheless, as attested above, Zevi Scharfstein was active, known, and respected among the Hebrew writers and Jewish educators in New York. Many of his writings were well received, and the *Histadrut Ivrit* (Hebrew Federation) implemented a number of his original ideas. The Hebrew Culture Center in New York contributed to Hebrew education in its own way by publishing numerous children's books and textbooks. Several of these books were written by Scharfstein and were widely used, as described in his

[17] Iris Parush and Ann Brener, "The Politics of Literacy: Women and Foreign Languages in Jewish Society of 19th-Century Europe." In *Modern Judaism,* vol. 15, no. 2 (May 1995), pp. 183–206.

autobiography. This issue leads us to a more thorough discussion of Scharfstein's autobiographical work itself.

Part I

Section B

An Analysis of Scharfstein's Autobiography, *Arba'im Shanah BeAmerica,* and Its Historical Significance

In light of the above statement that Scharfstein's output is probably not "outstanding or indispensable," it is appropriate to explain, nonetheless, the importance of his autobiographical work, *Arba'im Shanah BeAmerica.* There are several reasons that make this book very valuable for the study of various aspects of American Jewish history: First, it is an autobiography—that is, not a secondary work, but an original document and testimony by a Jewish person who emigrated from Eastern Europe to America and lived there for the rest of his life. In it, the author demonstrates a keen eye and ear for all that surrounds him in the New World. Scharfstein provides enlightening and detailed information that ranges from the architecture and furnishing of an expensive apartment on Park Avenue to a flea market on the Lower East Side, and from advertisements in Hebrew and Yiddish newspapers in the fall of 1914 to the proceedings at a Zionist convention in Boston. He is never bashful about expressing his intellectual insights or emotional reactions with regard to the people he met, the sights he saw, and the events that occurred in his life. We need to bear in mind, though, that Scharfstein was writing his memoirs. To a large extent he relied on his memory, and occasionally he erred with dates or names. Therefore, for the verification of factual accuracy, other sources should be consulted.

Second, Scharfstein's descriptions and analyses do not exist in a vacuum. Through hundreds of fascinating details he compares his experiences in America with his old life in Eastern Europe. Thus, the reader can identify with the writer's experiences and evaluations. By doing so, Scharfstein assures that we not only gain knowledge about the many facets of the Jewish immigrant's new life in America, but that we also learn about the differences between Jewish life in America and in Eastern Europe.

Third, because of Scharfstein's superb knowledge of and passion for the Hebrew language, he was able to situate himself at the center of the *maskilim* and the Hebraic circles in New York during the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, little is known from other sources about this world of ardent Hebrew partisans who believed they could create a Hebrew literature in America. These fanatics were moving in a countercultural direction, since Jewish immigrants were consumed with a desire to learn the English language and adjust to the American culture. Scharfstein's autobiography gives many examples of the tremendous social, political, and literary activities that took place among those Hebraic circles that began as early as the 1870s. Few books give such a great amount of valuable information on this topic, and Scharfstein's knowledge of it is the result of his own firsthand experiences.

Fourth, Scharfstein's autobiography dedicates several chapters to detailed descriptions of his encounter with a number of important contemporary Hebraists and Zionists in America, such as Louis Brandeis, Shalom Dov Ber Maximon, Samson Benderly, Dr. Moshe Halevi, and Dr. Nissan Touroff, to mention but a few. Although information on some of these personalities is available elsewhere, Scharfstein's memoirs provide colorful information that can only be gained from the author's personal

experience with these personalities. His chapter on Henrietta Szold, for example, is a masterpiece in miniature.

Fifth, because this autobiography covers the period that stretches from 1914 through 1954, from World War I through nine years after World War II, we gain important information on a wide variety of subjects. We learn, for example, about East European Jewish immigration in the twentieth century, and about the fact that not all Jews who came to America were impoverished. We learn from the very inside about the great problems, challenges, failures, and success stories concerning a critically important period in the history of Jewish education in America. We get a very close look at the activities of the various Hebrew societies in New York, New England, and the East Coast. We learn of the social and physical environment of a fairly well-to-do Jew in New York; indeed, it is an eye-opener to those who are only familiar with the harsh conditions experienced by so many of the Jewish immigrants who settled in New York's Lower East Side. And we also learn about Jewish political, labor, and welfare organizations, and Jewish leadership in America in the first half of the twentieth century: how they functioned; the nature of their internal relationships; who was in charge; the challenges and obstacles they faced; and so on.

Finally, the fact that this autobiography is written in the Hebrew language and, furthermore, in a euphuistic style that often incorporates ancient Jewish aphorisms, and both Aramaic and Yiddish terms and expressions, makes Scharfstein's memoirs inaccessible to those who cannot overcome these linguistic hurdles. In light of the points mentioned above, there is much value in translating and annotating this autobiography

into English and thus making its contents accessible to many more readers who will benefit from the collection of information in Zevi Scharfstein's autobiography.

Part II

Prefatory Note: In section A of part II, I have provided readers with a fluid translation and a detailed annotation of five chapters of Scharfstein's autobiography: chapters 1 through 4 and chapter 30. Because of time limitations and the expected scope of this presentation, I have provided in section B of part II a summation, but without annotation, of the remaining twenty-five chapters.

Part II

Section A

Translation and Annotation

Chapter 1

Our Guide in New York

I

What were the factors that caused me and my wife to leave Europe and to set out to a faraway land, to the United States—a land to which we did not aspire to come? The factors were blood, fire, and columns of smoke. We got out of Europe in 1914 as World War I broke out. We traveled from Genoa by an Italian ship, small by size and light by weight and baggage, with its romantic name, *Duca di L'Abruzzi,*[1] that was rocking about on the surface of the sea waves as the strong autumn winds were blowing.

Were we happy in our voyage? I do not know how to define the essence of happiness. Humboldt would say,[2] "I realized that happiness doesn't depend on events, of and by themselves, but in our relation to them." The events, of and by themselves—there was nothing in them to gladden our hearts. In Europe the lights dimmed, and life deteriorated, and cities crumbled, and the conflagration spread out. I did not know of my father's and my brother's fate in Russia, and my wife's parents escaped from Galicia and sought shelter for themselves in a foreign city, in Vienna, Austria's capital. And we—we

[1] In Italian: The Duke of Abruzzi. Abruzzi is a mountainous region in central Italy, bordering on the Adriatic Sea in the east, with L'Aquila as its capital.
[2] Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835); German linguist, author, education reformer, and diplomat who advocated the self-development of man. Was a regular member of the circle at the home of the leading Jewish intellectual Henriette Herz in Berlin.

were exiled to a foreign country, and Korach's mammon we did not bring with us.[3] In my pocket was forty dollars, or perhaps forty minus one—the one I gave as a tip to the waiter on the ship. And what other possessions did we bring? One suitcase of summer clothes and a stationery chest that contained numerous books and illustrated cards, postcards of landscapes from Switzerland and Italy, souvenirs from the places in which we spent our honeymoon. Kinsfolk and relatives we did not have in the new land, except for a remote relative of my wife's, whom we notified of our coming and were not sure whether our letter reached him, and whether he practiced the saying of our sages, may their memory be for blessings: "*g'dolah haknasat orchim.*"[4] In short, we went toward a mist. And yet our spirits did not sag. We were young and did not need to repeat Bialik's question: "They say there is love in the world; what is love?"[5]

And the atmosphere on the ship—it, too, distracted us from tomorrow's worries. The Holy One, blessed be He, graced us with the privilege to meet a famous Italian female singer who had been invited to San Francisco for a series of concerts. She became friends with my wife, and on her account the days of our journey turned into one long festival. Every day the travelers in first and second class assembled in the music room, and when the singer Adaberto appeared,[6] they outpoured words upon her in order that she would please them with her voice. She refused somewhat, but then granted their wish. An

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[3] From Numbers 16 in the Bible. Korach, a Levite, was punished by death when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed him and his household after he challenged Moses's and Aaron's leadership. Jewish tradition says Korach possessed great wealth.

[4] In Hebrew: Great is the welcoming of guests. Paraphrase of Mishnah, Avot 1:5 and 3:12.

[5] Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934), b. Volhinya (western Ukraine). Greatest modern Hebrew poet. Essayist, story writer, translator, editor. Lived in Zhitomir, Odessa, Berlin (1921) and Tel-Aviv (from 1924). Literary editor of several periodicals, founder of two publishing houses, compiler of selections of Aggadic lore; deeply influenced Hebrew literature and the development of the language. The line above is taken from Bialik's poem *Hakhnisini tahat k'nafekh* ("Take me under your wing").

[6] Esther Adaberto (1872–1954), b. Naples, Italy. Dramatic soprano; appeared in many European opera houses as well as those in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and other cities.

acquaintance of hers, an Italian newspaper editor, sat at the piano to accompany her, and she opened with an aria. Those Italian travelers, who were experts in singing, turned into a choir and sang with enthusiasm the classical repertoire, thereby silencing the engine's noise. Thus we passed the days and the evenings in pleasures. The waves lapped, and the wheels rotated fast, turning the seawater into foam—and the choir sang mightily, making us forget past and future.

But sometimes when I sat alone on the bedcovers, or during sleepless nights, a worry filled my heart. *Where am I going? What hidden things await us in the new land?* And then I remembered the contents of letters from America, published by the Hebrew newspapers in Russia. I also recalled compositions by Yiddish poets who lived there. I read *The Poems from the Ghetto* of Morris Rosenfeld[7] in the German translation by Berthold Feiwel,[8] which were published in Berlin with Ephraim Lilien's illustrations and ornamentation.[9] The rhymes on the workers' hard labor at the sweatshop factories still ring in my ears:

> The machines in the factory hum with persistence.
>
> Sometimes I forget in the noise my existence—
>
> In the tumult I wander as do most,

[7] Morris Rosenfeld (1862–1923), b. Poland; in the United States from 1886. Pioneer of Yiddish poetry. Worked in New York City sweatshops. Known as "Poet Laureate of Labor." Coedited *Der Ashmeday*, 1894, a satirical humorous weekly, and the daily *New Yorker Morgenblat*, 1905.

[8] Berthold Feiwel (1875–1937), b. Moravia. Zionist leader; Herzel's close associate; editor in chief of the Zionist organ *Die Welt*, 1901. One of *Keren Hayesod*'s first directors. In London from 1919. Settled in Jerusalem, 1933.

[9] Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874–1925), Austrian illustrator and printmaker. First artist to become involved in the Zionist movement. A founder of the Berlin publishing house *Jüdischer Verlag*. His Herzl portraits and decorations for the *Golden Book of Jewish National Fund* are familiar to Zionists all over the world. Turned from book illustrating to etching, 1908. Lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I.

I become a machine, and my soul is lost.

I work and I toil without count,

Products are made, accumulate and mount.

What for and for whom?—I won't know nor ask,

Can machines meditate and carry the task?

No feelings, idea, nor insight,

Brutal work crushes with might

All that's tender, noble, and deep,

All worthy things one's trying to keep.

Moments pass quickly and hours float,

And night or day, too, rush like a sailboat.

I chase after engines and machines as in flight,

Senselessly I run, aimlessly I row—no shore in sight.

Lilien's illustrations were a sad accompaniment to the poems. In his illustration to the poem "The Sewing Man" we see a worker, consumption-stricken, fallen cheeks, bent at the sewing machine and working relentlessly. This worker will not be privileged to see his young son and play with him at his home, and he laments:

Only seldom will I see him awake,

My tiny sweet boy, my love's sake,

Morning and night into his room I peep,

But always, always in his bed he's asleep.

Early to work I go, to see my son I yearn,

Too long I stay away, too late I return,

Oh, how strange is my child's glare,

How foreign is my son's stare.[10]

Would my destiny be as theirs?

In truth, I hoped to be engaged there in my beloved profession. To that day, teaching had brought me pleasure, comfortable life, and good status in society. And what would be the Hebrew teacher's lot in the new land? Regarding this issue, too, a sad word had come to me surreptitiously. I remembered reading about the schools and the teacher's situation in that metropolis in letters published in *HaOlam*[11] by my city resident Akiva Fleischmann,[12] who wandered to New York. The parents, he wrote, admire the American education and look down on Hebrew education. The Jewish mother adorns her sons when they go to the public school, and when it is time for them to go to Talmud Torah, she takes off their pretty clothes and dresses them with patched and tattered clothes, and sometimes the children would come there barefoot, with no shoes on their feet.

Barefoot? Will I teach barefoot children? That image seemed odd to me, and my heart did not let me believe it.

And a Jewish woman from New York who was traveling with us on the ship told me that the instructors and teachers in New York are poor and destitute, because they

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[10] This poem was translated by Avigdor HaMeiri, as published in *Gilyonot*, Tel-Aviv, issue 162–63.
[11] In Hebrew: The World. *HaOlam* was the central organ of the World Zionist Organization. Published weekly, 1907–1950 (excerpt for short intervals.) Hebrew counterpart of *Die Welt*. Edited in Cologne, Vilna, Odessa, London, Berlin, and from 1936 in Jerusalem.
[12] Akiva Fleischmann (1870–1929), b. Donevtsi, Podolia (Ukraine). Began as a heder (see footnote 24 in this chapter) and yeshiva teacher; in the United States since 1897; Hebrew teacher and journalist. Was secretary of the periodical *HaModi'a LaHadashim* (1900–1901). Was one of the pioneers of Hebrew pedagogical journalism, and founder of the periodical *Hed HaMoreh* (1915).

earn a meager salary, and in order to fill the shortage for their livelihood, they become peddlers as well, selling boxes of Wissotsky tea or brandy.[13]

I heard these things, but in my heart I couldn't believe them. More than ten years I had functioned as a teacher in Europe, liked by my pupils and respected by their parents. Even there, in the cities of poverty, I never saw Jewish children coming barefoot to their lessons. This must have been an exaggeration. And in my heart I felt confident about my future. And this confidence had something upon which to rely.

In my pocket there was a letter, written in euphuistic Russian, by Zevi Aberson,[14] one of the heads of the Russian Zionists in Switzerland, to his friend Abraham Goldberg,[15] one of the directors of the Zionist movement in the United States. In my wife's purse there was a letter from Dr. Robinson,[16] professor of history and political economics, to his friend Professor Seligman, both of Columbia University.[17] He asked his colleague to be helpful to her.

And in a Hebrew periodical—if I am not mistaken, in *HaMe'orer,*[18] edited by J. H. Brenner and published in London[19]—I found Daniel Persky's address.[20] Apparently, I

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[13] Kalonymus Ze'ev Wissotsky (1824–1904), merchant, philanthropist, supporter of *Hibbat Zion.* Established in Moscow the famous tea firm that bears his name; supported and financed Hebrew literature, e.g., *HaShilo'ach.*

[14] Zevi Aberson (1875–1951), b. Poland. Zionist journalist and political activist. Directed the Zionist Organization's office in Geneva in the 1920s, and was in charge of the Comite de Delegationes Juives designed to protect Jewish rights in the Diaspora.

[15] Abraham Goldberg (1883–1942), b. Yarmolintsy, Podolia, Ukraine. Zionist, politician, writer, and political commentator. Was among the founders of *Poalei-Zion* (Zion's Workers) in America. Edited the *Poalei-Zion*'s quarterly organ, *Freie Stimme* (Free Voice); from 1909 edited the Zionist Organization of America's weekly *Dos Yiddische Folk,* and for a while also edited the Hebrew monthly *HaToren.*

[16] James H. Robinson (1863–1936), American born; professor of history, Columbia University, 1895–1919; founded New School for Social Research, 1919. In 1929 made president of the American Historical Association (from *American National Biography Online,* www.anb.org).

[17] Edwin R. Seligman (1861–1939), American born; from 1885, professor of economics, Columbia University.

[18] In Hebrew: The Rouser. A Hebrew monthly published in London 1906–1907, edited by J. H. Brenner; influenced the generation of the Second *Aliyah* and Hebrew literature of the period.

[19] Joseph Hayyim Brenner (1881–1921), b. Poland. Hebrew writer; moved to London in 1904. From 1909 in Eretz Yisrael. Lived in Jaffa and was killed during the Arab riots of 1921. Exercised great influence as

said to myself, a patron of Hebrew. I sent a letter from Genf, Switzerland, and notified him that I was about to come to New York in the beginning of autumn, and I asked him to try hard on my behalf to find for me a position "that is respectful of me and my activities in the field of education to this day." Although I was a foreigner and he would not know me, I had nonetheless acquired two loyal referees, Jewish residents of America, who had witnessed my teaching in school.

The first witness was Professor Gotthard Deutsch from Cincinnati.[21] During his travels in Russia, he came to Berdichev to research the life of the Jews in that town,[22] and the town's most distinguished citizens brought him to the "reformed heder,"[23] the institute that was their glory. Deutsch's arrival made an impression on the town. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and possessed a distinctive countenance. His glory was his beard—a long beard, split in two, and sprinkled with gray hair. The beard lent him a majesty of ancient times, an ancestral majesty. He walked with assurance as a liberated man, before whose eyes there was no fear, with his head proudly raised. At his right hip swung a camera, enclosed in a yellow leather case, hung from the shoulder by a strap. As I walked

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novelist, short story writer, critic, philosopher, translator, editor, and publisher. Connected with Jewish labor movement.

[20] Daniel Persky (1887–1962), b. Minsk. U.S. Hebraist, educator, and journalist; in New York from 1906. Taught at *Herzliah* Hebrew Teachers' College, New York City. Edited Hebrew children's magazines. Wrote books on Hebrew grammar and syntax, and was a leading figure in U.S. Hebrew-speaking circles.

[21] Gotthard Deutsch (1859–1921), b. Kanitz, Moravia. Rabbi, historian, and theologian. In 1891 appointed professor of Jewish history at Hebrew Union Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Succeeded Isaac Mayer Wise as editor of the German American monthly *Deborah*. Director of the Jewish history division of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Was a moderate in the Reform movement and had sympathy toward Zionism and Orthodoxy.

[22] Berdichev, city in the Ukraine; second-largest Jewish community in nineteenth-century Russia. Jewish community from eighteenth century. Important center of Hasidism and the seat of the Hasidic *tsadik* Levi Isaac of Berdichev. Jewish population declined from more than forty-six thousand in 1861 to fifteen thousand in 1970.

[23] The reformed heder was founded by Jewish *maskilim* at the outset of the twentieth century in Eastern European towns and villages. It emphasized pedagogy and teaching in Hebrew. It mainly served families who could afford to send their children to the reformed heder. In the old (traditional) heder the teaching language was "old" Yiddish, and subjects included mainly the Bible, the Talmud, reading, writing, and basic arithmetic.

with him in the streets of Berdichev, the passers-by would look at him with awe and would move aside to make room for him. Such a beautiful and handsome Jew, patriarchal and modern at once, had rarely been seen there. And the camera gave proof that he had come from afar.

As he entered the class that I taught in the "reformed heder," he turned to me and said in Hebrew, with a Sephardi dialect,[24] "I came from America," he said to me, "and it is my wish to be acquainted with Jewish life in Russia. Would you permit me to test the children?"

"We would be honored."

"Do they study Jewish history?"

"Yes."

"From which period?"

"From the Middle Ages."

He asked the children about Yehudah Halevi[25] and Maimonides.[26] In spite of his Sephardi dialect, the children understood him and answered his questions properly.

"I wish we had such schools in America," he said with excitement.

The second witness was Reuben Brainin.[27] During his travels through Galicia in the year 1908, I invited him to Brzeziny,[28] in which I was principal of the *Safah Berurah*

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[24] A major ethnic and cultural branch of the Jewish people that originated with the Jews in Spain and Portugal before the expulsion of 1492 (its counterpart in Western and Central Europe is the Ashkenazi branch). Many of these Jews settled later in North Africa, Eretz Yisrael, Turkey, Greece, the Balkans, southern Italy, southern France, and the Netherlands. They have a unique Hebrew dialect, most of which has been adopted by the State of Israel. They also created their own Judeo-Spanish language called Ladino.
[25] Yehudah (Judah) HaLevi (ca. 1075–1141), b. Spain. Physician and great Hebrew poet and philosopher. Wrote both religious and secular verse; more than 800 poems and 350 *piyyutim*; many are imbued with longing for Zion. Introduced forms of Arabic poetry into Hebrew verse. His philosophical *Kuzari* is in the form of a dialogue. Set out to Eretz Yisrael; arrived in Egypt in 1140 and died there.
[26] Commonly used name for Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, also known as Rambam, (1135–1204), b. Spain. Fled persecution to Morocco, then lived as a physician in Egypt. An outstanding rabbinic authority, codifier, and philosopher. His two greatest works are *Misneh Torah* and *Guide of the Perplexed.*

school,[29] to lecture on the revival of the Hebrew language and literature. He, too, tested the children and praised them.

And if these two highly regarded individuals would recommend me, I said in my heart, a position would certainly be found for me. So why should I worry?

II

The festive feeling on the ship was gradually dwindling. When you are in the middle of the sea, you are cut off from the world and its worries. Your bread is baked, your fish is fried, your wine is poured, waiters hurry to fulfill your requests, and daily, in the afternoon and evening, musicians please you with classical melodies. This ship was like a showboat. But as you approached shore, you remembered life's responsibilities and battles. Tomorrow you would wake up from your sleep, and the task of earning your keep on foreign soil would burden you.

The passengers of first and second class had already taken out their binoculars to gaze at the distant ships and look for the faint coastal line. And as for the Italian immigrants in steerage, who smiled and tugged at their long mustaches good-naturedly throughout the voyage, they now appeared somber, their hardened, suntanned, and wind-beaten faces clouded with seriousness. Parents and their children assembled in groups on the crowded deck, voices mixed in a gargle—a very great tumult. Men carried their trunks, wooden trunks with metal hoops, and gathered them in one place. Their low-

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[27] Reuben Brainin (1862–1939), b. Bielorussia. Hebrew and Yiddish author and critic. Lived in Vienna from 1892 and in the United States from 1909. Wrote on Hebrew literature in context of world literature; introduced biography into Hebrew literature.

[28] Brzeziny (also Brzezany), Galicia (today in western Ukraine). Center of textiles; Jews from early seventeenth century. First synagogue made of stone, 1893. Rabbi Abraham Bornstein's *Yeshivah* established in late nineteenth century. In 1912 its Jewish population stood at 8,214.

[29] In Hebrew: Clear Language.

stature, wives in oversized dresses busied themselves with the pots and pans and put them into heavy bags as their sons and daughters stood by to assist them.

The ship slowed down. A boat with a raised American flag was seen. The captain and his deputy stood by the guardrail and saluted. The boat approached, the ship's sailors lowered a rope ladder, and the officials climbed aboard.

The officials sat in a hall to check the passengers—the American citizens. In the meantime, tugboats came and pulled the ship into the harbor. The passengers who stayed behind in the cabins began to disembark. They walked in couples and pairs, a husband and his wife, a man and his friend, calm and confident, smiling toward their country and countrymen. In front of them, the ship's porters carried the elegant leather suitcases and the heavy trunks, the clothes trunks. Behind the harbor's handrail stood a mass of people who had come to welcome their relatives. Standing on their tiptoes, they stretched out their necks to get a glimpse of those coming and waved with their kerchiefs. Adaberto said good-bye to my wife with hugs and kisses, and with pleas to correspond with her.

Little by little, the ship became empty of her privileged passengers. Now we—the foreigners, the immigrants—remained behind. We were taken down into a steamboat in order to take us over to Ellis Island for a check—according to the immigration law. Autumn winds were bowing. We felt like strangers, dependent on the kindness of others, and discriminated against.

This uneasy feeling increased as we got closer to Ellis Island, with its green lawn. The island was beautiful and pleasant, but it neither attracted our eyes nor gladdened our hearts. Sadness surrounded us. We found ourselves under supervision—officials in front and behind us. Like a herd they led us and directed our steps. We entered a big building

with gray walls. We passed in line in front of physicians, our heads uncovered. The first physician examined each head and sometimes would stretch his hand to dishevel an immigrant's hair. A second physician examined the eyes, looking for trachoma or other defects.[30] It is not the examination itself that devalues our human worth, but the way it is executed, wholesale. Like a flock we are—a flock of sheep. The physician doesn't treat you as a human being—he only directs his gaze on the place that needs to be checked, and to the rest his eyes are blind. The saying by our sages, of blessed memory, is also not practiced here: "A bride whose eyes are beautiful is exempt from a total body examination."[31] Only my wife remained upbeat. She smiled at everyone, and everyone smiled back at her.

We were called before the head of the commission and his entourage—those who were seated at a long table. A middle-aged Jewish woman turned to me and spoke to me in German, which language I speak. After responding to several routine questions, the head of the commission looked at us with smiling face and sent us away as liberated people.

"I wish you success," said the commission's head, and we felt relieved.

III

A policeman led us to the room's door that opened into the hall, and out of the multitude of people came toward us "the uncle" from De Lancey Street.

"Are you Mendel's daughter? And this is your husband? Welcome!"

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[30]Trachoma is a contagious disease of the eye with inflamed granulation on the inner surface of the lids.
[31] Paraphrase of a passage in the Babylonian Talmud, Order Moed, Tractate Ta'anit, 24 A.

In front of us stood a man about sixty years of age, whose pale face, hands with swollen veins, and somewhat crooked fingers bespoke of one who toiled and busied himself as a laborer. But with all of this, there was a dignity in his looks and speech. His clothes were clean and pressed, although they were made out of cheap fabric, roughly sewn, as are those that are sold to the masses. His beard was broad and combed and well cultivated. His speech was measured, as if he was counting his words. His only flaw was being somewhat cross-eyed, and this detracted from his purposeful importance.

"Shalom Aleichem!"[32] he said, as he gazed and examined me. "You are probably very tired from your journey."

"No, Uncle," erupted my wife with glee, "we traveled in second class and enjoyed delicious food, beautiful singing, and interesting companions. It was a pleasurable voyage."

"So it was," replied my uncle coolly, quite sternly. "You enjoyed yourselves! Times have certainly changed. It wasn't so when we came here. Anyway, let's go home and have a cup of tea. Don't worry. You have a tour guide in this country."

I picked up the light suitcase, and my wife carried the stationery chest in her arms, the one that contained the illustrated cards, and we followed our tour guide to a small boat that would take us to New York.

In the boat we sat on a long bench—I to my uncle's right and my wife to his left—and our good patron began with questions about my wife's family. Afterward he told me with calculated modesty that he was a worker when he came, but now he was a contractor—employing workers in a textile factory. On account of our arrival, he had called that morning a holiday and came to meet us. Into his speech he interpolated poetic

[32] In Hebrew: Welcome! May peace be upon you!

verses. His words were heard pleasantly and importantly. And I will admit that he evoked in me feelings of respect. When we disembarked at Battery Park,[33] we boarded the Broadway cable car. Out of curiosity I looked at the tall buildings and the rapid traffic in the streets. I sensed the blazing breath of a metropolis. The passers-by were rushing out of nervous impulse, and on their faces signs of worry for a missed hour.

In just a few days I, too, will be among these, who are chased by toil, I said in my heart, and a wave of excitement filled my heart.

Meantime, I saw my uncle consulting with the conductor. He spoke English haltingly, and the conductor looked at him unkindly. I wanted to help my uncle, but because I couldn't understand a word of the conversation, I asked the conductor, "*Sprechen Zie Deutsch?*"[34]

"*Jawohl.*"[35]

And the conductor told me with annoyance that this man stuttered in English and didn't know exactly what he wanted.

"An anti-Semite," my uncle said to me. "He pretends not to understand me. We need to go as far as lower De Lancey and then switch to another cable car, but he can't answer me like a human being."

My uncle's face had changed. His two eyes, both the good one and the flawed one, shot bolts of rage. His thick eyebrows stood on end.

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[33] Battery Park (known to New Yorkers as "The Battery") is a twenty-one-acre public park located at the southern tip of Manhattan in New York City. The park is named for the artillery that was stationed there during the colonial era to protect the harbor. To the northwest of the park lies Battery Park City, an area of landfill redevelopment built in the 1970s and 1980s.

[34] In German: Do you speak German?

[35] In German: Yes.

I explained to the conductor where we were going, and he gave us transit tickets and said to me, "When you arrive at De Lancey I will give you a cue, and you will take the cable car on the same street all the way to your home." I handed the ticket to my tour guide and promised him that I would take him to his place. He took the ticket from my hand, turned toward the windows, and spoke not a word.

IV

As the De Lancey cable car was going down the street, I realized that I was sitting among my people. These are my brothers—those whose beards are cut neatly, shaven, or grown. Most of them are "modern," a cheap modernity: short and dull-colored clothes, crushed and dusty hats whose brims are bent down, hesitating, flappy, and their dressing gowns not the cleanest. And the main thing: wrinkled faces, plowed with suffering and toil.

On the street there is mayhem. People rush, bump into each other, excusing each other angrily. From time to time I catch a glimpse of signs with Hebrew letters: *Kosher*[36] and also *LaMehadrin min HaMehadrin.*[37] I see a great number of shops, as well as sale counters, burdened with merchandise. This atmosphere is familiar to me—the atmosphere of fairs: it has neither beauty, nor splendor, nor good tidings, but it testifies of life and lessens the feelings of alienation.

It has neither beauty nor splendor, since even in the towns of Galicia, from which I came, Brzeziny, and Tarnow,[38] I didn't dwell in the crowded, poverty-stricken

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[36] In Yiddish: Fulfilling the requirements of Jewish law as pertaining to food and its preparation.
[37] In Aramaic: For the strictest of the strict.
[38] City in Poland east of Cracow. Jews there from fifteenth century. In 1581 granted rights to distill and deal with alcohol liquor. Community devastated in 1655 by Swedish invasion and in 1663 by fire. In 1670 reached agreement with guilds and city on taxation. In 1772 annexed to Austria. In 1890 a new school established with funds from the Baron Hirsch's Foundation. Important Hasidic center, but in nineteenth century also of *maskilim* and Zionists.

neighborhoods in which "Jewishness" announced itself publicly. I lived on quiet and spacious streets, near gardens. Now I see the old poverty of the townships, augmented in the form of a metropolis.

As the cable car kept going down the street, poverty and filth increased. Here self-assuredness returned to my uncle. This was the place of his confidence, the familiar territory of his rule. On Broadway his stature diminished. Over there wealth rules, [along with] American manners, and the English language. This neighborhood is the place of his livelihood and honor, the domain of his rule at the factory, and as *gabbai*[39] in the *Beit Midrash.*[40]

We arrived at a tall bridge that rose from the middle of the street—the Williamsburg Bridge—under which there were sale counters of fish, vegetables, and fruit. At this very place my uncle stood up and said, in a voice full of self-recognition, "Here we get off."

Upon the stony steps in front of a dusty tenement building, whose walls were scratched, full of poked holes, and covered with youngsters' graffiti, stood two women: the one small and thin—whose nose was as long as a stork's beak, and therefore her face looked like that of a bird—and her companion, a heavy woman with broad thighs, whose head was covered with a headscarf.

"Sarahke," said our uncle[41] to the little one, "here are our guests. Let's go up to our apartment."

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[39] In Hebrew, a word that has several meanings: beadle, back-up Torah reader, or treasurer.
[40] In Hebrew: the house of study; often attached to the synagogue.
[41] Although Scharfstein refers to "our uncle," the man was actually Scharfstein's wife's uncle.

The woman aimed her hawk eyes at us, measuring and examining my clothes and my wife's elegant hat, and grumbled, "Why you are so overdressed? Did you come for a *Yom Tov?*[42] Here in America you wear work clothes; here people work."

Some concerns crossed my mind: *Should we let our relatives alone and check into a hotel?* An inner voice told me, *Leave!* But the practical voice whispered, *This temporary accommodation is better.*

My uncle threw an angry look at his wife. She fell silent and walked in front of us. At home they seated us at the table to drink tea. My uncle covered his head with a *kippah,*[43] a tall silky one, removed his shoes and put on slippers, smoothed the hair of his beard with his hand, and he looked like the town's rabbi. He had forgotten his failure and insult at the cable car. Here in his home he was the ruler, and here he conversed like a man of experience, for whom America and its ways were familiar and well known. He was ready to guide us on a road to success in this new environment.

[42] In Hebrew: holiday.
[43] In Hebrew: skullcap.

Chapter 2

In the Language of Advertisement

Our conversation with the uncle rolled on for an hour, and after lunch he turned to us and said, "I must go to my business and you can rest."

"And you, Sarah," he said to his wife, "buy today's newspapers and let them read them so that they can find out what's going on in America."

The woman sharpened her eyes and raised her beaklike nose. It seemed that this purchase was not to her liking. After weighing the matter in her mind, she said to me, "I have a big bundle of old newspapers here. Read them. It must all be the same to you anyway. The newspapers repeat the same old things day after day."

She handed me a big bundle of paper sheets of the *Tageblatt,*[1] an Orthodox daily published in New York. I looked closely at the date. Several weeks had passed since they came out. Most of them were from before Rosh Hashanah[2] and Yom Kippur.[3] I threw myself over the newspapers with enormous craving. I was thirsty for reading a newspaper, since during all the days of my journey I knew nothing of what was happening in the world, especially in our own world, the Jewish world. And second, I desired to comprehend the quality of the new world into which we entered, and who would reveal to me its ways of life better than a newspaper?

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[1] In Yiddish: The Daily Leaf. *The Tageblatt*, founded in 1881 by Kasriel Sarasohn and edited by John Paley, was the first Yiddish daily in America. Although it had a religious bent, it was not above the lure of yellow journalism. It often played loose with facts and the English language, thus committing more than a few comical errors in the process. It's circulation reached one hundred thousand in 1900. Only a decade later its monopoly was broken by its rival, the *Arbeiter tseitung*, the Socialist Labor Party's newspaper, edited by Philip Krantz and then Abraham Cahan.

[2] In Hebrew: the Jewish New Year.

[3] In Hebrew: the Day of Atonement.

And I was not mistaken. I realized within an hour or two that I had arrived in a wonderland. Great and hidden things that I did not consider nor entertain in my imagination unfolded in front of me. Amazing, miraculous creations!

In the newspapers' pages that dated from before the High Holy Days, I found many advertisements about hazanim.[4] Indeed, I heard in the towns of Russia and Galicia hazanim and *ba'alei t'filah* of a wide variety,[5] some plain and pleasant, some beginners and ridden with flaws, some singers that God blessed with a voice and feelings, vibrating the heart's capillaries, and some yelling and shrieking, whose voices were strident and hard on the ear and nerves, but musicians and singers as were described in these advertisements I was not privileged to hear.

I read of a "famous" hazan who was accompanied by a "huge choir," and his voice is a "giant's voice" (*A reisige muzikalische tenor stimme*[6]). One hazan blessed God with a "lion's voice," and his prayer is "a wonderful harmonic singing," and the sighs that he sighs! Each one of them is an "authentic Jewish sigh," and anyone hearing his prayer would not forget it for the rest of his life, until he would go down to his grave; one hazan "charms his listeners" and his reputation has reached "the whole world." And one of them is not only singled out in his generation, but in all the generations, all of them, since he sings "in the original melodies of the Temple." And from whom did he learn this melody? Probably from Heman, Asaph, and Jeduthun,[7] those in charge of song at the Temple, and "he carries the banner of Jewish sweetness." However, all of these

[4] In Hebrew: synagogue cantors (singular, hazan; plural, hazanim).
[5] In Hebrew: service leaders.
[6] In German: a knight's musical tenor voice.
[7] Three of the poet-musicians who were appointed by David to be in charge of song in the Temple (I Chr. 6:16–33) and commissioned to give praise to God (I Chr. 16:5–6 and 41–42).

wonderful hazanim cannot compare with one named Karniol.[8] In his choir one can find the "most select group of singers in New York," and all "the greatest hazanim kneel before him," and when they hear his singing, they bless themselves with "*Ashreinu sh'zachinu l'khakh.*"[9] And why shouldn't they kneel before him? After all, he is the one who "plays with God's grace," who excites souls, and upon hearing his prayer even "a wall would cry."

In addition to this advertisement, the paper ran a special article about this miraculous hazan. It was a long article that occupied the whole column, from the top of the page to its bottom, at full length. There the praises for this hazan reached the acme, which no woman's offspring could ever reach. When this hazan prayed, it was written there, the theater's stones wailed. His voice was as balm to his listeners' hearts. At times the hazan erupted with a roar and reached the throne of glory; when he sang, those who sat at the assembly of the world below would rise and ascend to heaven's heights, and at the same time, the celestial angels would descend down to lend an ear to his mesmerizing singing, because nothing such as this was ever heard at the assembly on high.

The writer of the advertisements' article admitted, by his modesty, that his writing ability betrayed him. He would have liked to report in the newspaper the enormity of the excitement during the prayer, but his pen lacked the power to do so. There were moments, the writer confessed, that the assembled "gentlemen and ladies" began titillating with all their bodies and weeping bitterly like babies in pain, not able in any way to stop the flow of tears that poured out of their eyes without pause. Their emotions were likened—quite precisely—to the pleasure of the righteous, whose rest is in the

[8] Alter Yechiel Karniol (1855–1928), b. Russia. Cantor in famous synagogues in Russia and Austro-Hungary before immigrating to the United States.
[9] In Hebrew: Happy are we for this privilege.

Garden of Eden, according to a drawing that is in that writer's possession. It is worthwhile to come from far away, even from thousands of *parsa'ot,*[10] directly into the borough of the Bronx, in order to hear this pleasing nightingale of Israel.

My head began to get dizzy from this sluice of superlatives. I grew weary of these great and lofty effusions. *What else could this writer have added?* I said in my heart. *Why is he carrying on so?* Was he trying to beat me to death with an incessant word pounding? But I saw that I had been mistaken. He had not yet pulled out all the arrows from his quiver; *I am not yet completely indulged.* Still, his ability to exaggerate had left him. He had hurled away all the catapult's boulders, and now he was left only with gravel and chippings. Therefore he began to write in a poetic and sentimental language, almost tearfully—a sentimentality that could not be tolerated by the fainthearted. And for history's sake I shall give here a brief example: "If you happened to be at a place of a terrible storm, horrible, gigantic, in a night of darkness and dread, in a lightning, thunder, flood, and rainstorm, and you imagine that the whole world returns to its original chaos—and if it occurred that after the storm, you saw the heavy and dark clouds disappear, and the pleasant sun, a healing sun, peeking and reviving every soul and grassy reed—all of these will you feel if you will hear this hazan's voice."

Apparently some anxiety had crept into this writer's heart lest the reader doubt the veracity of his words—since, after all, he lived among a generation of doubters—and therefore he brought facts in order to support what he said: "When the hazan roared '*Shema Koleinu,*'[11] an awesome wailing erupted, and it seemed as if the entire *K'neset*

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[10] The Hebrew for *parasang* (plural, *parsa'ot*): a Persian unit of distance, equal to approximately four miles.

[11] In Hebrew: Hear our voices! From prayers for forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

Yisrael,[12] from all lands, begs for, with harmonious sound, mercy from the Holy One, blessed be He."

And this wonderful article he concludes with an intimate tone: "The writer of this column heard yesterday his musical performance at *Selihot*[13] and said in his heart: 'Indeed, this hazan is Jewish music, he and none else! And happy is the man who was privileged to hear his singing, because this hazan is "*A gotlicher mann.*'"[14] There was nothing more that this writer could say, and his breath stopped.

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When I was able to get rid of this awful storm, the likes of which never took place in my vicinity, and I could breathe somewhat, I began to examine the accompanying illustrations around the advertisements for the hazanim.

I was surprised at the places in which the hazanim chose to pray. Until then, I knew of a *Beit Tefilah;*[15] a *Beit K'neset,*[16] which is usually the biggest in town; of a *Beit Midrash;*[17] and of *Heichal,*[18] or *Beit K'neset Chorali*[19] for the enlightened and wealthy; and also of a *Kleisel.*[20] But in these advertisements there popped up before me new names that I did not know, and I could not believe that they connoted their accepted meaning as

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[12] In Hebrew: the Assembly of Israel.
[13] Prayers for forgiveness in the Hebrew month of Elul.
[14] In Yiddish: a godly man.
[15] In Hebrew: a prayer house, a synagogue.
[16] In Hebrew: an assembly house; a synagogue.
[17] See chapter 1, footnote 40.
[18] In Hebrew: a temple.
[19] In Hebrew: a synagogue with a chorus.
[20] In Yiddish: a small room serving as a chapel.

in Europe. The first prayed in "Miller's Theater," the second in the "Pabst Coliseum,"[21] and the third in "Tammany Hall."[22] "Theater" I knew as a place where they staged plays concerning matters between him and her, where love celebrates its triumph or weeps for its failure, and where they even come out with swords, and at times the victims of love fall on the floor. In the Jewish theater I knew that wars were scarce, but there they dance and sing, with hints, not quite as delicate as silk threads. "Colosseum" I knew as a Roman theater, surely not as a sacred place; and "Tammany Hall," its meaning was totally beyond me. If the first ones they call "theaters," I said, then this one was probably a circus. And in these they pray? Indeed, a wonder it was in my eyes!

At that time people used to say, "This you must see with your own eyes," and would add illustrations to the explanations. To the advertisements of the hazanim, they added illustrations as well, and these showed me the naked truth. In one of the paper's sections I found a cartoonist's drawing—Loeb was the name. With a unique talent, he showed me where New York's honorable places for singing and praying were. I saw a part of a busy street, with commercial buildings very close to each other. A gate, and above it a large sign: "Dancing Hall." On either side, the signs on the adjacent buildings were shown: a sign from a bar, and on it was drawn a foaming beer glass, with the price next to it—five cents. On the other side, an announcement, advertising a meal on Yom

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[21] The Pabst Coliseum was a generic name for a theater building in New York City built in 1902–1903 at Columbus Circle by John H. Duncan for the Pabst Brewing Company. When it opened on January 21, 1903, with the world premiere of the musical *The Wizard of Oz*, it was also known as "Majestic Theater." It was used for musical and drama performances. In 1911 it was renamed "Park Theater." In 1923 it was converted to a cinema/vaudeville theater and reopened as "Cosmopolitan Theater." From 1944 it was again used as a musical and drama theater. From 1949–1954 it was used as television theater by NBC. It was demolished in 1954 in favor of the New York Coliseum Convention Center.

[22] Tammany Hall was named for Tammanend, a Delaware Native American chief. In 1830 it was the name adopted by New York's Democratic Party's political machine. A new Tammany Hall was built in 1867 on the north side of Fourteenth Street (between Third Avenue and Irving Place), and included a lavish theater. Legitimate productions were held there from 1869 to 1876. Thereafter it served as a multipurpose auditorium. It was demolished in 1928. A new Tammany Hall was built in 1929 at Seventeenth Street and Fourth Avenue, but it has since become a trade union hall.

Kippur, arranged by a group of heretics. And on the entrance gate to the dancing hall, a big sign:

LISHMOA EL HARINAH V'EL HATEFILAH
Weltbehrümter König fun Alle Hazanim
Reverend Kamelie
Mit Chor
Vot da Farbeten Diese Yamim Nora'im
Ticket 50 cent

And I translated for myself words to our language: "The world-renowned hazan, king of all the hazanim, the Reverend Kamelie, will pray, accompanied by choir, for the High Holy Days, and admission charge is 50 cents."[23]

This announcement page was sown with photographs of hazanim, clear and blurred pictures of serious and frivolous faces, humble faces and boasting faces, faces of innocence or of foolishness—in short, faces of all kinds. On their heads, a miter in the shape of an upside-down pyramid, narrow at the bottom and wide at the top, and their robes were black, and on them were narrow prayer shawls; and the hazanim tied around their necks white ties that extended their winglike edges to the right and to the left.

My entrance to this new world caused me dizziness. My thoughts were confused and I became tired. My wife sat with the aunt in the kitchen and talked to her about her family members. Thereupon she entered into the parlor.

A sudden thought flashed in my mind. I stood on the chair and delivered a speech:

[23] No information about the Reverend Kamelie can be obtained. Scharfstein may have used a pseudonym.

To America arrived a Hebrew teacher, and his name is Zevi Scharfstein. He is the king of all the teachers, and before him would kneel all the learned in the world. When he teaches, his mouth produces gemstones, and the gemstones penetrate into the pupils' hearts and illumine with the light of Creation's first seven days. Students, in whose hearts the Holy One, blessed be He, planted wisdom, will become sevenfold wiser and will conquer lands with their insight; into the hearts of the foolish students, whom God has not endowed with much wisdom, cunning will penetrate, and they will amaze the world with their intrigues and stratagems; the dumb will open their mouths and will see visions like Isaiah, and like Jeremiah, and like Ezekiel, the son of Buzi. The ear of the deaf will open to hear words of holiness and purity, like those uttered by the holy angels, the *erelim*[24] from on high.

Parents of Israel! Send your sons to learn a lesson from his mouth. Happy are you for the privilege of delivering your descendants and offspring's destiny into the hands of the genius, unique in his generation and unique in all generations. And the tuition fee is a quarter per month!

My wife heard my initial words with amusement, since she was accustomed to my pranks. However, as my speech went on, a shadow of worry came upon her face. Suddenly, a shout erupted out of her mouth: "What is it with you, Zevi?"

I jumped off the chair and announced, "Don't worry, dear wife, I only speak in the language of advertisement; I speak American Jewish language."

[24] In Hebrew: one of the types of angels.

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In addition to the advertisements for the hazanim, whose narrowing miters and broad ties attracted my eye, I was interested in much of the news about the Jewish candidates from the Jewish neighborhoods in New York who sought to be elected to Congress. I arrived in New York at a critical time in the world of politics: election time! Walls were covered by giant announcements with photos of the candidates and the party's name. At street corners, speakers stood on boxes or on trucks and yelled their yells in praise of their party's candidates and in condemnation of the other parties' candidates. The pages of the *Tageblatt* were full of articles, advertisements, and debates with its opponent, the workers' newspaper, *Forwaerts.*[25]

The candidate's name, the one supported by the *Tageblatt,* was Henry M. Goldfogle.[26] Running against him was the representative for the Socialist Party, Meyer London,[27] indeed the beau ideal of the *Forwaerts.* Both candidates were Jewish.

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[25] In Yiddish: Forward. A Jewish Socialist newspaper in New York City, established in 1897 as the *Forwaerts* Association. Its first director was Abraham Cahan. *Forwaerts* had the largest circulation among Jewish papers; its publishing house served all the labor institutions in New York City.

[26] Henry Mayer Goldfogle (1856–1929), b. New York City. Lawyer and judge. Active member of the Democratic Party. Served as president of B'nai B'rith, and as governor of the Home of the Aged and Infirm (Yonkers). Elected to U.S. House of Representatives, 1901–1921. In 1902 fought for the removal of the restrictions placed upon American Jews traveling in Russia. Accomplished abrogation of the 1833 treaty with Russia. Also served as counsel of the U.S. House of Representatives, president of the City of New York Department of Taxation and Assessments (Borough of Manhattan), and as president of Temple Congregation *Rodeph Sholom,* New York City.

[27] Meyer London (1871–1926), b. Gora Kalvaria, Poland. U.S. lawyer and Socialist leader. In New York City from 1891. Drawn to radical leftist politics, following his father's involvement with anarchist and socialist groups. Joined the Socialist Labor Party, but in 1897 joined the opposition to its leader, Daniel De Leon. Became a member of the Socialist Party of America. Had a significant influence on the needle trades and unions in New York. Helped to formulate the Protocol of 1910, which attempted to establish collective bargaining and arbitration in the women's cloak trade. In 1914 elected to Congress; reelected in 1916 and 1920. Although opposed to American entrance into World War I, refused to resist wartime efforts. This alienated him in his party. Had little sympathy for Zionism, believing not in nationalism but in uplifting the working class.

The *Tageblatt*'s strongest claim was regarding immigration. The Workers Party was against free and open immigration, because it feared competition by the newcomers, lest they would sell their labor at a low price and thus would force wages to go down. The *Forwaerts* claimed that there was no love lost between some congressional representatives and the Jewish people; that there were those who feared "lest they increase," those who, from time to time, came up with proposals to limit immigration. In case such a proposal came before Congress, Meyer London would be forced, by order of his party, to support it. Goldfogle, who had served in Congress for several years already, defended free immigration deftly. In his speeches he strived to prove that in downtown New York City, the dwelling area of the Jewish immigrants, there was more intelligentsia, more love for labor, more talent and skill, and more patriotism than in the neighborhoods where generations of American-born lived. He himself was born and brought up in this city's downtown and could therefore serve as a decisive, living example. And the issue of immigration, wrote the paper, was the most important in those days, since the war had destroyed many towns in Eastern Europe, uprooted myriads of Jews from their dwelling places, and scattered them, and they had no hope for quiet life but in America.

To these honest words he appended hostile and abusive language, the likes of which I had never encountered in print. He called the writers of the *Forwaerts,* "A band of lawless, arrogant hypocrites, corrupt anti-Semites who bring curse with them; people who spit gall and mud on the Jewish yarmulke,[28] and who cough their final, dying coughs." And the paper he called *Royt-gelbe zenut schmatte*[29]—a dark, black force lying

[28] In Yiddish: skullcap.
[29] In Yiddish: a red-yellow prostitution rag.

under a red-yellow robe. The *Forwaerts,* from its point of view, announced that it would not fear nor yield to the terror of its opponent, and it would fight against it to the end.

From the bickering I learned that the *Forwaerts* was not weaker than the *Tageblatt* in its own reproach, denunciation, and cursing, and its writers found little difficulty in using insults. They called the *Tageblatt* "*Die schwarze yarmulke Zeitung*"[30] that hated the Jewish worker to the core and was ready to drown him in water.

On Saturday afternoon, about an hour before the departure of the Sabbath, I went on an outing in the area and arrived at the main street of the neighborhood, East Broadway, and my eyes witnessed an interesting scene: on the busy street came by large trucks full of school-age boys and girls who were waving American and red flags, and who shouted very loudly, "Vote for London! Elect London!"

This was the first time that I had witnessed the desecration of the Sabbath in public, and I was amazed that the passers-by—of whom there were bearded Jews, dressed in Sabbath clothes, and Jewish women whose heads were wrapped with head kerchiefs—looked upon this scene with indifference and without protest.

By this single phenomenon, the big change that took place in Jewish life unfolded before me: here in America, Jews were dwelling in multitudes, more numerous than in a small European state, but Judaism's laws were being desecrated!

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The elections took place a few days later, and Meyer London was elected. I rushed to buy the *Tageblatt.* I expected to read words of mourning and lamentation on the disaster that

[30] In Yiddish: the black-hat paper.

occurred, on calamities that were about to come, and advice on how to salvage the situation. Instead, however, in the main editorial I read blessings for happiness and success to the newly elected congressman. This, too, gave me a good lesson on democratic life in the new world.

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The huge exaggerations in the newspapers' language made me doubt the exact nature of things, and yet I admit that it was very difficult for me to relinquish the trust that had been imbued in me regarding the printed word, which had been sacred in my view. Doubt entered, then evaporated, and something of hyperbole clung to me.

Simultaneously with the elections to Congress, elections to the courts took place as well. The next moment, I read an article—or an advertisement in the form of an article—about a Jewish nominee to the court, from the Twelfth Ward, by the name of Gustave Hartman.[31] I learned from the article that the nominee was an attorney, an excellent orator, a man of good deeds, and a great philanthropist. He was the president of the society *Hesed shel Emet,*[32] and as a result of his labor, a large orphanage was built on the east side of the city, on Second Street. All day long he did nothing but busy himself in public affairs.

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[31] Gustave Hartman (1880–1936), b. Hungary. Lawyer, legislator, municipal court judge, communal leader, New York City. Federation officer; service with Israel Orphan Asylum, Hebrew Free Bureau Association, American ORT (an acronym for the Russian words for "Society for Manual Work"), American Jewish Congress; delegate, World Jewish Congress and World Zionist Conference.

[32] In Hebrew: an act of true kindness without expecting a reward. The phrase "*Hesed v'emet*" (kindness and truth) that appears in Genesis 47:29, when Jacob asks Joseph to take an oath and bury him with his ancestors, has been turned into "*Hesed shel emet*" (kindness of truth) in the language of the sages. They meant it to apply primarily to a kindness that can never be reciprocated by the receiver—that is, burial. Hence, Jewish burial societies are often called by this term.

In the Thirty-first Ward, as well, people promoted a Jewish nominee to be a judge, and his name was Isidore Hirshfield.[33] His photo was placed next to the article. Indeed, his appearance testified to his righteousness and qualifications for the position. Imagine to yourselves: a handsome Jew whose image was delicate and noble; his beard was rounded, trimmed very well, and was sharp at its end; and the two ends of his mustache were pointed upward. His clothes proved that he was meticulous in this regard. As a communal activist he engaged in *Hakhnasat Orchim;*[34] this is none but the organization HIAS,[35] which assists the immigrants; he was also a member of the Montefiore House;[36] he was a *gabbai*[37] in the same society "*Hesed shel Emet,*" and in "Downtown's *Talmud Torah.*"[38] And if you happen to think that these were all the institutions in which he participated, you would be mistaken. The article listed in detail hospitals, charity societies, and orders, where in one of them he is president; in the second, treasurer; in the third, honorary secretary; in the fourth, a community leader; in the fifth, member of the executive committee; and so on, and so on; and there is not one of them to which he does not devote his energy, money, time, and writings. And in one

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[33] Isidore Hirshfield, b. New York City, 1869; d. Washington, DC, 1949. Attorney, community worker, Zionist. General counsel of HIAS (see chapter 1, footnote 35, below,) Washington, DC, 1923–1943; counsel emeritus, 1943–1949. Active in Jewish community affairs in New York and Washington.

[34] In Hebrew: Welcoming the stranger.

[35] An acronym for Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, an international Jewish immigrant and refugee service. Founded in 1909, New York City, as a result of the merger of the Hebrew Sheltering House Association (1884) and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (1902). HIAS responded to the growing need of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and provided help in legal entry, basic subsistence, employment, citizenship instruction, and locating relatives. In the early 1920s it opened offices in Eastern Europe and the Far East. In 1927 it merged with the Jewish Colonization Association and the European Emig-direct to form HICEM, a partnership that was dissolved after World War II. In 1949 it cooperated with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and in 1954 it merged with the United Service for New Americans, and the JDC Migration Department into the United HIAS Service.

[36] Montefiore House has been a medical facility in the Bronx, with a branch in Queens, especially for the treatment of the elderly.

[37] See chapter 1, footnote 39.

[38] In Hebrew: Study of the Law. Term applied generally to Jewish religious (and ultimately Talmudic) study. Regarded as supreme religious duty. Name adopted by voluntary organizations providing Jewish religious education and later to schools established by them. Eventually applied to all Jewish religious schools.

thing he excelled: he was a member of the Union of Orthodox Congregations.[39] In short, he was everything, a multitask master who was able to donate from his honor and work to tens of institutions, societies, unions, and organizations.

Similar praises were listed also in regard to other Jewish nominees. Here, for example, is a man who was nominated to the post of Supreme Court Justice, by the name of Leon Sanders,[40] and he, too, was lauded for his outstanding public work, and they gave, in detail, a long list of institutions and good deeds that he did during his life. From these words, I came to the conclusion that America's residents were titans, giants of the spirit, possessing unlimited possibilities, since even if a man in Europe would live as long as Methuselah, he would not be able to achieve even a tenth of the accomplishments of these men of wonder.

Forty years have passed since I read these words. Now I no longer wonder how it is possible for a person to join tens of societies—if he only bought some advertisement. Joining a society that strives for ideal goals proves nothing about the heart's desire of the person who joins, concerning helping others; rather, his purpose is simpler, materialistic, and its motivation is profit or honor, or advertisement for the sake of livelihood. The "society" becomes a stepping-stone for achieving selfish goals. Nor does the joining person need to move a finger for it: if there is some advertisement, let others do the work and let him take the credit. I was naïve and provincial back then.

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[39] Full name: Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (UOJCA). Founded in 1898, it has been the largest organization of Orthodox synagogues, with more than eight hundred affiliated congregations and Jewish service organizations.

[40] Leon Sanders (1867–1937), b. Odessa, Russia. New York Law School, admitted to the bar, 1895. Specialized in commercial and negligence law. Member, legislature, State of New York, 1898–1901. Justice, municipal court, City of New York, 1903–1913. Resigned to become grand master of IOBA, the largest Jewish fraternity in the world. President for eight years of Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society. Involved in many other civic and Jewish organizations.

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The advertisements in the Jewish papers pulled at my heart as if by ropes. In them unfolded before me the new life in its bareness. The vociferousness, the chase after utilitarian materialism, and the commerce in Judaism's sacred matters for livelihood were daily occurrences. The disrespect for the reader's intelligence was proclaimed loudly and shamelessly. A hazan by the name of Moses[41] publicized information about his prayer during the High Holy Days under the title "Moses Will Speak and God's Voice Will Answer Him"; a liquor merchant publicized information, surrounded by a black frame, in which he announced in deep sorrow and heavy grief the first *yahrzeit*[42] of the crown of his glory—his modest, wise, and learned wife, one in a thousand—and in her memory he decided to do something great for the benefit of all Israel; namely, to sell them his splendid wines and hard liquor most inexpensively. Let all drink, be glad, and remember his righteous wife's name for blessing, and for God's sake let them, please, rush and come to his store without delay, and let them buy immediately, lest they would miss this timely sale before the old prices would be reinstated, and thereby they would lose much good. Another liquor merchant announced that he was a descendant of the holy Rashi,[43] and that he founded a big company of Rashi's offspring, and hence anyone by the name of Horowitz should let him know, research his origin and find it, and join this holy

[41] No information on a hazan by the name of Moses can be obtained; perhaps it was his first name.
[42] In Yiddish: annual observance of a date of death according to the Jewish calendar.
[43] Acronym for Rabbeinu Shlomo Yitzhaki (Solomon ben Isaac), 1040–1105. Considered the greatest and most influential biblical and Talmudic commentator to this day. Many editions of the Bible and the Babylonian Talmud are printed with his commentary. He was also a philologist and linguist, and often provided French equivalents to difficult words. Rashi, who lived in Troyes, France, also established a school that became the most dominant for both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in the following centuries.

company. He did not list the rights and privileges of the company's members in regard to his liquor store, but he who understands, understands.

In order to publicize goods among the Jews, the advertisers, who worked on behalf of Christian factory owners, distributed small flyers in which they printed the Jewish *Birkat Hanehenin*[44] over the Sabbath's wine, for after the meal, and *kaddish yatom*,[45] and between each blessing or prayer they printed words of praise for the bread or rolls made by a certain firm, for the noodles and mushrooms made by another, and for the canned soup made by a third. On behalf of a coffee factory they distributed Passover Haggadahs[46] among the Jews, printed on inferior paper, in the front, back, and middle of which the glory of this factory's coffee was declared. Furthermore, they were bold enough to publish multipage brochures, in small print, containing the history of Israel from its beginning as a nation until our time, and, of course, the factory's advertisements adorned and crowned this "history." The advertisers offered this brochure to the principals of Jewish schools to use as a classroom textbook. The brochures would be given to them free of charge, and they wouldn't need to spend Israel's mammon by purchasing textbooks. And, indeed, there were a few ignorant teachers who requested the brochure in large quantities and used it as Torah for the youngsters!

As is known, the art of advertisement has reached great heights in America, unparalleled heights, and it is a wonder that our brothers, who received this legacy from others, brought it down and degraded it to such a low point. So far I have not seen

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[44] Blessing recited for the enjoyment or benefit from nonspecific food and fragrance. It is similar to the wonders of nature: "Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who created the universe."
[45] The Jewish orphan's prayer, using mostly Aramaic and some Hebrew.
[46] An account of Egyptian bondage and thanksgiving to God for redemption; a set form of benedictions, prayers, Midrashic comments, and psalms recited at the Passover seder ritual. It grew out of the service prescribed in Temple times, which included eating of paschal sacrifice, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs, and drinking of four cups of wine, and recital of the Exodus story.

American firms merchandising the Christian religion via the newspapers. None of the industrialists would dare to print prayer books and to desecrate them by commercial advertising, and none of them would be so bold as to suggest that teachers should use these commercial brochures, which cost a penny, as textbooks in the schools. However, presently, as our people have become rooted in America, their sense of responsibility has grown, and a change has occurred in the style of the advertisements in the Jewish papers. They are void of cheapness and disrespect. Advertisements of the lower grade, still published from time to time, are but an echo from the recent past.

Chapter 3

The First Outing in Downtown New York

Evening drew near. Our uncle returned from the factory and with him also entered, at the same time, his young son, a bachelor who lived with his parents—a lad of about twenty-three, slim, quiet, serious—who spoke in a relaxed manner, as a "*ben avot*" in Europe.[1] The typical features that characterize the American young generation—the joy, youthfulness, and ardor for activity and boisterousness—were absent in him.

He introduced himself to us, and after a brief chat it became clear to me what he did for a living. He was a clerk in a public office, peculiarly titled "The Industrial Removal Office,"[2] that had been established and financed by the Baron Hirsch.[3] The head of the committee in charge of this bureau was the philanthropist Jacob H. Schiff.[4] The purpose of this bureau was to influence newly arrived Jewish immigrants against settling in the large northeastern port cities, such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore, but rather to disperse them in cities across the land, and especially in the West, and to assist them in settling there. For what reason? The wealthiest Jews did not look with a kind eye on the "assembly" and concentration of their brethren in these large

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[1] In Hebrew: a son with a distinguished pedigree.

[2] U.S. movement, 1900–1917, to disperse Jewish immigrants from congested immigrant districts to smaller places where Jewish communities existed and a variety of jobs were available.

[3] Baron Maurice de Hirsch (1831–1896), a German Jewish financier and philanthropist. Acquired wealth from Turkish railway concession and enterprises in sugar and copper industries. Established Baron de Hirsch Foundation for educational work in Galicia and Bukovina, 1888; the Baron de Hirsch Fund in New York for settling immigrants to United States, and later Canada; and Jewish Colonization Association (ICA), 1891. His attitude to Zionism was negative, but he was convinced of the future of Jews as farmers, and ICA financed such settlement in South America.

[4] Jacob Henry Schiff (1847–1920), b. Germany. U.S. financier and philanthropist. In United States from 1865. Head of Kuhn, Loeb & Co., 1885. Originally opposed Zionism, but in 1917 announced his support of cultural homeland in Eretz Yisrael. In many ways, unofficial lay leader of U.S. Jewry. Supported numerous causes and institutions associated with Judaism, including Yeshivah College, Jewish Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Publication Society. A founder of the American Jewish Committee, 1906.

cities. The result of these concentrations was crowding in special neighborhoods in which they would retain their special ways of life and languages, and thus stick out as a foreign element on the American landscape. Increased competition in these neighborhoods had caused sometimes less than the best manners. In the smaller, rural cities, where only a few Jews lived, they would adopt the local manners and be forged in the melting pot. The principal fear of these wealthy Jews was the "warnings" by and "wickedness" of anti-Semites. Their request was *Disperse yourselves, brothers; limit yourselves, walk among the Americans, cling to them, and paint yourselves in the color of the background—then the evil eye will not rule over you.* The clerks' job in that "Removal" bureau was to advise those immigrants who were not well versed in the country's conditions and help them choose a place in which to settle. This lad held such a job. He spoke good Yiddish, was like the average man on the street, and instilled confidence in the hearts of the newcomers.

We ate, and the cousin said to us, "Let's go for a walk and introduce ourselves to New York!"

"With pleasure!"

My wife put on her coat, and I took my walking cane by my hand, ready and eager to go. The lad stared at me and delayed.

"Is there something you wish to say to me?"

"Yes," he answered with hesitation.

"What is it?"

"You are new here, and you must get accustomed to the local ways."

"What foreignness do you see in me?"

"First, please don't take your cane with you. No one walks with a cane on the street. And your hat is unfashionable."

"Why? Is it not pretty? It was manufactured by Brosalino, the best in Italy."[5]

"Indeed, it is pretty, but it is too festive, with its black color and wide brim. Such a hat is worn by artists and musicians, and it calls for too much attention."

"So what?"

The man was stuttering. It was difficult for him to explain this matter to me.

"It's just not nice; why should you be different than other people? My advice to you is to buy an American hat. Your overcoat, as well, is unfashionable."

"And what is this coat's deficiency?"

"It is tailored in England's style: its lapels are large, and its chest piece is overemphasized . . . How can I explain it to you? It is fancy and overblown, suitable for one of Wall Street's rich men . . . Here everything is simple . . . everybody wears plain and comfortable clothes so that they won't hold him back in his work and will not discriminate him from other people."

"Oh, well," I answered without resentment, "for the time being I will wear what I have . . . I have still not paid for this coat, nor for a suit tailored for me in Geneva."

*

We walked down the steps, which were lit by a faint gaslight, and came out into the street. The streetlights were not on at that hour. The sun had not yet set. It was the hour in

[5] Founded in Alessandria, Italy (northwest of Genoa), in 1857 by Giuseppe Brosalino (d. 1900), the Brosalino Hat Company is one of the most prestigious in the world. In 1986 it moved to a modern suburban location. The old Brosalino hat factory is now home to Eastern Piedmont University School of Law.

which the workers were sent out of the factories; the air over De Lancey Street was dense and the atmosphere overwhelming.

This street used to be, and still is, a passage from the heart of Manhattan to Brooklyn. Manhattan is the center of commerce and industry, and Brooklyn is the city of residence. The two boroughs are connected by tunnels and bridges. One of these bridges is the Williamsburg Bridge, which begins at the end of De Lancey Street. This is one of the most wonderful bridges; its length is seventy-two hundred feet, and over it traveled some half a million people a day by trains and streetcars. Because of this distinction, De Lancey Street became one of the most important transportation arteries.

By taking a walk in this neighborhood, immense and enormous New York displayed its ugliness: its crowdedness, its filth, and its cagelike houses that rise like prisons, uniform in their height and shape, those dwelling places that are called "tenement houses." These are six-story mansions, built with bricks, and their walls are gray from time and are dirty from street dust, chimney soot, and youngsters' graffiti. From the top floor to the bottom, iron stairs are suspended like ladders, for fire escape. The ladders are directed toward the windows, and next to each window there is a wider landing area that could accommodate two or three people, a kind of a small balcony fenced in by iron bars. The purpose of these landing areas, which were designed for standing during danger, was forgotten, and they became storage areas for the poor. The tenants displayed upon them boxes and tin cans, and left their pillows and duvets to be refreshed in the outdoor air. Sometimes children could be seen sitting on these narrow platforms, only partially dressed, and their legs dangling through the iron grating.

The windows—some of which are sparkly clean and some dirty—are almost all open. From their openings heads are seen, heads of men and women, some with nicely combed hair and some without, wrinkled or young faces, bearded or shaved. From out of the windows voices of anger or friendship erupt: mothers call their sons to come up and scold them with a hoarse voice for their refusal; neighborly women exchange words with sweet tongues and winking eyes; rivals direct scowling faces at each other. The general view is that of frightened and noisy life. The buildings are arranged like barracks, close to each other and with little space between them, separated like cages, in which would dwell hundreds or thousands of families, a kind of shared life, mixed, with no privacy and without tranquility.

In the lower floors there were retail shops for cold drinks and ice cream; a grocery store; stores for office supplies, tobacco, household items; haberdasheries; small and large restaurants. And people were creeping like insects, coming and going, sidewalks strewn with pieces of paper and torn newspapers, and garbage cans were standing coverless, displaying their filth. The noise and tumult deafened the ears.

On both sides of the street, people in great numbers were streaming. It was a warm evening. Some men hung their jackets on their arms, and hats were tilted toward their necks. Their clothes were tattered and crushed, their faces tense, nervous, angry, and their steps hurried. Most of them would run as if they were being chased, and you would bump into the passers-by and their elbows. At the underground train stations, and on the stairs leading to them, multitudes huddled. Thousands of people are swallowed and ejected from these stations, nonstop. And despite the many faces, one does not see

individuals, only a faceless mass—overworked, exhausted, running around as being chased, pushed by a mysterious force, without distinguishable features.

The underground train runs under the sidewalk or the street; its noise penetrates upward, and the ground shakes under your feet. It climbs out of the tunnel onto the Williamsburg Bridge with much noise, and people may be seen in its windows, crammed and crowded as if forming a wall. The train and its wheels are very noisy; it shakes the air, and it overwhelms the spoken voices on the street. If you wish to say something to your company, you must raise your voice like a shofar, or wait until the train passes by; however, just as you are about to open your mouth, another train comes, or heavy trucks follow each other, as in a file with no beginning or end.

We went up the street and turned onto a side street, Orchard Street. Darkness had already fallen and the streetlights were switched on. Street merchants were standing next to their stands or counters, using torches or oil lamps for light. On both sides of the street, in long lines, stood pushcarts and stands, all loaded with a great variety of merchandise. This was the street of the "findings" market. Anything under the sun was sold here: fruit and vegetables, some fresh and some with black stains from rotting, upper- and undergarments, white and colored, and ties of cheap "silk." The merchandise looked outstanding: broad and huge gowns, fitting only giants and those blessed with great bellies. Carts loaded with old shoes and sandals, with worn soles, crooked heels, and cracked leather; fabric remnants; broken furniture—tossed out of homes—and pieces of boxes; coverless pocket watches, whose intestines and springs were in open view; all kinds of springs, iron stakes, and corroded copper screws; hammers, saws, screwdrivers, drills, and locks—old, crooked, and with defects; iconic statues with broken arms or

absent heads; bent tin spoons and forks with crooked teeth; bowls, glasses, and all sorts of household items; small coin wallets, stamped with banks' logos—a sign that they were given out free as promotion; long-abandoned musical instruments—cracked violins, thinly haired bows, hoarse harmonicas, and bent trumpets; ointments and perfumes, in bottles and small containers whose labels had become stained or blurred; pictures of the Madonna—cheap, shining lithographs; and broken or stained mirrors. It was a kind of a "warehouse," a receptacle street for every defective item, rubbish, leftovers, broken stuff, and thrown-away things—the dumping heap of the city. A heap of garbage in which sometimes can be found a gem—a highly valuable piece of antique.

There was an ongoing hum in the street. Around the carts, curious customers, men and women, look, check, touch the items, ask for the price, and bargain. And the sellers and owners of the merchandise announce aloud their goods with voluminous voices, praise their possessions before the customers, speaking Yiddish in various dialects—from the hard Lithuanian dialect to the soft and broad Polish one, to the Bessarabian[6] that rolls the "R," to the Ukrainian that substitutes an *Alef* for a *Hei*,[7] and vice versa—and all mix in their speech English words that were castrated in their mouths to the point that their original roots were unrecognizable. Some of the sellers rebuke their customers if they bargain endlessly or speak badly of their merchandise; they use dirty language, and those who happen to hear it burst in laughter; a motley crowd of people, a tumult of voices, crowdedness, density, and shoving by body or elbow. I was taken by curiosity and by joy upon joining this multitude, but at the same time by a mild disgust over this miserable testimony to regurgitated merchandise. But I admit with no shame that my curiosity

[6] Bessarabia is a large area northwest of Odessa and the Black Sea, between the Dniester and Prut Rivers.
[7] An "A" for an "H."

overcame everything else. In every city where I lived there was a market. Nonetheless, I was not privileged to be familiar with markets, since I lived as one of the "intelligentsia," and it is inappropriate for someone of such rank to buy in the markets—a silly pride of township residents.

*

From the moment I left home until I got mixed in this crowd, a change, which I didn't sense, came into me. First I was merely an onlooker. Gradually I became part of the crowd. Without noticing it, a certain unrest, an unknown force began urging me to walk faster, to use my elbows, and to squeeze between those standing near the stands. I stopped paying attention to the passers-by; I didn't look at their faces, and I pushed them. I became part of the battling individuals' mass.

The rhythm of the metropolis began to affect me. Being jammed, overcrowded, and forced to fight for room in a narrow space are the causes for impoliteness, to a man's shrinking into the four corners of his ego. This is the reason for the tension that creates a sullen face and swollen tendons of anger. This is the spirit of distress and annoyance, of hurriedness and nervousness that assails the people of this metropolis and turns them into warring beasts of prey.

A three-panel cartoon in one of the American newspapers was titled "The Boorish Gentleman of New York." Panel one: Sunday in New York: A smartly dressed man is about to board the subway. As he notices the running and shoving crowd, he steps aside, his top hat in his hand, and he bows and gives room to the swarm of people. Panel two:

Monday: He pushes and is pushed along with everybody in the crowd. Tuesday: He waves his cane, prevents others from entering the train, and rushes to be the first inside the train car. In just three days this boorish gentleman has received his urban education.

That night, I briefly glanced at a pamphlet by Gerson Rosenzweig.[8] I lay on my bed, and by the gaslight I read the parody, written in the style of a Talmudic debate, a penetrating satire:

> MISHNAH: There is no difference between America and all other countries but in matters of servitude to the State only—the words of Rabbi Yirka—[9]but other sages say [that] America is the same in every matter as all other countries.
>
> GEMARA[10]: They taught in a Baraita[11] that America wasn't created but for being a land for shelter, since when Columbus discovered America, [representatives of] three segments of the population came before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said in His presence: "Master of the Universe, you wrote in Your Torah (Deuteronomy 19:3), "and divide into three parts the territory of the country." The Holy One, blessed be He, replied to them: "so that any man-slayer may have a place to flee to." Said Rav Safra:[12] "Columbus observed through his astrology that America would become a refuge for the world's vain and reckless, and he pleaded

[8] Gerson Rosenzweig (1861–1914), b. Lithuania. U.S. Hebrew writer; in the United States from 1888. Edited Hebrew periodicals and Hebrew columns in Yiddish press. Published satirical *Talmud Yanka'i* (Yankee Talmud, 1907–1909) and books of epigrams.
[9] In Aramaic: the color green. A pun on such Jewish names as Greenhaus, Greenberg, Greenbaum, etc.
[10] In Aramaic: completion. A word popularly applied to the Talmud as a whole, or more particularly to the discussions and elaborations by the *amora'im* on the Mishnah.
[11] In Aramaic: outside. A statement of *tanna,* or *midrash halakhah* and *aggadah* not found in the Mishnah.
[12] In Aramaic: book. A pun on such names as Buchman, Buchbaum, etc.

that the country would not be named after him, and thus they called it Amei-reika."[13] Is it so? And this we have learned: that all other countries are like unfinished baked goods compared to America, since America is considered privileged. Said Rav Mevina:[14] "What privilege?!—that of the rejected from all other countries, as they taught in a Baraita. Ten privileged ascended first to America, and this is who they are: murderers, thieves, informers, arsonists, counterfeiters, traitors, false witnesses, bankrupt paupers, excommunicated, and wayward and defiant sons; and some say girls who were tempted and gone astray as well. And why are they called 'privileged'? Because, since all those rejected in the other countries had arrived in Amei-reika, they have become privileged."

I read with some anguish about the land into which I fell, a land, the residents of which are of the "qualities" detailed above, even though my mind tells me that this is but an exaggeration. This is not the first Hebrew parody that I had read. When I was still at my teacher's home, Rabbi Shamai Weissman,[15] I read a "Haggadah for Teachers" by Levi Reuven Zimlin;[16] "A Merchants' Tractate" by the author Melamed;[17] and "A Deeds Tractate" by Rakowsky,[18] a pamphlet printed in Warsaw. I knew that all of them

[13] A word play on "America." In Aramaic: *Amei,* meaning "people of," and *reika,* meaning "vain."
[14] In Aramaic: a maven.
[15] No information on Shamai Weissman is available at this time.
[16] A satiric Haggadah (Odessa, 1885). No further information on Zimlin is available at this time.
[17] Shmuel Moshe Mordechai Melamed (1885–1938), b. Vilkaviskis, Lithuania. Received traditional Jewish education; PhD, University of Bern. Reporter in London for a German periodical. In America from 1914. Wrote in Hebrew, Yiddish, German, and English, especially on psychology and philosophy. Active in Zionist and communal organizations in New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles.
[18] Abraham Abel Rakowski (1855–1931), b. Galicia. Austrian author and translator. Studied Talmud and Hebrew with his father, a rabbi. Since 1872, contributed to Hebrew journals, especially to *HaTzefirah.*

exaggerated in order to reinforce the satire, but "there's no smoke where there's no fire," or as the Talmud teaches: "When does a fire come forth? When it has thorns to burn."

After all, I wished to make my living in education. Thus I found in this booklet a few things about teachers as well:

> MISHNAH: "Whoever was a peddler and became corrupted, or was a worker and was rejected, the daughters of Israel are filled with pity on his behalf and make him the teacher of their sons, since in Amei-reika teaching is not considered work or wisdom, and everyone is qualified for it. There is a story about a wise man in Syria, who became famous as a teacher, artist, and pedagogue. When he came to America, all were afraid to bring their children over to him and, instead, left him alone to become corrupted."

"And in the GEMARA," the author adds, "Rav Melamdiel[19] says: It is the women, not the men, who choose instructors for their sons, since delivering the children to school is a time-bound commandment, and every time-bound commandment is obligatory upon the woman, and every commandment that is obligatory for women, men are exempt from them . . . Our sages taught: They check a hazan concerning his qualifications, but they don't check an instructor, because no one puts himself in the position of an instructor unless a spirit of folly entered him, and any fool is qualified as an instructor."

Wrote stories about the Prague ghetto, the history of money, history of Semitic nations, and humorous stories. By 1895, became a prosperous merchant in Zambraw, Russian Poland.

[19] In Aramaic: rabbi, with the last name meaning "God teaches me."

Was the American woman I met on the ship right, then, when she warned me against teaching?

I both believed and didn't believe in the satire's message, but that night, sleep deserted the one who was to become a teacher in America, or according to the satirist's words, in Amei-reika.

Chapter 4

The Next Day

(Second outing in the streets of downtown New York)

When we opened our eyes the next morning, we doubted that the night was over. The room was dark, and through the dirty-glassed narrow window only grayness could be seen. However, the echoing footsteps of those walking in the floor above us, the patter of the foot-dragging of those walking to the bathrooms in the hall, the jingle of utensils from the kitchens, and the conversations of the residents in the adjacent rooms—all hinted to us that the time for getting up had arrived. After we got dressed, I told my wife, "This morning we shall go out to see the streets by ourselves, without a tour guide."

"Certainly. We shall be free."

When we arrived at the street, I saw the over-ground train from a distance—this is the city train that travels above the street, on rails that are supported by pillars.

"Shoshanah," I said to my wife, "let the rail pillars be our road markers; let us walk in their direction as we tour the area."

This time we walked at ease, and we had plenty of time to observe. We ascended Rivington Street. Here there wasn't such a great tumult as there was on De Lancey Street, but the motion of traffic was uninterrupted. This was a narrow street, and on either of its sides there were apartment buildings, similar to those we saw yesterday. Their characteristics were crowdedness, hurriedness, and filth. In the lower floors were the shops and a variety of "repair" shops: pharmacies, which were like general stores, providing anything from cigarettes to candy to drugs and cosmetics; repair shops of used

clothes, patchwork experts, and shoe repairers; clothes cleaners; barbers and hairstylists; and restaurants that exhibited publicly in their windows their best offering: chopped fowl livers, combined with oiled turnips, pancakes stuffed with thick sauce, chicken and geese drumsticks, and other fatty goods.

I walked and meditated on the sights of life here. In front of me, one of these multifloor buildings with stairs leading to its hall, and on the top step was standing a Jew, with a distinguished face, with a bag for his tallit[1] and tefillin[2] under his armpit. His long beard's hairs moved in the wind, and his eyes were pensive, as if he came from a different world. And on the lowest step was sitting a dark-haired fortune-teller, color-dressed and with heavy jewelry, her bosom exposed as she nursed her baby. Next to the steps was the fortune-teller's "office," an empty shop with colorful canvas sheets hanging in it, behind which, concealed, the fortune-teller would predict the "fates" of those who came in and received her fee for her predictions. *Oh, would that I were a painter*, I said in my heart, and I imagined, as on a painted surface, the city's wonders and her shut-ins, its longing above and sorcery below.

I observed the passers-by and a thought occurred to me: *Am I in America? How is America different from Berdichev,*[3] *Kishinev,*[4] *Medzibezh,*[5] *and from all those other Jewish towns in which I lived?* These were my brothers to whom I was accustomed, the

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[1] In Hebrew: a four-cornered prayer shawl with fringes.
[2] In Hebrew: phylacteries; two small wooden or leather boxes containing scriptural passages, tied with leather straps on the left arm and forehead during the morning prayers.
[3] See chapter 1, footnote 22.
[4] City in Moldavia. Jews there from eighteenth century. Scene of two pogroms (1903 and 1905.) Improved conditions under Rumanian rule, 1918–1940. Under German-Rumanian occupation, 1941–1945. Sixty-five thousand Jews murdered by Nazis. In 1970, sixty thousand Jews.
[5] A small town in the Podolia district, Ukraine. Jews there from 1518. Annual fairs attracted Jewish merchants to the town. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Jews suffered at the hands of the Cossacks. The Baal Shem Tov settled there in 1740 and lived there until his death in 1760. He is also buried there. From 1815–1827, printing press of Hasidic and kabbalistic works. More than six thousand Jews in 1897. All liquidated by the Nazis in 1942.

minority of whom were men dressed with long clothes, beard grooming, and women whose heads were covered by wigs or head kerchiefs, and the majority of whom were shaven men, dressed in shorter clothes and with modern hats, and the women were all dolled up. But one feature they all had in common was the untidiness that was exposed more in regard to the "modernists" than to those holding on to the old ways. In my imagination I had clearly identified the greasy hats, the tattered capotes, and the dusty shoes with the old generation, and I stopped paying attention to it. When I once saw on the street a Jew whose coat's collar was clean and his beard combed and groomed, it was for me something extraordinary that called my attention. But the modern Jew, in my imagination, had always been identified with good taste and love for cleanliness. And therefore, when I saw these "modernists," with their pants wrinkled and their coats dusty, their hats—with their crooked brim—crushed, and their cheeks and chins covered by whiskers, and their faces frightened, I felt pity for them and their poverty. Even the younger ones who passed in front of me seemed strange in my eyes with their colored, open shirts, with their hats worn freely, and with their mischievous walk. The filth was greater in this metropolis than in the poor Galician villages. Dust, paper, torn newspapers, animal feces, wooden and cardboard boxes were littered about or were carried by the wind and pushed against the passers' legs.

We came as far as the over-ground train on Allen Street. Because the over-ground train travels above the street, it shadows the street—all of which is gloomy and its air is compressed—and it hums in a numbing, uninterrupted noise. The trains that travel above shake the rails and the rail ties, as well as the nerves of those walking below. And since sun rays do not reach through to dry the sidewalks and houses' walls, a smell of moisture,

dampness, and mustiness fills the air. The street's stores—with their exhibited merchandise and signs for all to see—reminded us of the sights abroad. Actually, the street presented itself more as a part of the ghetto than it did in Europe, because everything here was clustered together and more centralized. The stores were in the ground-level floor and sometimes also in the level below, and it was necessary to go downstairs in order to reach them, although their windows could be seen from the sidewalk. In the display windows were shown copper Russian samovars, candlesticks, Hanukkah menorahs, pots and pans, mortars and pestles, jugs and oil flasks, "knockers" that are attached to doors, watches, and more utensils and junk, mostly of copper, covered with dust. Later it became known to me that such instruments, to which we were accustomed and paid little attention, were considered here as "antiques," which rich ladies and others who love old things come to this street to buy as "objets d'art."

Out of the open doors of other stores, feathers were blown about, and over the doors were hung blankets, pillows, and duvets. The Americans are not accustomed to them, and they use wool blankets also during the hard winter days—the houses are heated well, and wool is sufficient. But our brethren who came from Europe are accustomed to the plume-filled duvets. Saleswomen's familiar faces could be seen through the shops' open doors, among them the types known to us from long ago, our acquaintances from "over there."

In the stores for bedding, linen, and muslin we saw that the shopkeepers were dark-skinned. We were told that these were our Sephardi brothers, who came from the Middle East, and they were engaged in import of this merchandise. Usually all those who came here resumed the trade or profession in which they had formerly been engaged or

accustomed to, or because by chance some of the first immigrants began to hold to these trades. As it turned out, most of the barbers in New York were Italian, most of the needle workers were Jewish, and many of the restaurants' owners were Greek. And our Sephardi brothers engaged, and still do today, in the import of linen.

When we passed a few blocks of this darkened street, we reached a broader and more central street. The street sign said "Canal Street," the street of the canal. Here there were lines of shops for men's clothing, and in front of each shop there stood a salesman whose role was to attract customers into the shop. These "attracting salesmen" had sharp eyes for identifying every stranger, and they identified us, too, as "green" and therefore laid an eye on us. Each time, another one approached us and informed us in Yiddish, sometimes in Russian or Polish, that the clothes in that shop were the least expensive. "You would come out of here dressed like an American. The clothes are wonderful and their price is low. Please come in."

And suddenly my eyes lit. Do you know what I saw? A store of Hebrew books. Regrettably, externally it was miserable and offensive: outside, on a pole, a tallit was waving in the wind, a tallit that was soiled by outdoor dust and stained by rain. Never before did I see tallits hung outside in such insult, a target for dust and rain. In the display windows a great mix of books and sacred objects was exhibited: novels in Yiddish, socialistic and anarchistic booklets, pamphlets with the blessing of the meal, *Siddurim*[6] and *Chumashim*,[7] books for teaching the Hebrew language, small booklets for the "greenhorns" on the laws of becoming a citizen, tin-made Hanukkah menorahs, kiddush

[6] In Hebrew: prayer books.
[7] In Hebrew: the five books of Moses, i.e., the Torah.

cups,[8] souvenirs made of olive tree wood from the Land of Israel. And in the window of a second bookstore there was a blackened sign on which was written in Yiddish: *Da fixet man tefillin.*[9] In short, all of Judaism in its entirety was consigned in this store.

Only a few steps farther, in the next house, there was another Jewish bookstore. I realized that I had arrived at the center, at the heart of the Jewish neighborhood. And, behold, a third store, a store in which my visit was a duty and a pleasure. On the store's sign, the blazoned letters proclaimed: "*Sifrei Haskalah.*"[10] Even though the letters were not shining bright—since the sign had been beaten by rains and stained by dust—its content warmed my heart.

I entered, and as my foot stepped over the threshold, I realized that this was the "meeting place" for the Hebrew *maskilim.*[11] So it was in Berdichev, so it was in Minsk, in Bobruysk,[12] in Vilna, and in Warsaw, and in every Jewish city. Group by group of *maskilim* stood huddled together in the long and crowded store, holding conversations.

Behind the counter, by his honorable self, stood the store's owner, Mr. Sh. Druckman, to serve the customers, a not-too-young Jew, tall and lean, his face thin and very pale. As I entered and approached his place, he recognized me as a guest. He stretched out his withered hand and lightly touched my fingers, almost like an *Admor.*[13]

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[8] In Hebrew: cups for the sanctification over the wine.
[9] In Yiddish: Here phylacteries are repaired and proofread.
[10] In Hebrew: Books by authors influenced by the Enlightenment.
[11] In Hebrew: the Enlightened.
[12] One of the oldest cities in Belarus, eighty-five miles southeast of Minsk. A center of timber industry, furs, and fishing. The 1861 census showed about twenty-five hundred Jews. Jewish population increased following the Napoleonic wars. Late nineteenth century Pogroms targeting Jews. In 1941, twenty thousand Jews shot by Nazis and buried in mass graves. The name is connected to the Babi-Yar saga: there is a memorial in Nachalat Yitzhak's (Israel) cemetery, dedicated to the Bobruysk Jews killed in the Holocaust, as part of the Babi-Yar memorial.
[13] A Hebrew acronym for *Adoneinu, Moreinu v'Rabbeinu* (Our master, teacher, and rabbi).

"*Shalom Aleichem,* "[14] he whispered to me in a faint voice, like a person destined for the hospital. "What is your name?"

I almost couldn't hear his words, but I surmised what they were.

"Zevi Scharfstein."

"*Baruch bo'echa,* "[15] he whispered to me again and coughed. "I have in my store two textbooks written by Scharfstein, and they are *Sefateinu*[16] and *LaDor HaTsa'ir.*[17] Are you their author?"

"Yes."

"Well, you have come at the right hour. Most of the textbooks that are used in America were brought from Russia and Poland, and now, since the world war broke out, this source is blocked."

"And don't you have textbooks produced in America?"

"Yes," he replied to me, "and I shall show you a few."

He began to search and brought me a few "American" books, very well known to me: *HaMeichin*[18] by Tawiow;[19] an obsolete book, *Sefat Yeladim*[20] by Marcus Bergman;[21] and *Sippurei HaMikra*[22] by Rawnitzki[23]-Bialik[24]-Ben Zion.[25] All of these were published

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[14] In Hebrew: May peace be upon you.
[15] In Hebrew: Be blessed as you come in.
[16] In Hebrew: Our Language.
[17] In Hebrew: For the Young Generation.
[18] In Hebrew: The One Who Prepares.
[19] Israel Hayyim Tawiow (1858–1920); b. Bielorussia. Hebrew author; moved to Riga. Wrote essays on language and folklore, textbooks on Hebrew language and literature, belles-lettres, etc.
[20] In Hebrew: Children's Language.
[21] Scharfstein's error. According to *Hebrew Printing in America*, No.359, this book is by Hayim Bregman.
[22] In Hebrew: The Stories of the Bible.
[23] Yehoshua Hana Rawnitzki (1859–1944), Hebrew journalist and publisher; b. Russia. Lifelong associate of H. N. Bialik (see chapter 1, footnote 5). Cofounder of Moriah publishing house, and editor of Hebrew and Yiddish periodicals. Settled in *Eretz Yisrael* in 1922. Helped establishing Devir publishing house and collaborated with Bialik in publishing *Sefer HaAggadah, Sippurei HaMikra,* and medieval poetry.
[24] See chapter 1, footnote 5.

in Russia, and an American company published them here without the authors' permission.

In the meantime, one young man with nimble movements left one of those conversing groups. As he was chatting with his company, with one ear he inclined toward the store's owner, who was near me. The young man approached me, stretched out his hand to me, and with light on his face said, "My name is Daniel Persky."[26]

What a blessing, this meeting! Persky! He was the imagined patron from whom I had asked help finding me a position. In my letter to him, I mentioned the two loyal witnesses who could recommend me as being qualified for the position of a Hebrew teacher; indeed they were Professor Deutch from Cincinnati,[27] and the author Reuben Brainin.[28]

From the way he was dressed—a sports coat hanging in an untidy way—from his missing or loosely sewn buttons, and especially from his bold-colored tie, which wasn't tied properly and was hung to the right and left, and from the liberally bent brim of his hat, and especially from his intimate way of speaking, popping and fluent, I recognized the type.

"I do remember," he rushed to say, "your articles from the time of my childhood; indeed, I am not mistaken, from my childhood . . . you published tales and news in *BeGan HaSha'ashu'im.*[29] One yeshiva boy,[30] from the town in which I lived, showed me the newspaper. I read your writings in *HaMelitz.* "[31]

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[25] S. (Simcha Alter Guttmann) Ben-Zion (1870–1923), b. Bessarabia, settled in Eretz Yisrael, 1905. Hebrew writer and translator. Wrote short stories as realist, then visionary symbolist. Taught and wrote textbooks. Editor of many periodicals and translator of classical German poetry into Hebrew.
[26] See chapter 1, footnote 20.
[27] See chapter 1, footnote 21.
[28] See chapter 1, footnote 27.
[29] In Hebrew: In the Amusement Garden.

"And *Friedrich Nietzsche*[32] *and His Opinions,* too?"

"*Friedrich Nietzsche and His Opinions,* too. But I especially admired an announcement of good wishes for Rosh Hashanah that you published in *HaMelitz.*"

"Do you store in your memory announcements of wishes, too?"

"Not all of them. This one was an extraordinary one; crème de la crème . . ."

"What special did you find in it?"

"A great innovation . . . You wished your friends 'Realization of their Idealism.' Fabulously to the point! It made a great impression on me."

"Indeed, when a person is still a young man, he takes pride in and admires foreign words grown—and he returns to simple ones."

"Well said, 'to the simple ones.' And for what reason do we like Brenner so much? Because of the simplicity in him!"

And he immediately leaped into another thing and mentioned articles written by others, detailed for me names of writers from Galicia, their articles and stories, asked for their welfare, informed me of the names of Hebrew writers in America, and told me, as

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[30] In Hebrew: a student at an Orthodox religious school.

[31] In Hebrew: The Advocate. First Hebrew paper in Russia; founded in Odessa 1860 by Alexander Zederbaum (1816–1893). Organ of moderate *Haskalah;* later became organ of *Hibbat Zion* movement in Russia. Originally weekly, became daily 1886; closed in 1904.

[32] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900). German philosopher, author, and poet. Professor of classical philosophy, Basel (1869–1879), where he was at first the friend and follower, and later (from ca. 1878) a strong opponent, of Wagner in art and philosophy; opponent of Schopenhauer's philosophy; suffered mental breakdown (1889); spent last years in care of his mother at Naumburg and his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche at Weimar. Known for denouncing religion, for espousing doctrine of perfectibility of man through forcible self-assertion, and for glorification of the superman (*Übermensch*). His works chiefly on philology, music, Greek antiquity, and especially philosophy, included *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872), *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–1892), *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887), and more.

well, about *HaToren,*[33] the monthly published in New York, and of which he is one of the editors—and all with alarm, with no space for a breath.

Such young lads I met in Europe. They were few in numbers—there was one in the city, and two in the province—youngsters for whom Hebrew literature was the source of livelihood, and there was nothing in their worlds but this literature's development and its creators. They were slaves to the literature; they read everything that was published, whether it was a newspaper, a pamphlet, or a book, without discrimination. They were interested in the details of the writers' lives, absorbed everything, and kept everything in the hidden regions of their memory. The family of authors was their family; in it they lived, and its air they breathed. Because of their concentration on that spiritual world, and out of their ambition to see everything that is printed, they were afraid of losing even one leaf, heaven forbid. They disregarded other matters, such as the way they dressed and their daily routines.

Of all those whom I had occasion to meet, Persky was superior, since he himself became an author. In those days he was engaged in dissemination of the literature, in selling books to every Hebrew *maskil,* and was assisting every idealistic publisher, such as Brenner[34] when he published *HaMe'orer,*[35] and within *HaPo'el Ha Tza'ir,*[36] in order to find subscribers and readers. Frischmann[37] was shooting his arrows into the hearts of

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[33] In Hebrew: The Mast. The most important Hebrew monthly in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Published in New York, 1913–1925 (by *Achiever, HaToren,* Zionist Organization of America, and *Safruth* publishing companies). From 1922–1925 underwritten by Israel Matz. Its first editors were Abraham Goldberg (1883–1942), Shimon Ginzburg (1890–1944), Shalom Ber Maximon (1881–1933), and Nahum Silkiner (1882–1934).

[34] See chapter 1, footnote 19.

[35] See chapter 1, footnote 18.

[36] In Hebrew: The Young Worker, referring to the movement by that name.

[37] David Frischmann (1859–1922), b. Poland. Hebrew writer and translator. Wrote short stories, poetry, essays, satire, literary criticism, and biblical stories, *BaMidbar*. Translated many classics, including

Hov'vei Sefat Ever,[38] whom he saw as being satisfied with an abstract love for the language. When he compared them with a teacher who liked his she-goat excessively, day and night, but who did not provide her with food to keep her soul alive, he could not have meant it against Persky. Persky's dedication to Hebrew was expressed by daily good deeds. And he did a great deal on behalf of Hebrew publishing houses.

After he continued to ask me a heap of questions, which came rapidly and as if chased, and I could not answer them properly, and after he talked with my wife and salvaged from her mouth details about her, and complimented her, I asked him to provide me with the address for the residence of Abraham Goldberg, the one who was then editor of the Zionist weekly *Dos Yiddishe Folk*.[39] Immediately he provided me with the address.

"I am saying," he added, "I have already told you that the monthly *HaToren* is published here, a very important monthly. Join it."

"In what? In any event, I must first find my livelihood; after that I shall worry about my spiritual matters."

"Don't worry, you will find a position. You are not the first here; everybody found one. Do you know how you might participate? Perhaps you should write a review on Bernfeld's book *Da'at Elohim?*"[40]

These things were said hurriedly, with a lit face, and with a voice that made it difficult to discern whether it had a thread of mischief in it. *Why did he choose this*

Nietzsche and Tagore. Editor and publisher of many Hebrew and Yiddish journals. Important influence on modern Hebrew literature and its broadening from artificiality of *Haskalah* period.

[38] In Hebrew: (A poetic way of calling) The Adherents to the Hebrew Language.

[39] In Yiddish: The Jewish People. A Yiddish literary biweekly, edited by Abraham Goldberg and founded in 1910. Founder cannot be ascertained.

[40] Simon Bernfeld (1860–1940), rabbi and scholar. Chief rabbi of Belgrade Sephardi community, 1886–1894; then lived in Berlin. Wrote works on the Bible, Jewish history, ethics; translated the Bible into German. His best-known works are *Da'at Elohim* (a history of religious philosophy, loosely translated as "God's Knowledge") and *Sefer HaDema'ot* (*The Book of the Tears*, an anthology of sources on Jewish persecution).

particular book? Is it really so new? Thus I meditated in my heart—*and why didn't he ask me whether philosophy was my profession?* Immediately, a suspicion awoke in me that he was joking. He saw a Hebrew teacher who was only occasionally writing "an article," and he presented him with this proposal.

As I departed from Persky and came out of the store, a fellow from the "meeting place" followed me, caught me, and said to me, "I have heard that you are looking for a teaching position, and that you are going to meet with Abraham Goldberg for this purpose. Please don't worry. Today and tomorrow your arrival will be publicized among teachers and principals, and this will benefit you."

"How will my arrival be publicized?"

"How? By Persky."

*

To the readers who are unfamiliar with New York or with its downtown, I shall note that what is described in this chapter is according to what I saw in the first week following my arrival, forty years ago. This was the typical section of the immigrants' neighborhoods, those of the generation of experimentation by the new settlers. There an intensive human drama had taken place, tragicomic and with a multitude of outcomes.

Two square miles built with apartments that seemed to function like cages served as a first way station. There were the sweatshops. There was the furnace of usurpation—in the factories of sweat—in which myriads of people lost their energy through hard labor from morning until night. And workers organizations were established there to protect the exploited by strikes and other means. And nonetheless, out of these neighborhoods came

people, renowned by name and deed. They adapted to the life of the land, learned, toiled, suffered, and ascended, and later became famous as lawyers, journalists, labor leaders, composers and artists, and even as politicians. There, boxers and athletes, and even ruffians, were brought up. And do not take the ruffians lightly, since it did happen that some of them acquired a reputation, many possessions, great influence, and high-ranking officials entered into negotiations with them, probably for the sake of democracy.

This neighborhood in the city's downtown, as is the case with most neighborhoods, assumes a shape and then abandons it according to the type of its residents, who change from time to time. First its inhabitants were Irish, then came the Germans, some of whom brought with them socialistic spirit and became the workers' leaders. There lived Germany's Jews from the outset of their arrival, and there they built the synagogues and schools—famous to this very day, except that they moved uptown, to the place of wealth, since in the course of time they became rich, climbed up the steps of society, and desired their dwelling places to be among the superrich and those of "ancestral" rights and distinguished pedigree. The German Jews in the downtown were the owners of textile and fur factories and were great merchants, and it was the Eastern European Jews who worked in their factories. In the year 1880 they were the rulers of the community of Israel in New York, which consisted then of some eighty thousand people.

When the German Jews left downtown, the Eastern European Jews took their places, and they were accompanied by immigrants from the nations of the world: Italians, Russians, Rumanian, Hungarians, Slovaks, and of other nations. Along with the change of the inhabitants, the general face and customs of the neighborhood changed as well: the language used there and on the signs, the type of restaurants, the language of the

newspapers sold there, and the faces of the passers-by. And the Jews who settled there were also not of one skin, and as much as it was possible, they did not mix with each other, but rather were split into special streets, forming states within states, like special small islands. Most of the Jews were, of course, from Russia, but here and there they crowded together with the Jews of Hungary, and in these streets could be seen a pious Hungarian Jew wearing a flat hat with its broad brim, shining with its light-reflective velvet. That was "Little Hungary," and there, in the restaurants, you were served with the original goulash. Then there was "Little Rumania," and in the restaurants' windows were laid—for all to see—chopped liver, gizzards, and turnips, and in the evening a singer wore a hat of stiff material and sang Yiddish folk songs, spicy and enticing songs, as he was walking among the eating and drinking public while singing, and the joy and rejoicing reached the ceiling. A "Little Galicia" was there as well; there, one could hear a long, intoned "*Shalom Aleichem!*" and the men's and women's faces were soft and shining. These Bessarabian[41] rolled the "R," and ended each sentence with a rising pitch. And Lithuanians interchanged their "Sh"s with "S"s. As all of them arrived, they were at first peddlers or needle workers. Whether in their homes or in the shops, they all worked—a family next to another, fathers and sons together, and with superhuman sacrifices they reached middle class, and occasionally wealth. Then they uprooted and moved uptown and became a special social stratum.

By now the neighborhood had entirely changed, and only footsteps of the old remained. The over-ground trains that used to hide the sun were destroyed and disappeared. Lines of old and musty houses, nests for diseases, were destroyed as well. A number of streets were widened, their houses rebuilt, and playgrounds for children were

[41] See chapter 3, footnote 6.

constructed. Sunlight shone more frequently now over the formerly dark Allen Street. Canal Street, with its busy traffic, was widened. The pushcarts and stands of merchandise on Orchard Street vanished. The city forbade selling merchandise in the open street and provided for this purpose new, roof-covered markets, and the city clerks supervised over the state of their cleanliness. De Lancey is now one of the important streets of commerce.

The number of Jews in the downtown area is gradually decreasing, and those who remain are the old, the poor, and the meek, for whom uprooting is hard, and they cannot depart from their neighbors, and from the synagogues to which they have become accustomed, and from other institutions. The young couples leave from there to the open spaces, to new and modern neighborhoods. The place of the Jews is taken by Italians and Slavs, and more recently by Puerto Ricans.

However, there is still there, in the downtown, a sort of Jewish center. There are the publishing houses of the Yiddish newspapers; there are the booksellers' shops, and there exist a number of yeshivot. And there are the offices of the secretaries and solicitors who are busy constantly with raising funds for the benefit of the yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael—by letters that are sent to every Jewish merchant. And whoever sends a contribution to one "secretary," it is certain that his address would be delivered from one office to another, and that he would receive solicitations from all the yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael, pleading for help. Prior to the festival of Sukkot,[42] the whole neighborhood is filled with the aroma of the *etrogim*[43] and *lulavim*[44] that are sold in the stores, and Jews come from all sections of the city to check and find "*mehudarim.*"[45] There they sell

[42] In Hebrew: sukkah is a booth. Sukkot is the Fall Festival of Booths, or Tabernacles.
[43] Etrog/etrogim; citron/citrons; a citrus fruit, one of the Four Species used on Sukkot.
[44] Lulav/lulavim; palm frond/fronds; a palm branch, one of the Four Species used on Sukkot.
[45] In Hebrew: flawless and strictly kosher.

thatch for the sukkah 's roof and willows for *Hoshana Rabba.*[46] There one can still see signs in Yiddish, whether of a reverend who officiates over weddings, or of a mohel,[47] or whether of a *beit din*[48] for arbitration. There Yiddish is freely spoken and no one worries. There favorite foods of the Eastern European Jews are sold: pancakes stuffed with thick sauce, mashed potatoes, cakes filled with poppy seeds or with plum sauce, or with cheese. There pickled apples and cucumbers are found, and over the street hovers a smell of sourness. There you will find all sorts of salted and smoked fish, fat and thin, even dipped in sour cream—whatever your stomach desires. In short, anyone who is worried about his Jewish stomach, or is looking for livelihood with profit and pleasure, will come there and will find whatever he seeks. And they do come.

The longing for the early days of one's life, to the good days, to the village and to Papa's and Mamma's home, focuses somewhat on that special food. The sight of that food and the spread of its taste all over the body reminds one of bygone times. A meal, therefore, is a ritual, and it awakens old dreams and youthful memories. In short, all the limbs and organs are stomach dependent, and the stomach is food dependent, and hence, American Jewry is dependent on food. And already there have been some sociologists who fixed a name to this Jewry, one that exists by the merit of the dishes: "The Kitchen Jewry."

And I do remember that downtown, on Ludlow Street, one of the dirtiest streets, lived a typesetter who dealt with Hebrew books whose vowels had to be set manually,

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[46] In Hebrew: The Great Hoshana. The seventh and final day of Sukkot, on which seven processions are made around the synagogue's sanctuary, and after which five willow branches bound together are beaten. In post-Talmudic times, the day became a supplement to the Day of Atonement, a day on which God's decrees for the coming year are finalized.
[47] In Hebrew: a title for a ritual circumciser.
[48] In Hebrew: a Jewish court.

who was—God spare us!—poor and destitute, and his print house was very dirty, and it was difficult to endure the dusty atmosphere. One of those who entered was an uptown Reform rabbi who was in need of a few pages of Hebrew with vowels. The rabbi was serving in a Temple of the rich, his salary huge, his attire elegant, and the ways of his life were as those of his supervisors—the bankers and the powerful merchants. He dwells in a spacious and magnificent apartment, and he eats in the gloriously famous French restaurants, and he enjoys all kinds of food, such as pork chops, crab, and snail, of which a Reform Jew is commanded to enjoy and prove to anyone who is not a segregated zealot that he does not keep away from the company of other citizens. When he entered the typesetter's room, which was suffocating because of the dust, and was sullied with ink stains and with bits and pieces of paper, he would take off his coat, sit with his undercoat garments on a rickety chair, and send the typesetter to buy him a piece of whole-grain bread and brandy, and eat in that surrounding with craving, and drink thirstily directly from the bottle, and his eyes would shine with brightness as he said with joy, "Oh, how much I yearn for the food of my father's home . . . but where on Fifth Avenue can I obtain it? Here I shall find it, and here I shall know life's pleasures."

Chapter 30

Our Dwelling Places in New York

I

New York—what is it? A city or a metropolis? Neither of these terms is apt to capture its character. New York is a world, a noisy world. For most people, a magic world that gestures and calls them with the luster of its lights as a place of wonders, as a shrine of happiness, as the garden of life; and on others it casts terror by its size and tumults, as a city of horrors and atrocities. Millions of people in the United States and all over the world dream about her, look up to her, and are attracted to her as a moth is attracted to light. Young men and women sometimes escape from their parents' nest and come to this foreign and cold metropolis to seek in it their happiness and their life's destiny. And in the eyes of millions of other people, New York is thought of as a big city of Satan, of immoral troublemakers and robbers, which hell's fire would consume and every soul in it would be burnt.

New York is the city of fantastic skyscrapers that look like narrow, tall giants that reach the clouds. Out of the mist of a wintry day and out of the purity of a clear day, at noon under sunlight and at night in the moonlight, these forts of wonders stand file by file, real in their mighty power, dwarfing everything in their tremendous height, and attractive by their towers and hidden secrets. The observer senses that these lofty creations are the fruits of enterprise, energy, and the genius of a new man's vision, a superior one, who, by his wisdom, competes with nature and strives to surpass it.

Yes, this New York is not a dream and a mirage. It is as real as the mountains of the Alps, and as glorious as they are, throbbing life like the seawaters and humming just

the same, and as romantic as the heavens' stars. Evening after evening, when these steel towers are lit with myriads of electric lights, man forgets heavens' heights, his heart expands and fills with awe for the sight of these flaming lights.

And the millions of people who dwell within it are a wonderful mix of natives from all nations and all lands. In it there are over two million Jews, about half a million Irish, around half a million Germans, myriads of Italians and Russians, a hundred and fifty thousand English, forty thousand Polish, and Czech, and Finnish, and Swedes, and Danish, and Norwegian, and Belgian, and French, and Greek, and Dutch. You see before you races and colors: blacks of all kinds, and mulatto, and Puerto Rican, and Indian. No one knows how many Chinese and Japanese live in it; they are not fond of the census.[1] And all these nations and tongues, those of all kinds of faiths and opinions—all of them are here as one medley. And New York's residents are patient and would show their white teeth one to the other, would giggle and smile to each other, not out of free will but out of necessity. Otherwise they would all be lost in an abyss of poison and hatred.

If a person arriving in it is a Jew who is interested in getting acquainted with the dispersed people of Israel, he doesn't need to travel over seas and lands in order to do so, nor an anthropologist or a folklorist need to leave the city. Within minutes he would cover not only geographical distances but also the full range of time.

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[1] The modern census—a periodic and thorough statistical review—began in the seventeenth century. The first census in the United States was conducted in 1790. Scientific census taking began in the United States with the decennial of 1850. In 1902 the Bureau of Census was established. In 1972 all agencies combined to form the Social and Economic Statistics Administration. Since Scharfstein's book was published in 1954, he may have referred here to the census of 1950.

On a Saturday in Williamsburg, a walker would forget that he is in America, because he would see in front of him Munkács,[2] Szatmár,[3] and Marmoresch Szighet[4]—he would see the same Jews as of these towns, who walk with their *szufitzes,*[5] as done for hundreds of years, and with multitail *shtreimels*[6] and bottle-like, curly side locks, and would hear *nigunei Hasidim;*[7] in the "Turkish" synagogue, on a festival day, he would see the women sprinkle eau de cologne during the taking of the Torah scroll out of the Ark, and in a Reform Temple he would see men and women seated together, the men with coverless heads, as they listen to organ music and recite phrases in pure English, and listen to the singing of a mixed choir, made out of men and women.

New York is the city of liberty; its residents are free to conduct themselves as they wish, without an observing eye or a managing hand. Everyone is free to be as he wishes: if he wills it, he becomes part of the public, and he joins it in his labors; if he wills it, he secludes himself from the public and lives in loneliness. If he participates with the public, he is assured not to become bored and will find no rest, just the same. Every day assemblies and meetings are called, every day argumentative discussions and debates take place, and people collect money for charity with pleas and shouts. The communal worker lends his voice, devotes time and energy, struggles and toils as chasing after an elusive honor. And if one who settles in New York is curious, he would find whatever he

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[2] City in the Ukraine. Jews from the seventeenth century. Renowned for extreme conservatism and Hasidism. More than 11,200 Jews there before the Holocaust. All of its Jews were killed by the Nazis in 1944; two thousand Jews there in 1970.
[3] City in northwest Rumania. Jews from the seventeenth century. In 1898 the Jewish community split between an anti-Zionist group of Orthodox Jews, led by Joel Teitelbaum, and the rest of them. Most of the twelve thousand Jews in 1941 were deported by the Nazis. Five hundred Jews lived there in 1970.
[4] City in northwest Rumania. Jews from the seventeenth century. Hasidism and Frankism strong there. Community split in twentieth century. More than ten thousand of its Jews died in the Holocaust.
[5] In Yiddish: a short coat with an attached belt.
[6] In Yiddish: a fur-edged hat, worn by rabbis and Hasidic Jews on Sabbaths and holidays.
[7] In Hebrew: musical tunes used by Hasidic Jews.

seeks without trouble. Every moment in the life of the city is full of events. Busy and noisy are the people in their creative work–there are those who dance to the golden calf, and those to the goddess Ashtoreth;[8] these who declare *Hai alma levei hillulei damya,*[9] and those who finish their accounts with *Emek HaBacha*[10] and commit suicide.

The city is busy. Taking place daily are parades and exhibitions, lectures and readings, trials, evenings of singing and joy, and eulogies that follow disasters. The moment you leave your house, you are swept with the stream of doers and deeds. And this tumultuous city serves as well as a city for hiding, for those who want to be left alone, or seek isolation and tranquility. A person running away from society secludes himself within his four walls, lives alone; the city noise doesn't reach him, and if he wouldn't come out of his dwelling place even for a year, no one would miss him. There are some American writers who escape from their small towns, from the same places of which tranquility seekers dream, but cannot find there their quietude; their good neighbors disturb them in their work. What do they do? They check into hotels in the center of noisy New York, and in their rooms inspiration dawns on them, and there they find solitude with their creative work, where no one interrupts or disturbs them.

In this metropolis, one can stay all his life and remain a countryman. Every neighborhood is a town by itself, and it can provide all of life's needs "from the cradle to the grave." A person goes out to work in the morning and, at a distance of two hundred initial steps, he can buy the morning paper; buy cigarettes; deliver his whites to the laundry; order groceries, vegetables, and fruit for his home; inform the dry cleaners to send for his slacks for cleaning and pressing; bring his radio to a store for repair; order

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[8] In biblical Hebrew: the Canaanite goddess of love and war (in Greek: Astarte.)
[9] In Aramaic: This world resembles a house of merrymaking.
[10] In Hebrew: The Valley of Weeping (or of Tears).

roses in a flower shop to send for his mother's birthday; and enter a Western Union office to send a consoling telegram to his friend, whose mother passed away. And should one of his household fall ill, heaven forbid, he can find nearby, often even in the same building, a physician and a pharmacy, and not too far from them is the undertaker's office. As evening falls, when that person returns home from his daily work, he can buy, on his short way from the underground train station to his home, a few new lightbulbs, go to the shoemaker and ask that new rubber heels be fixed to his shoes, and then buy at a store a few bottles of soda or beer and bring them to his family. After supper, if he doesn't like to watch television, he can go with his wife to the cinema, which is across the street from his home. In essence, he is not required to get far away from his home, and both he and his household could spend all their days in their *k'n ammah*[11] and to taste of all 150 flavors of pleasure. And if they arrive at a different neighborhood, a walk of about half an hour from their place, the surrounding would look strange and foreign. But if a guest from far away happened to visit them, they would go out together for a walk and sightseeing, and then the resident, too, would see a little of his city's wonders.

What does a New Yorker know about his city? Does he know that its port is the largest in the world, into which ships come from the end of the world and then leave, that myriads of trains come and go, that crowded buses travel to every town and village in the United States, even if they are thousands of miles away, that mighty airplanes and aircrafts fly and bring visitors from the four corners of the world, and day and night they will not stop? The New Yorker who lies down on his bed and sleeps, or stretches on his couch and daydreams, or talks a lot with his friend's wife, or fights with his own wife—would he know what is going on at that hour in his city, how many comedies are

[11] In Hebrew: 150 *ammah;* a symbolic, confined area with a circumference of about 150 feet.

presented in its chambers, and how many tragedies are taking place in its habitations? Like a snail, he rests in his shell, cocooned in his little "world," and whatever happens around him escapes him. Every time my hand holds a book about New York, and I read it, it seems to me that I am being introduced to a foreign city, since everything is new to me. A complete newness.

No, the New Yorker is like a stranger in the city of his birth and residence. Every New Yorker is a warrior; he is forced to fight for his rights, for his seat on the train, in the bus, in the restaurant, and in the store, and the shy and the timid could not survive in it. People huddle together and touch each other on the side or the shoulder, in the elbow or the knee, and they are strangers to each other, and vie with each other for a seat, or for the metal holding ring on the train, and for the right to get out of the subway car's miserable confinement. A cartoonist conveyed this situation well through his drawing, which he titled: "The Education of a Gentleman in New York."[12] In all three panels we see the well-mannered man, who comes from out of town to New York, in the three stages of his education: he stands on the underground platform and wishes to board the train car, while a multitude rushes toward the open door. The first time he stands on the side, bows to everyone, and gestures for the privilege to enter before he does. The next day he joins the multitude and gets in with everybody else. On the third day, with a might of a township resident, he pushes with his strong elbows everyone else who wishes to board the train as he enters first.

This is New York and these are its inhabitants. And should you meet a New Yorker on his own turf, do not expect that he wouldn't trespass upon your territory, or

[12] This is the same cartoon that Scharfstein earlier refers to in chapter 3 as "The Boorish Gentleman of New York." See pp. 60–61.

that he wouldn't deprive you of your rights, or not step on your toes, since a warrior he is from his youth.

II

The Holy One, blessed be He, bestowed blessings on my wife and me by tossing us into New York. In the beginning we had temporary apartments, because I did not know whether my position would last, and during the first year we lived in a furnished room in Harlem.

"In Harlem?" would the reader ask, astonished, since at this time the thought of this neighborhood brings up unpleasant sentiments. Harlem is the habitation of the blacks and the Puerto Ricans, a place of crowdedness, poverty, and filth, and anyone guarding his soul, his honor, and his pocket would stay away from it.

Yes, in Harlem, because back then a large section of Harlem was the quarter of nobility.

In Harlem there were glorious apartment buildings owned by the able, and private homes for the rich.[13] In such a private home we rented a room. In the same house, with five stories, lived a lone woman with her bachelor son. And what moved the landlady to accommodate a couple in her home? It wasn't the rent that was important, but life's atmosphere. This woman was a widow, and her son was leaving daily for his office, and she stayed alone with her maid, wandering through the five stories' fourteen rooms, lonely and melancholy, walking up and down the stairs as she listened to the sound of her

[13] Much information on the Jews in Harlem can be gained from Jeffrey S. Gurock's books *When Harlem Was Jewish, 1870–1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), and *American Jewish Life, 1920–1990* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

footsteps. She was overcome by boredom, and she wished to bring in a young couple and a bit of joy into her abode.

Among the residents of this neighborhood were many of our Jewish brethren, members of the upper-middle class who came out of enslavement in the factories into the liberty of commerce, and from the darkness of poverty into the light of the well-to-do. The main streets, Seventh Avenue and St. Nicholas, looked like today's Broadway, except they were cleaner, and in the evenings there were many, many passers-by, walking and gazing at the decorated display windows. When we went out to the street, a parade of men and women, young and old, passed in front of us. Their faces gave proof that they had seen their dream world in their lifetime, and the women's clothing, in particular, testified to spoiled life.

At autumn's end—when cold winds had just begun to blow, and the trees shed their leaves, and snowflakes had not yet been seen—women rushed to take out their furs to be seen in them. My eyes were not accustomed to the American fur coats, whose hair faces outward, and a walk in a wintry night on those avenues seemed to me as a visit in a foreign country. In front of us passed older and younger women, dressed with coats of fox fur and Astrakhan lamb hide, curly and shining, from hides of beavers and otters, to the brilliant and expensive ferret hide, and all of these created a feeling of pleasant warmth, of spoiled and pleasurable life. The women and girls, with their smooth, plump faces (being thin was not yet fashionable) and rosy makeup, giggled with delight. Their fingers sparkled with the light of their diamond rings, and their voices rang with laughter. All of these testified of fulfillment, confidence, and satisfaction. I shall not deny that this

environment made me feel good, as if it promised me stability and comfort for the unfolding future.

This neighborhood's Judaism did not declare itself outdoors in a singing voice. Still, it included synagogues and Talmud Torah schools,[14] and one of them, the Uptown Talmud Torah—which, in those days was directed by the poet B. N. Silkiner,[15] may he rest in peace—had over a thousand students. But this was in the poor neighborhoods. The Jews of the middle-class avenues managed to "adapt," and there was no difference in the way the streets looked on Saturday as compared with a weekday. On the contrary, on Saturdays traffic increased, and the number of shoppers in the stores increased. Those individuals who walked on Saturdays on their way to pray looked like strangers; their Sabbath attire and inner feelings distinguished them from all others, and with their struggle of whether to be unseen or be bold, it was as if they said, "Look! We observe our Judaism here, too, in this foreign environment."

The room in which we lived was spacious, with a high ceiling, and out of its tall windows Morris Park could be seen. We ate our meals in restaurants. This arrangement was convenient for us, since both of us worked, and after a tiring day we met at the Jewish-Hungarian restaurant and thereafter go for a walk or to the theater. This is how our first year passed.

Toward the end of the twelve-month period, a shortcoming had been found in our accommodation. This widow, for her own enjoyment, meant to get warm by the light of young people, but when she met them face-to-face, a resistance to their joyful way of life

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[14] See chapter 2, footnote 38.

[15] Benjamin Nahum Silkiner (1882–1933), b. Lithuania. U.S. Hebrew poet; in the United States from 1904. Taught Bible at Teachers Institute, Jewish Theological Seminary. Emphasized American themes, e.g., *Mul Ohel Timmurah*, an epic poem on the struggle of Indians against Spanish conquistadors.

arose in her. She became bitter. Whether she feared old age, whether due to her loneliness, or whether as a result of bad health, every sound of happiness was dissonant in her ear. Especially she complained when we brought over guests, colleagues and friends, in order to talk and have fun. Then we heard a knock on the door and an angry voice: "For politeness' sake, keep quiet!"

III

From Harlem we moved to Eastern Parkway. Two of our friends who worked with me in the education department proposed to us to rent an apartment together, each couple in their own room, with the kitchen and dining room to be shared by all. This "company" was joined by another acquaintance, a not-so-young woman, who made her living by way of the theater and other things connected to it, such as writing lyrics and songs for the vaudeville singers. The proposal was very welcomed by us, and we sang, *Hinei ma tov u mah na'im, shevet achim gam yachad,*[16] especially because it turned out to be very inexpensive. A widow—slim, with a small stature and quick movements—who had a child, joined us as well. She agreed to undertake the maintenance of the house, to cook and clean, for free rent and food, and a small monetary compensation. In this way we lived a shared life in a three-story house.

I didn't get to know very well the surroundings of Eastern Parkway, because here we were just guests, and our workplaces and interests were in Manhattan. Here in this neighborhood lived our Jewish brethren who had climbed from the ranks of poverty into the middle class, and we saw in their lives the influence of America. Most of them came

[16] From the Hebrew Bible, Psalm 133:1: "Behold, how good it is, and how pleasant, when brethren dwell together in unity."

from the villages in Eastern Europe—the streets, alleys, houses, and cottages of which were illustrated with much talent and sharp realism by our grandfather Mendele Mokher Seforim.[17] Here they settled in private homes; in front of each of them there was a small flower garden or a lawn, and on both sides of the sidewalk, broad-canopy trees were planted. Gradually the Jewish landlord learned to appreciate the lawn, to cultivate it, water and groom it, and to plant flowers at the edges. As evening fell, the landlord, dressed informally with a shirt, could be seen holding a rubber hose in his hand, watering. Even by this custom alone, a revolution had taken place in regard to the attitude toward work and nature.

Not far from there was Brownsville, and the two neighborhoods contrasted. In Brownsville the old customs prevailed, the continuation of the Jewish quarters of Berdichev, Warsaw, and Lodz. Its trees, a remnant of prettier times when it was a country farm, were wilted, and its lawns were trampled upon and disappeared, and the plaster fell off its houses, and its streets were filled with storefronts of vegetables, fruit, and fish stands. The sellers and buyers would debate, and bargain, and fight, and reconcile, and the voices and shouts were deafening, and the sidewalks were dirty with leftovers of food and with torn pieces of newspapers. It is true that the residents of those neighborhoods possessed feelings of home safety and the comfort that comes with routine, but not everybody believes in the idea of *Sheker HaChen.*[18]

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[17] Pen name (meaning in Hebrew: Mendele the Bookseller) of Shalom Jacob Abramovitch (1835–1917), b. Belarus. Important Hebrew and Yiddish writer; studied at various yeshivot; traveled widely; lived in Berdichev and Zhitomir; settled in Odessa, 1881. Instrumental in founding modern literary Yiddish and new realism in Hebrew style, leaving marks on both literatures thematically as well as stylistically. Wrote Yiddish and Hebrew fiction, literary and social criticism, works of popular science (in Hebrew), and rewrote some of his Yiddish novels in Hebrew. One of the acknowledged classicists in both Hebrew and Yiddish. His popular, often satirical stories include *Fathers and Sons, Fishke the Lame, The Mare,* and *The Travels of Binyamin III.*

[18] From the Hebrew Bible, Proverbs 31:31: "Grace is deceptive, Beauty is illusory."

The wrinkle-faced old ladies dressed in wide dresses were untidy. They would sit in front of the apartment buildings, on the steps, and chat. The men's faces, with their trimmed beards, or shaven as of yesterday, were anxious. Their hats were tilted toward the neck, and they were running about. All of these features made the character of this place similar to that of a European Jewish village. And within this frenzy, children jumped while playing ball. The old and the new, Eishishuk[19] and New York mixed together.

After we tried for a year to live this way on Eastern Parkway, the experiment fell apart. We became resentful of living like occasional guests, sharing our space with others. We decided to acquire our own apartment on a side street in Manhattan, a few steps from Central Park, at the corner of 106th Street.

IV

This part of Manhattan was—and is still today—double- or multifaceted, and a bit odd, like the magician of I. L. Peretz,[20] who wore on his head a silken miter, while his pants were tattered and torn. Along cultivated boulevards, the upper-middle class and the

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[19] Eishishuk, or Eishishki, is a nickname for the city of Vilna, capital of Lithuania. Among the Jews it is also called "Mother City in Israel," and *Yerushalayim d'Lita* (Lithuanian Jerusalem.) Organized Jewish community from 1568, granted charter 1633. Vilna was home to the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman (1720–1797), and the center of opposition by the *Mitnaggedim* to Hasidism until 1799, when a reconciliation was reached between the two sides. In the nineteenth century Vilna became a center for Enlightenment, Socialism, and Zionism. Famous for its press of Jewish texts, especially the Talmud (1835 and 1880), Strashun library, and headquarters for YIVO (the Insitute for Jewish Research) for cultural work. Of its eighty thousand Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century, almost all were murdered during the Holocaust. After 1967 it became a center of agitation for immigration to Israel. In 1970 the city was home to sixteen thousand Jews.

[20] Isaac Leib Peretz (1852–1915), b. Zamosc, Poland. Important Yiddish and Hebrew author. Practiced law, 1877–1887. From 1891 until his death, official in the Department of Burial Sites of the Jewish Community in Warsaw. A founder of modern Yiddish literature and an important figure in Hebrew literature. His polemical writings influenced the Jewish social movement. His heroes are mostly Hasidim and common people who suffer hardship but bear the burden of their lot with faith. Championed the cause of the oppressed. Pioneered in short story and symbolic drama.

wealthy lived in high-rise apartment buildings, and the general impression was of spaciousness, beauty, leisure, and luxurious life. In front of the houses stood doormen, fully uniformed, and every now and then they whistled toward the passing cabs in order to have them pick up one of the well-dressed residents and take them to their desired destination. There we also met the "person who considers himself important," the ones who carry a glorious cane in their hands, and the women who are loaded with jewelry. However, from the dark halls of the somewhat neglected houses on the side streets, poor Irish workers, clerks, and good-spirited blacks were bursting forth, walking carelessly in the broad boulevard.

We especially enjoyed the wonderful garden, the walks on the narrow rising or descending paths, and the boat rides in the pond. Each morning we went out and walked around the pond. On the horse-riding paths we saw girls and young women, dressed with tight riding attire and high boots, riding with pride, and waving their whips gracefully.

Occasionally we found the teacher, the riding coach, accompanying a group of women riders. One of those was a relative of ours, a young woman from Europe who became in New York a teacher in the "Riding Academy," and who changed her name from Scharfstein to Sharfe. There we also met wealthy barons as they were going out on their morning walks, among them Felix M. Warburg,[21] who looked very noble, and who walked with his son and carried his glorious walking cane with considerable importance.

[21] A member of the large Warburg family of German and U.S. bankers, Felix Moritz Warburg (1871–1937) was a banker and a philanthropist in the United States. Helped establish the Henry Street Settlement, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Fogg Museum of Art at Harvard, and the Federation of Support of Jewish Philanthropic Societies of New York City. Chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee, 1914–1932. Many other institutions benefited from his time and financial support, especially the Jewish Theological Seminary. Although not Zionist, he supported the Palestine Economic Corporation and Jewish Agency. His wife, Frieda, was a philanthropist in her own right.

To our regret, we were not able to stay in the same area for long. Our son was born, and it was difficult for us to take him up and down from the high story every day in order to provide him with some fresh air. This was after World War I, and there was a great shortage of apartments. We had no choice but to buy our own house.

The lady from whom we bought the house had built it for herself and her son, and was hoping to live in it and to enjoy it, but her husband died, and her son had become a bank clerk in one of the large banks on Wall Street. He wanted to be nearer to his workplace. Therefore she decided to sell the house. When I traveled there for the first time to look at the house, this widow accompanied me and we spent a long hour on a train ride until we arrived at Sheepshead Bay, at the edge of Brooklyn, close to a seashore enclave. We came there on a snowy winter day. As we left the train station, cold winds from the open spaces that spread in front of us, and from the close-by sea, blew at our faces. The streets were covered with brilliant white snow that hadn't been touched by a human foot.

The houses, with considerable space between them, were of two stories, each with a lawn in front and a garden in the backyard. While we were walking, we came across one of this landlady's neighbors, a young woman wrapped with fur, abounding with good health, with rosy cheeks from the cold. For a moment she stopped and talked with the widow, and laughed with a full mouth in sheer joy of life. The entire surrounding made an impression of village life, of spaciousness, of snowy steppes and winds. On the streets' sides grew thick-trunked and broad-canopied elm trees. Even though I saw this place on a winter day, the trees being naked and icicles hanging, suspended from their branches, I could imagine to myself the shape of the streets on sunny days. They would

be somewhat dark from the shade that came from the treetops that would touch each other and create a green canopy, and the wind that brought cold air would be then light and pleasant and refreshing to the soul. The open spaces, the trees, the white snow, and the rosy color of this strong, young woman's cheeks were all decisive. I bought the house and we moved in to live there.

For twenty-five years we lived in it and enjoyed it. It was a solid house that was built by the generous hand of a wealthy woman for her own satisfaction and comfort. The rooms were spacious, and some of them were covered with polished wood panels. In front of the house there was a large lawn, and behind it a yard. And the main thing: the balcony. On the second floor there was a large balcony, open in the summer and closed on winter days. For about seven months during the year we would spend most of our time on this balcony, the branches of the trees along the sidewalk reached up to it and created a sort of a protective roof with their plentiful leaves, so much so that it looked completely like a sukkah[22] drowned in greenery. In the fresh air I would read, write, and host guests.

This neighborhood, Sheepshead Bay, was renowned awhile ago. Horse races took place there, and this sport's aficionados would assemble there by the thousands at race time. Some came specifically for the sport, and others for another purpose, to try their luck in winning bets. Houses were built along the sea enclave, as well as palaces that were called back then "The Millionaires Row," because superrich people lived in them. Hotels and restaurants opened there for guests who came from near and far. The whole neighborhood was bustling and busy with thousands of idle life lovers and those addicted to games, trying their luck, who sacrificed their and their relatives' and friends' treasure chests on the altar of their desires. At last, the government saw it as its duty to forbid

[22] See chapter 4, footnote 42.

gambling at that place; thereupon, the neighborhood became deserted. The gambling field, which spread over a huge area, was fenced in, and thorns grew on it. The rich people uprooted themselves, and the palaces were abandoned and decayed. The wonderful hotels and restaurants lost their high stature, and, since then, served the poor strata and visitors who came there only for a few hours of fishing. However, one big and famous restaurant still remained open—the famed one of Lundi—to which many flocked in the evenings, holidays, and on festival days. In the neighborhood settled old, retired Irish men and women who lived on fixed income. Life there crawled in a slow pace, like the water of the Shiloah spring.[23]

In spite of its decline, this place was very interesting because it became a center for fishermen. Out of the small harbor on the edge of the bay sailed fishing boats, small and large. Some served the needs of professional fishermen who sailed far into the sea for a big catch of fish, and some served fishing aficionados who went out for just a few hours as a hobby. There were stores there as well, and New York residents would come there to buy seafood. Obviously, stores for fishing gear opened there too—in their display windows were placed fishing rods, nets, hooks, and cans for bait—as well as special seafood restaurants for delicacies of fish, crabs, and snails. The air around smelled of salt and a bit of must and decay of wood from the lumber and boats, which were hit constantly by the sea waves.

The passers-by, most of whom were Italian, wore high rubber boots and carried fishing rods, hooks, and cans with bait. Sometimes one would see the fishermen kneeling

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[23] In Latin: *Siloam;* name applied to the waters of the Gihon springs at the bottom, east side, of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. King Hezekiah built a tunnel to connect the pool with the City of David. From the Middle Ages, name of a village on the east slope of the Kidron Valley (in Arabic: *Silwan*). Jews from Yemen settled there in 1884 but had to leave in 1936. Since 1967, part of united Jerusalem.

down on their knees, busily repairing a huge net that was spread out in front of them. Boats and small ships sailed on the water. There were also houseboats in which people lived. From time to time we would see a woman on a ship deck, hanging wet laundry on a tight rope to dry it, or someone cooking his meal there.

As far as the social atmosphere is concerned, we did not find special pleasure there. My neighbors were, as mentioned, elderly Irish, loyal Catholics who lived off the priests' mouths and attained their perspectives on the world and politics from the church. Especially the women, a number of whom were old and single and who were as devout as pilgrims would be, thought the Jews as Jesus' crucifiers. They made it their habit to read in the yellow, sensational newspapers about cases of murder, divorce, and adultery. They knew all the details of the trials, enjoyed their reading, and sighed about the decline of morality in that generation. First, our neighbors were upset with the woman, Mrs. Green, for selling her house to a Jew and introducing *Sha'atneiz*[24] into this pure neighborhood. But as the days went by, they became accustomed to us and didn't view us as a problem; on the contrary, they actually showed signs of respect toward us. They never bothered us and never confronted us with angry faces, and whenever we needed to repair something light, in the fence or the like, they would help with advice, and sometimes with real work. There were hardly any Jews living in that area, except for a few who didn't stick out.

After a few years, when building contractors began to seek open land on which to build new neighborhoods, due to the shortage of housing that didn't ease, this gambling field, too, was sold. Many streets were built on this field, along which they raised rows upon rows of houses, for a single family or two. The houses were all identical in shape, measurements, and color, and their monotony and ugly mold seemed boring. At this

[24] In Hebrew: a mixture of different elements or materials.

point, our Jewish brethren came along with a few Italians, who also bought these houses and settled in them. The newcomers were mostly craftsmen and blue-collar workers who managed, during the good years back then, to save a little money. They were neither giants in spirit nor intellectually sophisticated in their minds. Naturally they rushed to establish a house of prayer, but for a long time they had no permanent rabbi, so they would invite someone to act as a rabbi and preacher only for the High Holy Days. I thought about supporting the synagogue closest to my house, but its customs were not to my taste. It was especially difficult for me to sit in this *Mikdash-m'at*[25] on the High Holy Days during the "appeal," when they announced the need for contributions. Various speakers spoke, one assisted another—one with blessings, the other with reproach, and still a third one with lightheartedness. At that hour the synagogue was transformed into a fair of bargaining, laughter, and frivolity. And on Yom Kippur, before the closing prayers, the temporary rabbi stood up on the *bimah*[26] and demanded from the attendants to hurry and pay their pledges immediately after the Holy Day was over, because he who pledged and did not fulfill it would not see the end of the year, and his sons and daughters would be dead, too. I gazed at those who heard the message, and I could not see in them either amazement or depression.

In the basement of the synagogue they opened a school, and the beadle, who was also the Torah reader, presented them with a low-value certificate that was sufficient for

[25] In Hebrew: a small, modest temple.
[26] In Hebrew: the raised area in the synagogue sanctuary in front of the Ark.

them to make him a teacher and instructor. And he taught "*Ivri*" to children who were willing to learn it from his mouth.[27]

V

A well-to-do neighborhood called Manhattan Beach was only an eight-minute walk from there. Since it was situated close to the seashore, it was entirely different from our neighborhood. Its houses were beautiful and immersed in greenery, and surrounded by flowers and quiet streets—not the silence of wilderness, but a peaceful tranquility. Only one street at the edge of the neighborhood was appropriated for commerce, where stores, restaurants, Laundromats, craft shops, and the pharmacy—in short, all that is required for the local residents—were established. In this neighborhood a glorious synagogue was built, conservative in its outlook. The service practice was elegant, but its *gabbaim,*[28]—because they were rich, and two or three of them were from Germany, the original home of Reform Judaism—inclined toward liberalism in the religion and placed an organ in the sanctuary, usually to be used for Sabbaths and festivals, and the choir singers were mixed, males and females, and one female singer was not of our faith, and she sang the *Shema Yisrael*[29] from an English transliteration and with a foreign dialect.

As the numbers of residents increased—among whom were many from *amcha,*[30] who only a few years ago worked in the factories but now had become "landlords"—this modest temple was no longer satisfactory. They proceeded to build an Orthodox

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[27] The word "Hebrew" in English is both a noun, connoting the Hebrew language, and an adjective. The Hebrew language is called *Ivrit,* but Scharfstein is humorously playing with the English word, using here the adjective instead of the noun.
[28] In Hebrew: dues collectors or treasurers. See chapter 1, footnote 39.
[29] The watchword of the Jewish people, "Hear O Israel," taken from Deuteronomy 6:4.
[30] In Hebrew: the common folks of your own kin.

synagogue. At first, disagreements erupted between the *gabbaim* and several members. I do not know sufficiently well the arguments behind these disagreements, but I would probably not be far from the truth if I say that none of them arose from an ideological source. "I do not observe the Sabbath, and I am not cautious in avoiding forbidden food," one of the "Orthodox" said to me, "but when I come to pray, I want to do so as my parents did in their native town, and yet I recoil with trepidation due to customs of the house of awe." One woman who drove her car and saw me walking in the street—this happened on a Sabbath—stopped and came out of her car to share her opinion with me that there was a need for an Orthodox synagogue. Certainly, practices of wheeling and dealing with ritual honors were important factors. The first *gabbaim* in the Conservative synagogue were "aristocrats," of the third and fourth generation in America. They behaved disrespectfully toward the new settlers, who struggled with the English language, and the stamp of the European village was engraved in them and their movements. These two types were unable to cohabit in peace under one roof, and they separated from each other. In time, the *gabbaim* were replaced in both of the institutions. The synagogues were filled with those who came to pray, and the schools with pupils. The school of the Orthodox grew and developed nicely, and is considered nowadays one of the best in the city.

The birth pangs that afflict new synagogues are an interesting phenomenon. When a new synagogue was just established, the members could not afford to support a rabbi. Therefore, they invited a preacher for the High Holy Days. Thus came an *avrekh,*[31] who was apparently a relative of one of the *gabbaim,* to preach on Yom Kippur. He learned and memorized the lesson in Yiddish, from a book or a written blurb that someone gave

[31] In Hebrew: a yeshiva student.

him, and he repeated the regurgitated words dryly and without spirit. The audience became bored, and his preaching seemed to them as if it lasted for an eternity. When he finished, one could hear sighs of relief and gratitude from all sides. But the preacher added in broken English, "If you wish, I will repeat all these things in English."

"No! No!"

After a year, they invited Joseph Barondess.[32] In his earlier years he was a radical socialist and dedicated his life to the management of the workers unions, such as the clothing sewers, the Jewish actors, and the Jewish print workers. However, after the pogroms in Kishinev, a turnabout occurred in his thinking; he returned to the fold of his people and became one of the Zionist leaders. Immediately as he came to pray, he assumed the role of a rabbi and a spiritual shepherd. He prayed with enthusiasm and devotion, and occasionally he would comment to the attendants on the sacredness of the prayers and their message. He gave wonderful sermons, full of feelings of holiness, and demanded that all give an account to themselves regarding their Jewish soul, and to return with full repentance. And it was easy to see that he himself was girded with faith, his soul bathed in the sublime pleasure of the rabbinic role that suddenly fell into his lap. And now this synagogue is one of the most important ones, and its influence is felt throughout the area.

When I lived close to that neighborhood, I learned the differences between a city and a suburb. In the city, it is hard to maintain the life of Jewish community. The residents of the gigantic apartment buildings are as strangers to each other. They disappear in their dwelling places and do not socialize. Public opinion does not exist in

[32] Joseph Barondess (1867–1928), b. Ukraine. U.S. labor and communal leader. In the United States from 1888. Worked as cloak maker; became labor organizer. Active in Socialist Labor Party and also early Zionist movement.

the metropolis. But it is not so in a neighborhood of small houses where the residents know each other and their children play together. The women meet at the store, the butcher shop, on the beach, and they talk to one another. There a public opinion is formed and conformity is the rule. If a synagogue is built, everyone is obligated to join it, and the children must attend the nearby school. If a child does not attend that school, a delegation from the school council will come to discuss this matter with the parents. And during an appeal, no one can evade contributing. Neighborly relations, business matters, and the desire to see one another—all work favorably.

We would go for a walk to this neighborhood, and we acquired good friends there. We walked on the asphalt sidewalk. In the morning, I and my wife would go out of our home and pass by the quiet, green streets, which were inspired with purity, softness, and beauty, until we arrived at the esplanade by the seashore. We never tired of hearing the sound of the waves as they broke upon the rocks, at times with a spirit of frivolity, and at times with fury and rage.

After twenty-five years of dwelling in this house, we decided to move to the heart of Upper Manhattan. My advanced age and work made the burdensome trip on the subway very difficult. In addition, my son and daughter had enrolled in colleges uptown. We decided then to move out there and live in the proximity of Columbia [University], the institution in which I teach.

VI

It is only proper to move to an elegant place, and where could it be? One would say *Riverside Drive.* Leaving Sheepshead Bay was difficult for us. The sight of the sea that

stretches in front of you, in full view and with no limits, created a feeling of freedom, of a world open to you. Anyone who ever dipped his foot in the beach sand would never be able to stop longing for it. Alas, we had no choice!

"Come, my wife, let's go to the banks of the Hudson and look at apartments."

More than once we walked there and enjoyed ourselves. What a charming place it is! Between the rows of these humongous apartment buildings with their thousands of eyes, their windows, and between the Hudson River's water there is a garden that runs for a few miles, a garden of trees in rows, climbing and descending trails, and benches, ready and inviting for a rest or conversation. And everywhere you see the coming and going ships. And across, on the other side of the river, ascend New Jersey's mountains and their cliffs, and in the evenings neon lights blaze, their lights are reflected in the river's water with a great array of colors.

"Yes, dear, we should live here. Tomorrow we shall go out and look for an apartment in one of these giant buildings."

And such an endeavor was not difficult. This was an opportune time for apartment buyers. Business had slowed down, the number of the unemployed had increased, and families left their spacious and expensive apartments and moved in order to live in less-expensive neighborhoods. In almost every building there was a sign: "Apartments for Rent."

We entered some of the most glorious of these buildings, but with some trepidation. Provincialism caused me to hesitate. The doormen and their uniforms, with their gold stripes and shiny buttons, reminded me of state Russian officials. Although I knew that these uniformed men were only servants, it is hard to argue with my emotions.

We saw several apartments. We came upon a big and most glorious one. The living room was very spacious, with a very high ceiling. From it descended chandeliers—-heavy with clusters of glass pieces that created a bluish reflection from the sun's light. At night, when these chandeliers would be lit by electric power, these polished iron branches and glass pieces would glow and change colors like a rainbow. On the eastern wall a huge mirror was fixed, and the Hudson's water reflected in it, thus eliminating the divide between room and river. The wallpaper, some made of silk and some of leather, the brilliantly polished tiles, and the huge, high space were all stamped with a seal of great wealth. This living room was designed for receiving guests, for drinking and for dancing. It seemed as one of those halls that belonged to the superrich that one may see in some of Hollywood's films. You enter into such an apartment and immediately observe all that can be seen down below.

"Zevi," my wife said to me after they informed us of the rent, which was not very high, "look at the view! This apartment broadens a man's horizons! What do you think?"

"No."

She was stunned.

Why I answered in the negative I wasn't entirely sure. The fear of magnificence and the look of wealth—how could I adapt to this palace? What kind of furniture would I have to place in these glorious rooms? Would it not be a testimony to our poverty? And if one of the chandelier's lightbulbs would no longer function, how would I change it with a new one? Would I have to invite servicemen with ladders, who would climb to these heights in order to change the lightbulb?

Instead, I decided to buy a small house in the area, a walk of one or two minutes from this beautiful avenue. On the side streets there were private homes, narrow and tall, mostly of five stories, built for the comfort of all members of one family; of course, for families that weren't poor. Almost all of them were built according to a single design, the heritage of English architecture. First and foremost, they took care that these houses would be well protected against robbers and thieves: the thick walls, the windows of the lower stories protected by iron grating, and the gates and doors facing outward were heavy; they were securely closed and locked and could not be pried open even with a hatchet or a heavy axe. The lowest level was dedicated for the solution to the question of "What shall we eat?" There was a spacious kitchen, and in its center isle, a stove, to cook for a regiment of soldiers. On the second floor was the dining room (the food would be brought up by a special elevator) and living room; on the third, the landlords' bedrooms; on the fourth, additional bedrooms for sons and daughters; and on the fifth, the rooms for butlers and maids.

This arrangement worked well a good sixty or seventy years ago, when both servants and maids were readily available. The house was considered a "fort": all family members were connected to each other, and the "old man" was first and foremost, and everyone obeyed him. In the meantime, conditions have changed: the "slaves" and the maidservants are all gone, and family ties have been severed. The son and the daughter went away to colleges outside the city, and when they finished they became independent, living on their own as liberated human beings, without their parents' supervision. In short, the children disappeared and the house became deserted. The rooms in the fifth floor, which were designated for the maids, had turned into storage for old boxes,

portraits of "ancestors," worn-out carpets, and junk. The rooms in the fourth floors were empty, and no one would touch the well-made, dusty beds. On the third floor slept two bodies, disdainful and powerless, who spent their days in the living room, from which they looked out at the street in order to chase away their boredom, and they ate at the darkened kitchen downstairs in order to spare them the trouble of taking the meals to the dining room upstairs. Many months the house would be closed down with heavy locks and its windows covered with boards; the old man and woman would travel to their summer home or winter home, in Maine or in Florida, or would go out to fish or hunt. And when one of the two would die, and it is the husband who usually dies first, the widow would remain alone, climbing up and down the stairs, wondering about her life.

The house into which I entered was of this type. It belonged to one of the great industrialists, and when the husband died and the sons left for one of the suburbs, the widow remained there alone until her life came to an end, and the house was sold.

VII

A mere eight years have passed since I came to live in this neighborhood, in 1946, and what changes have taken place since!

The first phenomenon that unfolded in front of me was the large number of those afflicted with loneliness. As is well known, loneliness is a serious matter in the metropolis, especially among the residents of the large apartment buildings. And it is especially severe among the elderly who have no family members. It seems that Upper Manhattan has become a refuge city for the lonely: to widowers and widows, to divorced men and women, to old men and women whose children gained their independence, and

they, the elderly, quit their work or business, and they live on fixed income. Why do they all concentrate in this area? Perhaps because it is close to the city center and they can get to the center of entertainment and commerce within a short time. To this end, many hotels had been built. They included tiny one- or two-bedroom apartments, with a small kitchen suitable for light meals, and the hotel provided service. The five-story homes were changed into such small apartments, and whereas once one family used to occupy it, now about ten couples live there. For the "lonesome" there are many cafeterias in which they can sit and stay for hours, every day, for a light taste, and mainly in order to spend their time or, as the second version goes, to kill time.

Initially I did not see this loneliness. At sunrise, as I was going out for a morning walk, I saw men and women walking their dogs—big ones or little ones, the hairy and frightening ones, or the soft and feeble, who make you pity them for their weakness! They take all of them out to enjoy a breath of fresh air. In my view it was a sign of wealth and nobility, since who could afford to keep a dog in a city, to provide the pet with food, to comb and wash it, and to take care of all its necessities? Surely, only a person who has no worries and who has achieved his life's goals can do it. And who can buy for these dogs their specially made food that is sold for a high price? In other words, whoever brings up a dog has capital. However, after some time, when I looked more carefully at the faces of those walking the dogs—or perhaps one should say, those who were walked by the dogs—they didn't seem to me as getting much gratification out of it. I saw old women whose faces were wrinkled from anger or bitterness, and their eyes flickered with sparks of wrath and hatred of people. I saw old men—and they are softer and easier than the old women—but their boredom and apathy scream in your face. They were among

those regular residents who frequent the cafeterias and sit there for hours, attempting to connect with strangers by conversation, and to acquire new acquaintances. But even that was all out of sleepiness, without alertness and any expectations.

By the way, when I arrived there I was a total ignoramus in the "tractate" on dogs. A neighbor living near my house used to take his dog for a walk daily. Once I became courageous and asked him what breed his dog was. He listened and smiled: "Aren't you familiar with dogs?"

"Unfortunately not; my father didn't teach me such things."

"I know, I know. In New York you may find people who cannot distinguish even between a bulldog and a papillon. Come with me to the boulevard, and I will provide you with basic knowledge in these affairs."

We walked over there, and whenever he saw a person with a dog, he stopped in order to instill in me knowledge and ability to distinguish between the breeds.

"Please look. This dog is of the Eskimo breed. Look well at his body shape; he looks like a wolf and doesn't bark. In Siberia he pulls sleds. And that hairy dog over there—the one being walked by this lady owner—his two ears are spread out like a dove's wings, and his tail is like a fur coat. This is a papillon, specifically groomed for amusement. The young woman who carries in her arms a small Chinese dog with a pug nose—know that it is a Pekinese. And now, open your eyes upon the bulldog. This is a superior guarding dog, his nose is broad and his look is intimidating. He is used to fights, and to jumping over and chasing an opponent."

Thus he was imparting to me the lessons about dogs. To my regret, I am not an attentive student, and to this very day I still mix up the breeds.

When I came to this area it was a mixed one, with a good number of Jews. And yet no Jewish characteristics were recognized there, at least not unquestionable ones. The area had beautiful and large synagogues, and one could find kosher meat shops, although all of these were spread out. This large and elegant boulevard, West End Avenue, determined the general character: it was one of wealth, but not of conspicuous Jewishness. It was a "golden ghetto." But during the years, its face has gradually changed. When the scroll of suffering of Germany's Jews had just opened, quite a few of them had arrived to this area as refugees, those who were still able to bring along some of their possessions and kept the manners of nobility—memory of happy days. They often took a walk on Riverside Drive, spoke German, read their special newspaper, *Aufbau,*[33] and were like a European community in this metropolis, wearing clothes of *Yom Tov,*[34] carrying walking canes, walking with small steps, with an air of considerable importance, bowing and exchanging polite words. Later, refugees from the concentration camps began to arrive, Polish Jews who still maintained their Polish accent or their Judaized German. They were easy to recognize by their nervous movements, their hurriedness, by their conversations that they carried in a loud voice. Several of them had still kept their old manners and maintained their movements from the *Beit Midrash.*[35] When Hotel Marseilles was used as their temporary accommodation, they used to walk over there in groups, debating and arguing, and the cantillation of the *Gemara*[36] could be heard out of their mouths, although their conversations did not deal with issues of Abbaye[37] and

[33] In German: structure, edifice, construction.
[34] See chapter 1, footnote 42.
[35] See chapter 1, footnote 40.
[36] See chapter 3, footnote 10.
[37] Abbaye (278–338 CE), a Babylonian *amora,* head of the Pumbedita academy. His discussions with Rava constitute a major element of the Babylonian Talmud.

Rava.[38] On Sabbaths and festival days, one could often see a father holding his children's hands and walking them to the service. On the festival of Sukkot[39] one could see people carrying their *lulavim.*[40] In the last few years, new types joined them, Orthodox from Carpatorus[41] and from the Hasidic regions. In one school, Beit Ya'acov, mature girls whose parents did not allow them to watch movies were studying. A few of the *Admorim*[42] opened small synagogues, a kind of *shtiebelekh,*[43] as well as small yeshivot. At times one may come across an *Admor,* or a long-bearded rabbi, who is wearing a Hungarian rabbinic hat, with a low skullcap and wide brim, made out of shiny velvet. One Sabbath afternoon, I saw on the avenue a few children with shaven heads, covered with small skullcaps, their side locks long and curly, playing with a rubber ball—a mixture of Munkács and New York. From time to time wishes of "*Gut Shabos*"[44] and "*Gut Yontef*"[45] can be heard from these walkers when they come across one another. The jokers gave this avenue a new name: "*Gut Shabbos Boulevard.*" One Sabbath morning, on a very clear morning, I came out of my home and peeked at West End Avenue. It was an early hour, and a peaceful tranquility enveloped the street. I saw two people walking. At the head walked *he,* tall, with elegant countenance, adorned with a wide beard, dressed with a capote of Atlas,[46] and on his head a *shtreimel.*[47] A few steps behind him, walked *she,*

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[38] Rava (d. 352 CE), a Babylonian *amora;* colleague of Abbaye. In all his *halakhic* discussions with Abbaye, the decision, except in six cases, was tendered according to Rava. When Abbaye was chosen head of the Pumbedita academy, Rava went to Machoza on the Tigris River, where he set up his own *beit midrash.*
[39] See chapter 4, footnote 42.
[40] See chapter 4, footnote 44.
[41] A city in the Ukraine that before the Holocaust had a large community of Hasidic Jews.
[42] See chapter 4, footnote 13.
[43] In Yiddish: a small, modest synagogue.
[44] In Yiddish: Good Sabbath.
[45] In Yiddish: Good holiday.
[46] Made by Jews or Arabs in the Moroccan Atlas region.
[47] See this chapter, footnote 6.

somewhat bent and covered by a Turkish kerchief. For a moment I forgot my whereabouts.

"*Shabbat shalom, Rabbeinu,*"[48] I said to him, and when I looked at his face I recognized him. He was a famous rabbi, an emissary who came from Jerusalem, who was in charge there of the organization of Orthodox yeshivot. Not too long ago I paid him a visit at his office in Jerusalem, and we talked at length at that time about the Torah institutions that were under his supervision.

"*Shabbat shalom umevorakh,*"[49] he replied with a lit face, and suddenly I imagined I was standing on the hill across from the hospital in Jerusalem, and observing from there the representatives of Israel's tribes from many countries, who were on their way to pray; every person and his own unique attire.

Yes, in our own times it is not hard to forget sometimes that this is New York. It is no longer unusual nowadays to hear couples conversing in Hebrew on Broadway: a conversation about life issues, or a discussion in front of a display window about the quality and price of merchandise—all in fluent Hebrew. These are the Israelis who come for complementary studies or for other purposes. Sometimes when you hear the question that he asks her, "What is playing tonight?" you get the urge to answer.

*

Four years ago I invited an instructor to my home to teach me Spanish, because I was about to go to Mexico for a few months. I said then to myself: *This will probably be a study in vain, since, upon my arrival back in the United States, I will have no*

[48] In Hebrew: A peaceful Sabbath, our master.
[49] In Hebrew: A peaceful and blessed Sabbath.

opportunities to hear or speak even a word of Spanish. When I came back from Mexico in 1952, I realized that my worries were for naught. On Broadway, a walk of five minutes from my house, the general movie house had become a pure Spanish one. The movies that are shown there today are imported from Spain and Mexico, and the movie viewers laugh a lot as they see the pranks of the Mexican Charlie Chaplin, the one who is none other than the wonderful comedian Cantiflas.[50] When I approached the box office window to buy tickets, the girl looked at me in astonishment and said, "They show here Spanish movies!"

On the newspaper stands I saw a new guest, *La Prensa,*[51] a new Spanish newspaper. And everywhere I walked I saw new faces: people of small stature, dark-skinned, thin-faced, who seemed very innocent and very quiet, and all of them spoke Spanish. These were the immigrants who arrived here from Puerto Rico and from Cuba, who settled in all the old, either somewhat or very neglected houses, the houses east of Broadway, next to Central Park. Their apartments were very crowded—one family per room—and the families were blessed with sons and daughters, since every little and thin woman was like a fruitful grapevine. And the symptoms of poverty among them could be clearly seen: many of them were among the delinquents, and a woman going out to the street would clutch her purse tightly, lest someone would come and snatch it.

Anyone interested in learning of a neighborhood's character should look at the newspaper stands. In this area one can find—in addition to the English, Yiddish, German, and Italian—also Russian and independent newspapers that object to the Communist Party, and the party's own newspapers, whose content is as red as fire.

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[50] Real name, Mario Moreno (1911–1993). Cantiflas was a prolific and productive Mexican comedian, producer, writer, and singer.
[51] In Spanish: The Press.

The immigrants who come from countries of the German language—many of whom know French as well, as befitting the enlightened Europeans—are served by the cinema house "Thalia," which is dedicated to imported movies from Austria, Germany, and France. There they see life in their "native land," and hear the enjoyable melodies from the operettas such as *The Merry Widow*[52] and the like, the movies such as *Hands Around* (*Reigen*) of Schnitzler,[53] and French movies of little interest and much cynicism that tempt one's inclination with delicateness and taste. The viewers look and listen as their past becomes alive in front of their eyes and their longings intensify. And from time to time a sigh from one's heart would erupt, unintentionally, about the good old days that were lost and do not return.

*

Years ago, a man would put his roots in his soil, and his home served him as a dwelling place for a lifetime. In our own time, man wanders from one apartment to another, without knowing rest.

Age is a factor, too. Settling in a metropolis is difficult for those who have reached advanced age. And we too, I and my wife, feel it's time for us to uproot and move to a suburb, in which we could see gardens' greenery, and in which we would sit on an open porch, enjoying fresh air and freedom.

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[52] A famous operetta (1905) by the Austrian composer Franz Lehár (1870–1948).
[53] Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931); Austrian physician, playwright, and novelist; known for his psychological dramas that dissected turn-of-the-century Viennese bourgeois life. *Reigen* (1897) was his fourth play.

Why does man's soul wander? Why do we not have the steadfastness of our ancestors who struck roots in one place, in which they came out to the world's air, and in which they left it? Why does a place lose its grace in the eyes of its settlers? Has man stopped being like the tree of the field?

Part II

Section B

Summation of Chapters 5–29

Chapter 5: In the Bowery Street

In this chapter we read of Scharfstein's experiences as he continues to tour the city of New York. He writes about his somewhat confused impressions on the Bowery street, of a few glamorous stores next to very cheap ones. He is astonished to see restaurants with very low prices and hotels with fancy names (such as Savoy and Niagara) that appear very cheap. He relates his first astonishing experiences while walking there, not without fear, seeing blacks, and pawnshops and pubs from which drunkards come out. He tells of his visit to the Salvation Army center and his impressions and criticism of the missionary efforts. Forty years later, according to him, there have been many improvements, but the street is still a place full of outcasts.

Chapter 6: My Initial Cutoff from Europe

In chapter 6 Scharfstein realizes that his ties with Europe have been severed. Daniel Persky invites him to lecture at an *Achiever* (one of the groups of the New York Hebraists) group meeting. He writes of his impressions of all the Jewish signs above the shops—Kosher, *Yiddishe Tageblatt,* and so forth. He sees on a sign that Zvi Hirsch Masliansky, whom he would meet later, will speak. Between fifty and sixty mostly elderly men were in attendance at his lecture. Chairing the meeting was Abraham Spicehandler (father of Dr. Ezra Spicehandler, my adviser for this thesis, along with Dr.

Gary Zola)—a man with youthful energy, according to Scharfstein. In presenting Spicehandler, Persky is portrayed as a straightforward, informal man. Then Scharfstein describes the post-lecture get-together at a restaurant. All around were younger Jews arguing about the quality and usage of the Hebrew language. Abraham Goldberg exhibited the typical love for the Hebrew language and for Zion. He even defended the German Jews (one of whom was Jacob Schiff) when someone berated them. Goldberg was a *maskil* already in Jarmolinitz, and Scharfstein met him while he was still in Europe. Goldberg promised to take Scharfstein to the *Tageblatt* and to the Hebrew Publishing Company in order to introduce him to other Hebrew authors. The chapter ends with a symbolic event: as Scharfstein is ready to leave the restaurant, he finds that his expensive coat, borrowed from his Swiss friend and not paid for yet, has been stolen. This incident created in him the feeling that his ties with the past were now permanently cut off.

Chapter 7: On Fifth Avenue

This chapter describes New York City's famous Fifth Avenue and the wealth seen there. Then there is a discussion on the early, turn-of-the-century fights by homeowners who are opposed to stores being opened on that street. Scharfstein is impressed with the melting pot and the different attires. And yet to him no one seems calm and happy; all run after the god of success, the diamonds and gold, the expensive dresses (Saks Fifth Avenue). He sees the women in pairs going to lunch together, looking at sales in the newspapers, buying on impulse. They have credit accounts in the stores. Then he describes the contrasts between the stores and the gothic churches. More wealth: the beautiful, expensive houses and art museums along Central Park.

Chapter 8: At the Jewish Section of the Public Library

In this chapter Scharfstein tells of his and his wife's first visit to the Jewish section in the public library, on Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street. He describes the large, impressive building of thirteen stories, high ceilings, and so forth, and thousands of visitors each day. They enter the Jewish section, which contains more than fifty thousand books, collections of newspapers in Hebrew and Yiddish, even the periodical *HaMeasef* from Moses Mendelssohn's time. Then he talks about meeting Abraham S. Freidus (the librarian who developed a classification scheme for Judaica). Scharfstein describes Freidus's heavy figure, moustache, and untidy clothing. Freidus brings out copies of *HaLevanon* and *HaMagid.* In one of them Scharfstein is happy to find a letter with a poem by Mordechai Weissman-Chajes (Chayot) of Tarnow, the same town where Scharfstein taught, as well as *She'elot u'T'shuvot* (questions directed to a rabbi and the rabbi's answers) by the Gaon Maharsham—Shalom Mordechai HaCohen Shwadrun—from Brzeziny, the same city where Scharfstein taught in *Safah Berurah.* Freidus invites the Scharfsteins to lunch on his own account (his salary was minimal). Freidus offers Scharfstein's wife, Shoshanah, a job at the Jewish section of the library because of her command of the Hebrew, Yiddish, German, French, and Polish languages. Scharfstein recounts Freidus's qualities as a *maskil* and his life history from Europe to Palestine, to France, and to New York. He mentions that Adolph S. Oko, the librarian and writer on Spinoza, delivered the eulogy upon Freidus's death in 1923.

Chapter 9: In Stamford, Connecticut

While they were renting a small apartment in New York on a weekly basis, the Scharfsteins were surprised one morning by the visit of Jacob Berger, an emissary from the council of the Zionist school in Stamford, Connecticut. It was Persky who led him to their apartment. Berger asked Scharfstein to become the principal of the school, and to his wife he offered a teaching position. The Scharfsteins accepted the offer. Zevi tells of his very favorable impressions of this suburban city, the greenery, all compared with the gray colors and angry looks of the Poles back in Europe. He especially enjoyed the fall season and its beautiful colors. But conditions at the school were not favorable. He taught in a cellar of the synagogue; it took him awhile to change his European clothes for American, and he could never adjust to the informality—both in customs and dress—of the young generation of parents and of his students. Deep in his heart Zevi remained European. After six months there was a decrease in attendance, as well as less support from the children's parents. Gradually, he began to study English privately and learned to appreciate the good manners of the American people and the friendship among neighbors. He found much tranquility in Stamford.

Chapter 10: David HaCohen–Builder of the Community

David HaCohen was on the school board. Scharfstein describes HaCohen as a pale and thin man, quite poor, but a real *maskil.* Scharfstein paints a picture of the earlier days in Stamford, around 1887, after more pogroms took place in Russia. Back then only thirteen Jewish families lived in Stamford, and there was neither a Jewish school nor a synagogue. He describes the hard life of the new immigrants, most of whom became

peddlers, working hard and sometimes being insulted when the landlady slammed the door in their faces. Children especially were cruel and constantly harassing and mocking the peddlers. David HaCohen was one of these peddlers who endured his suffering quietly.

One year a *Shochet* from Canada settled in Stamford, and a small synagogue was established in the *Shochet*'s home with the help of the Irish community in town. David HaCohen finally managed to buy himself a cart and a horse. He had a tiny store in a poor neighborhood, in contrast to many of the Jews who came with him from Russia in 1887, who had become quite rich. Scharfstein went occasionally with David HaCohen on his trips. While on the cart, David shared with Scharfstein his memories of his youth in the Ukraine. He got married and had an American-born daughter. David became the living spirit of the Jewish community in Stamford. He owned many Hebrew and Yiddish books. He established the society *L'ma'an Tzion* (For the Sake of Zion) His wife was active as well and organized a welfare society. Some evangelists noticed that Jewish education lagged behind and tried to do their missionary work in the Jewish neighborhoods. That gave impetus to many Jews, including HaCohen's daughter, Janet, to establish other organizations, such as Children of Israel and *Beit Sefer L'Shabbat* (School for the Sabbath) Emanuel Javetz, secretary of *L'ma'an Tzion,* wrote a lengthy article for the New York Yiddish newspaper *Judishe Abend Post* (The Jewish Evening Post) praising the efforts of his society in raising eighty shekels for the Jewish Federation. As a result, a young teacher from New York moved to Stamford and taught there in a reform heder.

Janet wrote many letters to the *Stamford Advocate* in praise of the Zionist movement and igniting the curiosity of the non-Jewish readers. HaCohen wrote in

support of the Jewish National Fund (JNF), too, but as he got older, he got less respect from the new generation, who couldn't relate to his Hebrew interpolations of biblical and Talmudic gems. His wife died and his daughter moved to Brooklyn. When his health deteriorated he followed his daughter to Brooklyn, but the new environment was foreign to him. Before his death he wrote a booklet on the Jewish community of Stamford, and the public library on Forty-second Street in New York City heard about it and asked that he send it, which he did.

He was buried in Stamford, but Scharfstein reports that by then hardly anyone knew him, and the Jewish community could hardly find a *minyan* for his funeral. Scharfstein imagined himself as a painter or a poet, describing the dichotomy between the wealth of America and David HaCohen's life. He says that HaCohen was always poor but full of dedication to the Jewish people.

Chapter 11: The Societies of *B'nai Ir* (City's Natives) and Other Orders

When Scharfstein was asked by Jacob Berger to join the Stamford branch of *B'nai Tzion,* he did so. The meetings were dedicated to taking care of the members' welfare, raising money, and organizing activities for the JNF. Scharfstein describes the great changes and difficulties encountered by the immigrants who moved from a familiar soil to a foreign country. He talks about the societies of *B'nai Ir,* or *Landsmanshaftn* in Yiddish, and how they helped the Jews in Europe with purchasing tickets for the journey to America, as well as providing them with accommodations upon their arrival in the United States and helping them to find jobs.

With immigration increasing by the thousands, acquiring new land for cemeteries became essential. The tasks then were divided between various societies: some were in charge of matters involving the synagogue only, some of visiting the sick, and others of burial and comforting the bereaved. Scharfstein quotes a detailed account, written by the *maskil* Leon Slonimski, about such a society, the "Progressive *Bridhern af Nishbizh*" (Progressive Brethren of the City of Nishbizh), on the enterprise of acquiring land for cemeteries, raising thousands of dollars to help those who were still left behind in Europe, and establishing small banks with the specific goal to assist the needy in the Jewish community. Until about 1900 most of the immigrants from Eastern Europe shared common, simple life without many competitive ideologies. But from the beginning of the twentieth century, after the social and national fermentation and upheaval in Russia, new types of Jews arrived in the United States, and the division in opinions and customs became much more pronounced. Scharfstein quotes another anonymous report on the composition of such a new society, in this case the Society of the Sons of Nova Ushitze. That society included Orthodox Jews, affiliated with *Mizrahi* (a Zionist movement of Orthodox Jews), modern religious Zionists, members of *Poale Zion* (Laborers on Behalf of Zion) who wished their society would join the National Labor Union, and Communists, for whom Birobidzhan (an autonomous region in eastern Siberia, allocated for Jewish settlement in 1928) was the new Jewish State.

Nevertheless, although their meetings were dominated by wars of words, these wars were only in words. When it came to action in support and protection of their Jewish brothers and sisters, they all stood united. This type of fraternal tolerance was translated into the societies' joint efforts, whether in raising funds for the Birobidzhan

project and for the pioneers in Eretz Yisrael, in boycotting German products, or in sending delegates to the Zionist Congresses. Many of the debates ended with reading poetry, playing music, or singing. Each society published its own journal, into which much love and art were poured. The societies composed and printed pamphlets of their rules and regulations, assigned duties, and mandatory pledge of loyalty required of their members. They even distributed passwords to the members in order to have control over who could attend the meetings. Unity of purpose dwelled side-by-side with growing divisions. One of the most important factors of those divisions was that by then an English-speaking second generation of Jews had grown in America, and the younger generation could not relate well to the older generation. The younger generation only learned about the European past from their parents, but didn't share in its physical experience. As a consequence, the younger Jews established their own societies, and deep economic differences created further divisions and increased financial burdens on the societies that still supported the same goals but lacked the means to accomplish them.

Scharfstein describes the phenomenon of national orders that emphasized social welfare and support for all Jews, regardless of their religious affiliation. This trend had begun already in 1843 when the German Jews established the *B'nai Brith* order. *B'nai Brith* also worked hard to improve the relations between Jews and Christians, and helped in setting up the *Hillel* branches for Jewish university students. Later, other orders such as the Independent Order of the Free Israelites, or the Independent Order of *B'rith Abraham,* were founded, each with its own ideological slant, whether socialist, Zionist, or totally independent. Thus, in each town the individual societies began to affiliate with the national orders that suited their own ideologies. The orders also had the goal of

Americanizing the Jews and became desirable organizations for many Jewish professionals and businessmen with which to affiliate. Some, like *Poale Zion,* attracted thousands of new members, and in the 1930s they established their own Jewish schools and even summer camps. In 1938 a survey of the Jewish societies was taken, according to which there were 2,468 such societies in the United States. Their makeup was 75 percent labor, 15 percent businessmen, and 10 percent professionals.

Gradually, small societies began to merge with others, so the number of societies decreased, but not the total membership. From administrative and economic points of view, it made a lot of sense. The status of those larger societies, called in Yiddish *Verbunden,* had become much stronger. Greater attention was paid to the Jews in Europe and Palestine, and these large societies joined together in support of other Jewish organizations such as HIAS (Hebrew Immigration Aid Society), the Joint (the Joint Distribution Committee), and ORT (a Russian acronym for the "Society of Manual Work.") Scharfstein analyzes the situation in regard to these societies at the time when he wrote his autobiographical book (1954). He lists some of the dramatic changes that had taken place in these societies, especially after the Holocaust, and expresses his hope that through the common will of the Jewish people to continue to exist, these societies would find new ways and modes of operation in their pursuit of important goals while adapting to the ever-changing social, demographic, and economic situation in America.

Chapter 12: To the Zionist Conference in Boston

Scharfstein was elected to serve as a delegate to the Zionist convention in Boston in the summer of 1915, by the *B'nai Zion* society in Stamford. This shows how far, in only a

few months of being in the United States, Scharfstein had gotten in both his studies of the English language and in his stature as a leader within the Jewish community in Stamford. He talks about the various Zionist organizations then in the United States—from the Zionist Federation, *Hadassah, Mizrahi,* and *Poale Zion,* to youth organizations such as *Yehudah HaTza'ir.* During the convention these groups held their own meetings, as well as joint meetings for all the delegates. This was not the first such Zionist convention, but it was the largest so far, and it convened on the background of the calamities that befell the Jewish communities in Europe during World War I. Almost every delegate still had relatives overseas, and the concerns for the Jewish communities in Europe often bore strong personal attachment to the cause. In light of this urgency, the American Zionists hoped to ignite a flame in the hearts of the non- or anti-Zionists. The choice of Boston as the convention's site was deliberate, because during that pressing time the Zionist movement was looking for a new and vigorous leader, and it found such a man in Louis D. Brandeis (1856–1941), whose home city was Boston. A special ship was chartered to carry the many delegates from the New York City area up to Boston. On the ship there was a tremendous feeling of brotherhood, and Scharfstein could have spoken Yiddish or Hebrew with any of the delegates, although the English language dominated the conversations.

Before he embarked on the ship he met Akiva Fleischmann, who was a teacher at the *Tomkhei Torah* (Supporters of Torah) school in the Bronx. Fleischmann told Scharfstein about the difficulties in teaching the new Jewish generation and about the conflicts he had often had with the parents. Fleischmann organized a Hebrew Teachers Union, edited a pedagogical monthly by the name of *Kol HaMoreh* (The Teacher's

Voice), and published a pointed (i.e., with Hebrew vowels) weekly for children called *Aviv* (Spring), whose editor was J. Z. Frischberg. Fleischmann gave Scharfstein two sample issues of the weekly in order to promote it during the convention. Daniel Persky and Isaac Leon Dalidansky, the *Tageblatt*'s editor, were there, too. Older Hebraists mingled with younger ones, each testing the other's knowledge of Hebrew and Yiddish. A few jokes were tossed around; for example: How do you say "flat" (meaning a flat tire) in Hebrew? No one could answer. Dalidansky said, "*Tetze rucho vyashuv l'admato*" (Let his spirit go out and let him return to the ground), and everyone erupted in laughter.

There was no difference in the joyous atmosphere of this assembly compared with those in Europe. In the evening everyone joined in singing Hebrew and Yiddish songs until Joseph Barondes commanded with his big voice, "It's time to say the *Kriat Shema al hamitah!*" (It's time to say the night prayer Hear O Israel . . . on the bed) and all went to their cabins for the night. The delegates became especially emotional when the next morning the ship's captain agreed to have the blue and white Zionist flag raised to the top of the mast. All began to sing *Hatikvah* (the Jewish national anthem), and Scharfstein realized the power of democracy in America: a country strong enough that it needs not fear or suppress the expressions of minorities! That feeling of pride and happiness returned when Scharfstein saw all the welcoming signs for the Zionists in the hotel in Boston, and even special banners on a wall of city hall. Among the participants in the convention were Professor Richard Gottheil, the famous ophthalmologist Harry Friedenwald, and Chicago judge Julian William Mack. The latter wrote to Congress that the Jews are not a race, and hence they should be registered as Russians, Polish, and so

forth, according to their native countries. Nathan Strauss was present, too, and contributed one of his ships for the use of the Zionists in Palestine.

Louis Brandeis was introduced to a greatly enthusiastic audience. The last day of the convention moved to nearby Chelsea. The Christian mayor welcomed the delegates and praised their actions to alleviate the plight of the European Jews and the settlers in Palestine. Brandeis spoke again, inviting every citizen of Chelsea to support the Zionist cause. Scharfstein admits that at first he was not particularly impressed with Brandeis, whose thin body, simple clothes, American face, and modest movements were unlike those of Herzl, Nordau, or Sokolow. But awhile later Scharfstein began to appreciate Brandeis's qualities of humility and quiet but firm resolve.

Chapter 13: Louis Dembitz Brandeis—Supreme Court Judge and Zionist

The entirety of chapter 13 is devoted to a detailed description of Brandeis—the man, the leader, the realist, and the Zionist. Scharfstein says that the convention in Boston was a turning point in the global Zionist movement, and in the evaluation of the new Jewish forces in the world. He talks about those who were afraid of expanding the movement, those who were advocating national or regional conferences, as opposed to those who wanted to emphasize the global character and democratic values of the Zionist movement and who called for convening a Zionist Congress, not merely a small conference. Brandeis sided with the latter. Scharfstein analyzes Brandeis's qualities and the reasons for his deep commitment to the Zionist cause. He thinks that it did not stem from anti-Semitism, but rather from Brandeis's deeply rooted sense of justice. Even during the debates over his nomination as attorney general, and later to the Supreme Court, Brandeis

carried on with his speeches for the Zionist cause, not being afraid that his words might backfire. He was not a man who used hyperbole; words such as "sacrifice," "devotion", and "altruism" were not part of his vocabulary. Rather, he often used words like "responsibility" and "duty." He was a realist and pragmatist, and he saw the revival of the Hebrew language as one of the most important features of the new Jewish nationalism.

Chapter 14: Shalom Dov Ber Maximon—A Man of Virtues

Scharfstein describes his early acquaintance with the Hebraist Shalom Dov Ber Maximon (1881–1933; changed name from Maximowski), first through correspondence, when Maximon was in London and inquired about a teaching position in Galicia, and later in the United States. Scharfstein had become increasingly aware of the deficiency in Hebrew textbooks, and in 1916 he resolved to give up his position as school principal in Stamford and decided to move back to New York City. Through many essays in a variety of Hebrew publications, Scharfstein learned about the New York Bureau of Jewish Education, under the direction of Dr. Samson Benderly (1876–1944). He also learned that Maximon had moved from London to New York and that he worked at this bureau. Scharfstein contacted him and soon after accepted a position in the bureau.

Chapter 14 is devoted to a detailed description of Maximon and his life. He is described as a man who always sought balance between physical and spiritual health. Consequently, he engaged in sports and in writing. A few times, Scharfstein and his wife were guests at the Maximons' house in White Plains, New York. The Scharfsteins were impressed with the beauty and cleanliness of the house and with the greenery around. Scharfstein became well acquainted with Maximon. He reports that Maximon was a man

of principles, who had difficulties submitting to others when asked to cooperate on projects that conflicted with his own principles and ideas. Thus, according to Scharfstein, Maximon came into conflict with Benderly, resigned from his position at the bureau, and was appointed principal at a Jewish school in Chicago, a school that was founded by nationalist Jews. For lack of means, it was sold later to a group of a few wealthy Jews, who changed the school into a center for the support of immigrants. There, too, Maximon was unable to implement his ideas, and after nine months he resigned and joined the faculty at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, under the directorship of Rabbi Stephen Wise. Once again, however, Maximon came into conflict with Wise concerning the latter's complimentary comments about Jesus in one of his speeches. In 1933 Maximon became registrar at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, where he died shortly thereafter from a viral infection. Scharfstein describes Maximon as a righteous man and a man of principles, who emulated successfully his teacher, Ahad Ha'am.

Chapter 15: Samson Benderly—The Architect of Jewish Education

Scharfstein writes about his first meeting with Benderly and about Benderly's encouragement and offer to Scharfstein to work for him in the education bureau. Scharfstein describes his favorable impressions of the office, which was full of young men and women working busily at their desks. He writes that he had been praying for this kind of work for years, but he also states that Jewish education lagged behind, was unorganized, and lacked basic means and resources. He thought that in a metropolis like New York City, he would be able to support himself and his family better than he could as a principal of a small Jewish school in Stamford. He felt both sadness and excitement

upon his move back to New York. He and his wife rented an apartment in a larger house in Morris Park, a section of Harlem that, in his words, was prosperous, and blacks had not yet moved there.

Benderly invited Scharfstein to his home in Englewood, New Jersey, for a conversation. He writes about Benderly's enthusiasm for Jewish education, and of his belief in the need for free education that would bring about the preservation of Judaism in a free society. He believed that the ideals shared by Hebrew authors and teachers alike—those who dedicated their lives to the Hebrew language and to Hebrew culture, together with their attachment to Eretz Yisrael—would revive the spirit of the Jewish youth. He believed in new Jewish teachers who could—and should—be closer to, and more understanding of, the younger generation than their colleagues who grew up in the old world in Europe. Benderly founded a youth organization for younger children called *Chug Yaldei Yisrael* and one for adolescents called "The Union for Israel's Youth." All of his descriptions seemed to Scharfstein like wonderful dreams. Here was someone who put his roots in the new country and the new environment, someone who knew how to navigate it with his Jewish ideas and ideals.

In the bureau Scharfstein made the acquaintance of many Hebrew teachers, writers, and poets, such as Shimon and Pesach Ginzburg, Samuel Margoshes, Harry Sklar (pen name Zevi N. Shalom), Morris Samuel, Joseph Bragin, and Israel Kanovich. Scharfstein's first job for the bureau was as a Hebrew teacher at a high school. He also proposed to Benderly to create a monthly for adolescents called *Shachrut* (from the root *sh, ch, r* of "morning," but denoting here "early life"), which was welcomed by Benderly and published for five years. Scharfstein was also assigned to create new textbooks in

Hebrew after an attempt by Benderly to include all the subjects in one book proved unsuccessful. At the same time, Scharfstein was also engaged in temporary jobs such as writing articles for an English publication for teachers issued by the bureau, and for other communal bulletins, such as a statistical and descriptive survey on New York's Jews and their institutions.

Scharfstein writes in detail about Benderly, the man, his life, and his mission; his work; and his tremendous influence, even after his death. Scharfstein describes how every idea that came into Benderly's mind, because of either local circumstances or his experience, was immediately translated by Benderly into an idea for the general welfare and success of Jewish education. Scharfstein speaks of how Dr. Judah Leon Magnes became acquainted with Benderly after he read an enthusiastic letter in praise of Benderly in *HaShiloach.* Magnes then dreamed of bringing Benderly from Baltimore to New York, and Scharfstein writes that the opportune time occurred in the fall of 1910 (in fact it was in 1908) as a result of accusations by New York's police commissioner, Theodore A. Bingham, who blamed Jewish gangsters for much of the crime on New York's streets. Jewish leaders, including Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall, Felix Warburg, and Judah Magnes, contributed money in order to establish the Jewish Educational Bureau of New York, and Magnes convinced Benderly to move to New York and take charge of this new institution.

Before venturing to open new schools, Benderly tried first to reform the established ones. He found great resistance from the Orthodox and nationalist circles. To accomplish his dreams, Benderly contacted three influential educators from the *maskilim* in New York as intermediaries between the bureau and the teachers, parents, and

students, with whom Benderly had little contact. These three educators were Joseph Bragin, Israel Kanovich, and Rabbi Zevi Handler. Benderly knew that in order to realize his plans, he had to be in close contact with the wealthy Jews, as well as to recruit the new generation of college graduates. To his aid came Israel Friedlaender, and with the latter's assistance another Hebrew educator was recruited, namely Dr. Israel Chipkin.

Scharfstein authored a new textbook called *Sefer HaTalmid* (The Student's Book) that was approved by Benderly for publication and was republished for many years. Its two main innovations were unity of content (as opposed to the older books that mixed stories of varied topics and heroes) and the inclusion of American themes, historical events, and figures, in order to not separate the Hebrew language from the child's real experiences in America.

Benderly's plans required enormous amounts of money. He thought he could get the funds by creating a sense of duty and responsibility for Jewish education among the Jews. But he was mistaken. Only small amounts were raised, and even Jacob Schiff had become cool to the idea when he became suspicious that the bureau was devoting too much time and resources toward the Zionist and national ideals. The financial difficulties were encumbered by Benderly's inability to function within the allotted budget. His staff members, including Scharfstein, did not receive their salaries for several months. Benderly even clashed with the bureau's board of directors on these matters. This situation deeply affected Benderly, and with his brother he embarked on some ventures in the insurance and export businesses. But he was unsuccessful and began to think of new plans, this time buying strong tents for the Jewish pioneers in Palestine. However, the Jewish residents in Palestine rejected his plan to purchase these expensive tents, and this

plan failed as well. He then thought of organizing a nationwide society of *Tzamei-Tzion*, Jews who would agree to fast once a week and contribute to his causes the money they would save by not eating. In the bureau's earlier days, Benderly came up with the unique idea of a summer camp for Jewish children, which he named *Achvah* (Brotherhood) Later, with the help of others, he established a year-round farming school. But again, lack of funding forced him to change the nature of the school, and the camp became a burden on him. There were still a few activities that were initiated by the bureau, but when the Educational Council of New York was established, it was Dr. Alexander Dushkin who was appointed as its director. Gradually, Benderly lost his power, both physically and as a leader of Jewish education. Scharfstein met him only once during Benderly's final years and found him bitter and disappointed. But even then, there was still a glint of youthful enthusiasm in his eyes.

Scharfstein has analyzed Benderly's achievements and failures. He thinks that Benderly's weaknesses were his stubbornness, unwillingness to listen with an open mind, and his attraction to the newest technology without considering its cost or necessity. He says that many of Benderly's ideas were tried already in Europe (for example, teaching Hebrew in Hebrew, and the use of games and art in the classroom), but that Benderly was the first to experiment with many of these ideas on a grand scale. He was enthusiastic, energetic, and totally dedicated to the cause of Jewish education, and to the new generations of Jews who were born and grew in America. As a pioneer, he showed the way to those who followed him.

Chapter 16: The First Conference of the Hebrew Federation

When Scharfstein moved back to New York City in 1915, a few groups and societies of Hebraists had already been in existence there. One of the Hebraists, Kalman Whiteman, came up with the idea of unifying the small groups into a citywide organization. After a while a conference was called in Philadelphia. More than one hundred delegates came from a number of cities, and it was at that gathering that the Hebrew Federation was established. Because of the political and social difficulties in Europe and Palestine during World War I, it was decided to convene the first conference of the Hebrew Federation in New York. Among the activists who attended were Shmaryahu Levin, Ben Zion Mosensohn, Menachem Mendel Sheinkin, Yitzhak Ben Zevi, and David Ben Gurion. All of the above, except for Ben Gurion, were on the Zionist Executive Committee. A proclamation was signed by Reuven Brainin, Shmaryahu Levin, and Nachman Syrkin. Menachem Sheinkin, and others, called for the unification of all who saw the Hebrew language as central and vital for the future of Judaism.

The first conference took place in January 1917 in the hall of the "Kindergarten" on Montgomery Street in New York City. This was the first time that the varied Hebrew activities took the serious character of a movement as opposed to an informal gathering of Hebrew aficionados. The delegates were not only from the Hebraic societies, but also from educational institutions, the Zionist Federation, *Poale Zion, Mizrahi, Hadassah, Yehudah HaTza'ir,* and the National Workers' Union. In one meeting Shmaryahu Levin encouraged the delegates with reports of positive activities in the Hebrew language in Russia, and even in Germany. In another meeting, chaired by Abraham Spicehandler, J. Z. Frischberg lectured on Hebrew education. He blamed the people who were in charge

of Jewish education as being mechanistic and without vision, and proposed to transfer this important work to the hands of the newly established Hebrew Federation. This proposal met with strong opposition from both *Poale Zion,* which ran its own schools that emphasized secular and national education, and from *Mizrahi,* which wanted to keep the control of Jewish religious education in its own hands. They claimed that the federation should concentrate on the Hebrew language alone rather than interfere in education, which, according to them, was an issue for each party to decide for itself. Although during the conference Ben Gurion was successful in his efforts in convincing the delegates to eliminate Jewish education along party lines, it was still difficult to determine the overall success of the program when one school was compared with another.

As a compromise, Yehudah Kaufman (now Even-Shmuel) suggested that instead of infringing on boundaries in education, the federation should promote the study of Hebrew as mandatory for Jewish students in the public schools. He was supported in this proposal by Yitzhak Ben Zevi and David Ben Gurion. This proposal created an even bigger storm by those who wanted to emphasize integration of the Jews in the United States. When it became difficult to control the delegates, the chairmanship of the meeting was transferred to Scharfstein. Ben Gurion could not be calmed down, and at the end he uttered mockingly the word *Melamdim!* toward all in attendance, for which he apologized soon after.

In the evening a more civilized meeting took place. Shmaryahu Levin complained that those who assimilate always offer to "build together" with the Americans, and do not understand that creative work cannot be done in such partnership. He emphasized the

voice of the individual, symbolized by the prophet Isaiah. Following Levin, Eliezer Ben Yehudah talked about the necessity to select a dialect for the modern Hebrew language, and through many examples from ancient texts in Eretz Yisrael, he proved why the Sephardi dialect was the most suitable for modern Hebrew.

At that point, Scharfstein writes about the changes in Hebrew education that had occurred by the time he wrote his autobiography in 1954. He writes that in many public schools and colleges Hebrew was being taught, as well as other foreign languages, and that the reasons for the introduction of foreign languages into the American school curriculum were both to connect the child with his or her parents' culture, and to broaden the American child's horizons in regard to other cultures in the world.

Chapter 17: The Enlightened in America

In this chapter Scharfstein surveys the various facts concerning the fate and conditions of the *maskilim* who immigrated to America. He quotes the words of Moses Weinberger from his volume titled *The Jews and Judaism in New York*, in which Weinberger describes how the roles of the European *maskilim* and their much less educated Jewish brethren have been reversed in America: In Europe, the highly educated *maskilim* were honored, and many listened to them. In contrast, in the free society of America, with its democratic ideals, the simplest of the people, even the uneducated, were able to carve for themselves a better economic life, and consequently they took charge of many aspects of Jewish life in America. Scharfstein describes the different generations of the *maskilim*. The earliest were educated on the knees of Abraham Mapu and Perez Smolenskin and were zealous for a pure, biblical Hebrew. To the next wave belonged *Hovevei Zion*

(Lovers of Zion), romantic and melancholy in their usage of the language. Then came the followers of Ahad Ha'am—more rational, less romantic, and with an ideology composed of national and socialist aspirations. But even these *maskilim* belonged to two main groups. The first group consisted of those who were dedicated to the Hebrew language to such an extent that they could not see themselves earning their livelihood from anything else but writing in Hebrew. When they couldn't make it by one job, they took additional assignments, or, to their dismay, sometimes they wrote for Yiddish newspapers and other publications.

The second group consisted of *maskilim* for whom Hebrew was important as well, but they also wished to progress economically and socially in the American society. They became businessmen, professionals, and community leaders, and their love for Hebrew consisted more of reading the publications than of writing for them. Many *maskilim* from this second group—like Jacob Gordon, who contributed to Hebrew education and established a Talmud Torah in Minneapolis—were in the forefront of Jewish education, and many of their students became dedicated to the ideals of the revival of Jewish life and the Hebrew language in America.

Chapter 18: Dr. Moshe Halevi

In 1916 Scharfstein was appointed as a teacher of education and literature at the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York. The head of the institute then was Mordecai Menahem Kaplan, and the most senior teacher was Moshe Halevi. Halevi had superb knowledge in the Bible and Hebrew poetry from the Middle Ages to modern times, but he was a bitter man who was critical of Jewish life around

him. Scharfstein writes that since he was more understanding and forgiving as far as the actions of the American Jews, even concerning selfish acts, than was Halevi, the two of them never became close friends.

Halevi enrolled in the rabbinical seminary in New York and also received an MA degree from Columbia University. He obtained a rabbinical position in Chicago but could not reconcile his ideals with the reality around him. He resigned his position and was appointed as a teacher of the Bible and Hebrew language and literature at the Teachers Institute. Halevi wrote many articles for Hebrew journals, but his writings did not make much impact on his readers. He dreamed about writing a book about the history of teaching in Israel, but this dream was never realized. He was burdened by caring for his ill wife, his two daughters, and by his big teaching load.

Toward the end of his life Halevi was chosen as secretary for the Israel Matz Foundation, a foundation that supported the publications of Hebrew writers who could not afford to publish their works. The two ideas that captured Halevi's heart were national redemption and the revival of the Hebrew language. He was known for his love of Jewish culture, his deep knowledge, and his dedication. He died from complications of a stomach ulcer in 1936.

Chapter 19: The Climbers on the Ladder of Success

This chapter is devoted to the description of the Jews' economic development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scharfstein read in his youth about the "land of unlimited possibilities," but he himself never experienced real wealth. He was content as a teacher and was glad to see others succeed. Scharfstein speaks from his own experience

and from that of others about the days of economic hardship on the Lower East Side—the sweatshops, the crowdedness, and the lives of those who chose to be peddlers rather than work under the difficult conditions of the clothing industry. He speaks about those who "made it" in America and became a first generation of Jews with great financial resources. Unlike Europe, he says, in America no one is shy or afraid to say that he started from scratch. On the contrary, in America it is considered meritorious, as a sign of resilience, hard work, and industriousness. He says that he read many accounts on the "difficult life" of those who succeeded, as if they were toiling day and night not to lose what they had acquired, and as if they had no tranquility or happy time with their families. He states, however, that many of these accounts are inaccurate and full of exaggerations.

Chapter 20: Rabbi Israel Matz—Literature Aficionado

In 1925 the industrialist Israel Matz established a special foundation to aid Hebrew writers. In 1936, following Moshe Halevi's death, Scharfstein was elected to the board of the foundation. In 1950 Matz died, but the foundation continued to function with a trust that he had left.

Matz was born in Kalavaria, Lithuania, in 1869 and came to New York in 1890. He studied business at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in Lower Manhattan. Later he became a partner in a chemical and pharmaceutical business, and then established his own factory for medications and became very successful. In Europe Matz studied Hebrew and became an admirer of Smolenskin. When Smolenskin died the loss had a tremendous impact on Matz. Unlike many who neglected their

attachment to Jewish culture and Hebrew, he decided to support it. He was influenced to take up this effort after he read an enthusiastic article by Brainin on Smolenskin. Matz also supported Smolenskin's widow and began to read regularly many of the Hebrew publications and newspapers. Matz continued to support Brainin, even after the latter moved to the extreme left and defended Communism, without even mentioning the suppression of the Hebrew writers in Europe. For Scharfstein, Matz symbolized the best type of the *maskil.* He supported Hebrew literature, its writers, and the national values with endless love, devotion, and generosity.

Chapter 21: In the Years of Abundance

In this long chapter, Scharfstein describes the tremendous changes that occurred in America between the years 1918 and 1929—that is, up to the beginning of the Great Depression. Through the anonymous figures of "Mr. and Mrs. Smith," he tells about the ways and manners of the middle class in New York City. He writes about the fashion that began as conservative and gradually changed, especially with respect to women's clothes, to much more daring and revealing; he also writes about the increase in the number of cars, in drinking, and in parties. He compares the increase in the rate of divorce: from eight out of one hundred in 1910, thirteen out of one hundred in 1920, to seventeen out of one hundred in 1928. He writes about the constant rise in the cost of living, which occurred simultaneously with the rise in profits of the steel, chemical, and automobile industries. During that period women received the right to vote, and many began to leave the kitchen for other interests. New kinds of dances and music, especially jazz, became more and more popular, and whereas until then teenage girls had been greatly restricted

in their freedom, now one could more frequently witness parties with physical contact and the rise in teen pregnancy. These were all symptoms of a free society, a society that had the economic means and did not suffer the horrendous consequences of World War I, as did the European countries. All of these changes and trends had significant influence on the lives of American Jews, who slowly but surely began to join the ranks of the American middle class. Scharfstein states that in order to write this chapter, he was assisted by several books, especially *Only Yesterday* by Frederick Louis Allen (New York: Harper, 1931).

Chapter 22: The Crisis of the Year 1929

This chapter recounts the known facts about the Great Depression of 1929–1933. There is not much new material here, except for the fact that Scharfstein highlights the effects of the Depression on the Jews, many of whom suffered more than the non-Jewish population. According to Scharfstein, Jews often took unsecured loans, increased their possessions beyond their capacity to maintain them, invested too much in the stock market, and speculated in real estate. In addition, the Jews played a relatively small role in natural resources enterprises like mining, oil, and the railroad business—industries that were still vital and relatively healthy even during the hard economic times

Chapter 23: Israel's Children in America

As a teacher, Scharfstein became interested in American children from the moment of his arrival in the United States. He soon noticed significant differences between the conduct of children in America and that of Jewish children in Europe. America was known as the

"Land of Opportunity," and the emphasis on economic success had its effect on education as well. Scharfstein writes how children flocked to school subjects that could produce some concrete, utilitarian results, such as shorthand, typing, and a variety of similar subjects, and shunned history and ancient languages. Scharfstein says he noticed that children were not interested in literature and high culture. Rather, they were living with fantasies of the flesh and of gold, going out and eating in glorious restaurants, visiting nightclubs, investing in expensive clothes, and spending much time in the movie houses.

In contrast, in Europe children were obedient and marginal. They were supposed to act properly and remain silent unless asked to speak. In the United States it was the reverse: here children had become the center of attention, and many parents raised spoiled children. In Europe schoolteachers were honored and respected, and a university professor was considered as part of the elite in society. In the United States, on the other hand, respect was measured by financial status. Teachers in America, even college professors, did not enjoy such respect from either adults or children. Here the teacher had to know the latest in fashion and in sports in order to get along with students and be respected by them. Hebrew teachers, who could never rely on a steady income, were respected even less.

Jewish children saw the culture around them and adapted to it quickly. Many parents only wanted to see their children become bar or bat mitzvah, and after that their interest in Jewish education or culture waned. In 1918 Scharfstein wrote an article in the Hebrew periodical *HaToren* about this topic. He says there are three phases in the life of the immigrant: the first is the inability to adapt and uttering much criticism about the new environment; the second phase is a decline in criticism and a measured acceptance of

some good aspects in the new country; and the third phase is complete acceptance, adaptation, and even patriotism. When he speaks about himself, Scharfstein believes he falls somewhere between the second and third phases. He believed that America may have been the first to elevate materialism to its highest degree, but by the time of his writing, one could already see this affliction the world over.

Chapter 24: The Pain of Childrearing

This account opens with Scharfstein describing several occasions that occurred while he was still working at the New York Bureau of Jewish Education, when well-to-do Jews came to him for consultation about their inability to draw their children to Judaism, Hebrew, and prayer. Now it was Scharfstein's turn to educate his own children.

In 1919 his son, Ben Ami, was born, and then a few years later, his daughter, Shulamit. Scharfstein and his wife spoke Hebrew to their son, while their Swiss maid spoke German and broken English. At age four their son began playing with the American children in his neighborhood and slowly learned English. Because there was no independent kindergarten in their neighborhood, Ben Ami was sent to the one attached to the elementary school. There was also no Jewish school in their neighborhoods, so the Scharfsteins gave Ben Ami his Jewish education at home. When he was nine years old, Ben Ami traveled by train to a Jewish school a few afternoons each week. This was good for him, because the teachers were conscientious and there were not many children in the school. Since there were few students, the atmosphere of the school was more intimate. As he grew up, Ben Ami became increasingly aware of the differences between his parents and his friends' families. If he was asked something in Hebrew in the presence of

his friends, he replied in English in order not to speak in a language that was unknown to them. Scharfstein couldn't find a Hebrew high school for his son, and thus Ben Ami attended a public high school. Then his Hebrew education was interrupted, and he became interested in general literature and the sciences. During his college years, Ben Ami studied science and English. He also attended classes in Jewish studies in a Jewish school for college-age students. In the competition between general education and Jewish education, the former won because it was a natural product of the environment and society in which he functioned. These subjects had more immediate social and economic implications on the future life of the student.

In the center of Scharfstein's own life was a Judaism symbolized not by religion, but by Israel's history, Hebrew, and Zionism. For the Scharfsteins, religious life was more of a habit or a routine than a burning passion in their hearts. They concentrated more on the Hebrew language and on the ideals of Jewish nationalism. The education of their daughter, Shulamit, was similar to that of Ben Ami's, but with two positive differences: she attended a yeshiva in Flatbush, Brooklyn, where she studied with excellent teachers; and the friendships that were created there among the students continued even after they finished school.

Chapter 25: Henrietta Szold—A Mother in Israel

This chapter contains biographical information on Henrietta Szold (1860–1945). Scharfstein first became acquainted with Szold at the 1915 Zionist convention in Boston. Even eight years after the establishment of *Hadassah,* Szold found herself defending the actions of these Jewish women. Compared with those in the Zionist camp, who tended to

be sentimental or overly emotional, Szold symbolized rationality, realism, and objectivity. She was also distinguished in her ability to keep *Hadassah* out of debt.

The organization was known for its love for order, love for work, clarity of purpose, and care in handling the money raised from the Jewish public. Szold was the organization's leader, and the women in the organization admired her for her outstanding personality; in their eyes she almost seemed to be a saint. In spite of her meteoric rise, Szold never changed in her core. Her fundamental qualities remained in their original purity. At one point Scharfstein tells about his personal experiences with Szold when they sailed together to Italy and then to Palestine. Szold was serious and meditative. She was interested in improving her Hebrew and asked Scharfstein to teach her. He proposed to use a few books that he had with him, but she insisted on learning from a difficult book that was given to her as a gift, so that she could thank the author after knowing what was in the book. They talked with mutual agreement on the necessity to strengthen the education of Jewish children in Eretz Yisrael, and on the need to unify the curriculum for Jewish schools by teaching Hebrew literature, both old and new, and Jewish values.

Scharfstein then gives a detailed account of Szold's development, and of her early years at the home of her father, Rabbi Benjamin Szold, in Baltimore. She lived there within a Jewish atmosphere of tradition and culture, but with little differentiation between Judaism and humanity in general. All of Henrietta's five sisters married, but she remained single all her life, dedicating herself to her work on behalf of the Jewish people and their causes. She was a frank and honest woman. As an older woman she said that she lived a rich and full life, but not one of happiness. She had a unique sense of duty and responsibility and had special love for nature and flowers.

She became a teacher at a public high school, and then at a private school managed by three women. The events of the decade between 1880 and 1890, with the pogroms in Russia and the massive immigration of Jews to the United States, attracted her to communal work. She joined the Hebrew Literary Society in Baltimore, an organization established in order to help the new immigrants during their first few months in the United States. Eventually she became the director of this organization. She was especially attracted to the Russian *maskilim* and to *Hovevei Zion,* which often assembled in her father's home. The foundation of the Zionist ideals had been already laid at her father's home, but now, influenced by these newcomers, it had been crystallized and strengthened. In 1893 she was asked to be the secretary of the Jewish Publication Society in Philadelphia. She assumed the position, commuting back to Baltimore on weekends. After her father's death in 1902, Henrietta moved with her mother to New York. In 1916 she resigned her position with the JPS. Judge Julian Mack established a special fund from which she could be sustained.

While she was still at the JPS, Henrietta became secretary of the Zionist Federation of America. She became acquainted and often friendly with the German Jews, who occupied important positions in the Jewish community and had the financial means to help her in her mission. After she learned about Aaron Aharonson's work and discoveries of the wild wheat in Palestine, her thoughts became even more focused on Eretz Yisrael. From 1909, the year of Henrietta's first trip to Palestine, to 1912, she organized and prepared the women of *Hadassah* for the real task of aid in health and education in Eretz Yisrael. Henrietta was elected president of the organization. Its original name was The Daughters of Zion, and in 1914 it was changed to *Hadassah.*

Henrietta traveled from one town to another and from one meeting to the next in order to recruit women for the organization. She made sure that every new member understood the organization's mission and the platforms of the Zionist Congresses.

With the financial help of Nathan Strauss, she sent two nurses to Palestine, who opened a clinic there and began to monitor health and hygiene among the populace. During World War I the number of *Hadassah* members reached 1,937, with $2,880 in the organization's coffer. A group of twenty doctors, twenty nurses, and five administrators was sent to Palestine, and in 1939 the first wing of the *Hadassah* hospital opened on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem. In 1927 Henrietta was elected to the executive committee of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). She fought against the divisions among the parties in Palestine, and for her ideas of a unified educational system and values. In 1929, at age sixty-nine, she resigned from the WZO's executive committee in order to devote her efforts solely to social work in Eretz Yisrael. In 1932 she established a school for social workers, and worked hand in hand with the British government, which had ruled in Palestine since the end of World War I, to make sure that no child younger than thirteen could be put to work. When the Hitler regime ascended in Germany in 1933, she became concerned with the fate of the Jewish youth in Europe and began laying the foundation for their organized transport to Eretz Yisrael. In 1934 the first train, with eighteen Jewish girls and twenty-five Jewish boys, left Berlin. The children arrived in Haifa and then transferred to Kibbutz Ein-Harod in the eastern Jezre'el Valley. By 1937 thousands of children had arrived in Palestine. Consequently, Henrietta established the organization known as *Aliyat HaNo'ar.* Many thousands of Jewish refugees from Europe ended up in

Teheran, Iran. In 1937 *Aliyat HaNo'ar* rescued hundreds of Jewish children from Teheran and brought them to Palestine.

Henrietta Szold believed wholeheartedly in the Hebrew language, and in the unification of the Jewish people in order to make them one nation with one heart. She believed in education, and that the redemption of Israel would come through care for the physical and spiritual well-being of the Jewish child. She believed in the nation of Israel, not in political parties. A child's happiness was dearest to her heart, and she founded a special fund called "For the Child and Youth."

Henrietta Szold was self-sufficient, modest, and humble. She did not deliver stormy speeches and did not invent new methods. She was a woman of action, who dedicated her life to her people and their lives. She was the main force behind the reconstruction of social aid in Eretz Yisrael. Although she had no children of her own, she was the mother of her people Israel.

Chapter 26: Dr. Nissan Touroff—The National Educator

The life story of Dr. Nissan Touroff (1877–1953) was, on the one hand, a saga of constant struggle and obstacles, and on the other, a tale of total dedication and a good measure of accomplishment. Scharfstein does not remember when he first made his acquaintance with Dr. Touroff. It probably took place first through correspondence in 1925, when Dr. Touroff became the editor of the pedagogical bimonthly *Shevilei HaChinukh* (The Paths of Education). Touroff asked Scharfstein to write a few articles for the periodical, and when Touroff left his position as director of the Hebrew Teachers College in Boston and moved to New York, the two became close friends until Dr.

Touroff's death in 1953. Beforehand, Touroff was the editor of another periodical, *HaChinukh* (The Education), in Eretz Yisrael, a periodical that included articles with a much more moderate and respectful tone than those printed in the United States at that time.

Touroff was born into a family of modernists, a home where Russian was spoken, and the values of the *haskalah* (Enlightenment) reigned supreme. Some of the nobility of his native city, Neshvizh, in Belarus, were frequent guests of the Touroffs. Rabbi Mordechai Zeev Raisin wrote down his own memories of the Touroff family, and claimed that none of the family members was ever seen even close to a heder or a yeshiva, and that at that time no one could predict that Touroff would ever get close to Jewish matters. Scharfstein, on the other hand, completely rejects Raisin's claims. He writes that Nissan Touroff was in fact a student at a heder for a few years; that Judaism was never far from his heart, but that neither he nor his family planned for him to become a rabbi. Scharfstein writes that while still living in Russia, Touroff became a close friend of the *maskil* Simcha Chaim Wilkomitz, and the latter influenced Touroff and encouraged him to learn Hebrew and become a Zionist. In the course of the years, Touroff became a sensitive and respected Hebrew writer, with a simple but elegant style. Much of his study of the sciences he accomplished by reading books that had been translated into Hebrew.

Still as a child, Touroff moved with his family to Moscow, where he began to show talent in art. However, because of the government decree in 1889 forcing the Jews to leave Moscow, his family was forced to move back to Neshvizh. From there he began traveling, first to Vilna, where he became a teacher. Already he showed special interest in psychology, and the importance of this field for him grew in the course of the years. He

then became a teacher in a small town in Belarus and then moved to Warsaw. Wilkomitz, who had moved to Eretz Yisrael at the turn of the century, became principal of a school in Rosh Pinah. He invited Touroff to join him, but Touroff felt he needed more preparation before taking such a step. It was in Warsaw that he began to write for Hebrew periodicals such as *HaShiloach, HaTzefirah,* and *HaDor.* He then moved to Berlin, where he studied philosophy, then to Leipzig, and then to Lausanne, Switzerland. Wilkomitz joined Touroff in Lausanne, where another famous Hebraist, Isaac Epstein, befriended them, and the three became close friends. Finally, after Touroff received his doctorate in philosophy in 1907, he accepted an invitation from Menahem Ussishkin to make aliyah to Eretz Yisrael and become the principal of the school for girls in Jaffa.

In the beginning, Touroff, the Zionist with advanced European education, was like a foreign element in an alien environment. He was a tall man, with black hair and a glorious beard, and dressed meticulously and with good taste. He resembled Theodor Herzl. At first, the teachers, all of whom were older than him and more experienced, suspected and feared him. But soon they discovered both his good nature and good intentions, and all began to respect him highly. Touroff basically revolutionized the school's curriculum and general demeanor. He was strict, punctual, and neat, but kind, well-mannered, and always trying to find the positive in every person. One of his greatest contributions in Eretz Yisrael was as editor of the periodical *HaChinukh,* mentioned above. It was in Jaffa that Henrietta Szold visited Touroff and his school and was very favorably impressed with his accomplishments. After the Zionist-Hebraist E. L. Lewinsky died in 1910, a new school for young female teachers, bearing Lewinsky's name, was established in Jaffa, and Touroff became its principal. In 1914 some of the

girls he taught at the high school were the first to graduate as teachers from the Lewinsky school, and to assume teaching positions in many Jewish settlements in the land. For a short time Touroff also worked as the editor of the newspaper *HaAretz,* but World War I forced him to flee to Rosh Pinah.

After four years of unrest and suffering, he immigrated in 1919 to America. His plan was to stop teaching or directing schools for the foreseeable future, and to devote the rest of his life to writing and to creating new Hebrew textbooks. But because of his difficult economic conditions, his plan was frustrated. He first became principal of the Hebrew Teachers College in Boston. He repeated his success from his years in Jaffa in reorganizing and reshaping the education at the college. After five years he wished to return to Eretz Yisrael, but again didn't have the means to do so. He then accepted an invitation by Rabbi Stephen Wise to join the faculty of the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York and teach Hebrew literature. There, too, Touroff was successful but still yearning to leave teaching and begin writing in earnest. Thus, when in 1932 Ussishkin once again invited him to come to Eretz Yisrael—this time to head the education department at the Hebrew University—Touroff agreed to assume the position, but with the caveat that a new library would be established primarily to buy books on psychology and pedagogy. After a while, Touroff realized that his wish would not be realized; disappointed, he returned to America.

Touroff was fifty-six years old at that time, and from then on, he vowed to never take another full-time position of any kind. Only occasionally did he agree to lecture, and thus he was forced to live very frugally in his New York apartment. He then dedicated all of his time and energy to writing. Although Touroff did have extensive schooling in

Europe, he was also self-taught on many subjects. He never became an adherent of any particular school. He wrote several books, of which the most important are *Byod'im u'velo Yod'im* (Knowingly and Unknowingly) on the psychology of the individual and the public; *Ha'Arakhot* (Evaluations) on the problems and challenges of Hebrew education in the Diaspora, and *B'Ayat HaHitabdut* (The Problem of Suicide), in which he investigates psychological conditions that cause suicide and provides specific examples of acts of suicide in literature and by renowned people.

Touroff's education as a *maskil,* his artistic gifts, his high standards, and his character as an introvert caused him to be detached from simple, nonintellectual people. His experience in psychology, and in witnessing many failed marriages, led him to remain single to the end of his life. Touroff was not totally dissatisfied with his life, but he never achieved complete happiness. By chance, he met in New York a Jewish refugee of the Holocaust named Edmund Melton, whom Touroff helped a few years earlier in Europe. They renewed their contact, became true friends, and decided to live together. In his early seventies Touroff was seriously injured in a car accident. Regrettably, by the time he was healed from the accident, he was diagnosed with a terminal illness, from which he never recovered. Scharfstein obtained all of these biographical details through his close association with Touroff, an association that lasted for more than twenty years.

Chapter 27: How I Became a Textbook Author

Here Scharfstein reflects on his early years back in Eastern Europe and on his initial attempts in writing textbooks. At the age of thirteen he became fascinated with the subject of geography—the climate, planet Earth, and its exotic people. Because of his

enthusiasm, he translated a book from Russian to Hebrew, copied it in a beautiful notebook, and added his own rendering of the book's illustrations. He bemoaned the fact that the notebook got lost. At age twenty-three he was appointed principal and teacher near Lvov, in one of the many *Safah Berurah* Hebrew schools that were scattered around Russia and Poland. In Galicia there was a state "Teachers Union," and he was director of the pedagogical bureau of the union. In this position he attracted the attention of teachers who traveled to see him teach. His reputation grew. One day a Jewish partner in a large publishing house invited Scharfstein and another Hebrew teacher, Raphael Soferman, to publish a new textbook on the Hebrew language. Scharfstein was to write it and Soferman was to advise, proofread, and edit it. The book was named *S'fateinu* (Our Language). The publisher added illustrations, and the book was soon published in a beautiful format. But the more demand grew for the book, the more Scharfstein worried that perhaps his background in pedagogy, psychology, and methodology was inadequate to justify publishing a textbook for children. Although he did not withdraw the book from circulation, he embarked on an intensive study of the newest pedagogical and methodological trends and innovations. Equipped with this new learning, Scharfstein decided to write a new textbook on Jewish history. He called it *Toldoteinu* (Our Origins).

He brought the manuscript to the publishing house in Drohobycz, a nearby town, and left it there together with a large advance payment. Unfortunately, in the meantime World War I broke out, and the Russians occupied Drohobycz and took over the print shop. By that time, when the manuscript was lost forever, Scharfstein was already in America.

A month before the war broke out, Scharfstein married his wife, Shoshanah, one of his former Hebrew students. They moved to Geneva, Switzerland, so that Shoshanah could take advanced studies in French. It was there that Scharfstein came upon a book by Francois Gauvin on the art of teaching languages, advocating "psychological methods." The book served Scharfstein as a model.

Still in his initial stay in New York, Scharfstein met a Mr. Terkel, who introduced him to a staff member of the Jewish Publication Society. However, the JPS was not interested at that time in printing new books, but rather in republishing older books, many of which were first published in Russia and now being republished in America without compensating the authors. Scharfstein decided to find out whether other Hebrew teachers were interested in collaborating with him in the establishment of their own publishing house for new textbooks. Terkel directed him to J. Z. Frishberg, Kalman Whiteman, and H. A. Friedland. Although the three were generally interested in such a project, none of them was willing to invest time or money in it. Determined to succeed, Scharfstein decided, nonetheless, to embark on the project by himself. A few months after his arrival in Stamford, Connecticut, he rewrote from memory his history book that had been lost in Dorhowitz and renamed it *Historia L'Yeladim* (History for Children). He first published the third volume, beginning with the early days of *Shivat Zion* (the return to Eretz Yisrael) in the nineteenth century up to the present. The other two volumes were published later. Scharfstein states that the book had great success, but that many new writers began to "steal" his ideas, and some were involved in blatant plagiarism.

During the years that he worked at the Bureau of Jewish Education, he published another Hebrew textbook, *Sefer HaTalmid* (The Student's Book). In this book Scharfstein

wrote a story about a New York family, using new ideas and techniques and a much simpler language. This book was also widely circulated in the Hebrew schools. When he left the bureau, Scharfstein realized his dream and established the Shilo Publishing House on Ditmas Avenue in Brooklyn. He continued to write additional books. He writes that he worked especially hard on one of them, *Artzeinu* (Our Land), referring to Eretz Yisrael. He traveled a few times to Palestine to check firsthand that his descriptions in the book were true in light of the quickly changing lives of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael. He concludes by expressing his concerns about the deterioration in the knowledge of Judaism in general, and of the Hebrew language in particular, among the young generation. In general, he confesses, he was enthusiastic during the process of writing a book, less so when his book was in print, and even less after it was published and circulated. Scharfstein always had doubts about the "correctness" of the methods he had introduced in his books. He cautions that in order for a textbook to be up-to-date, textbook authors must constantly adjust their writing and methods of presentation to the rapid changes in American life. Sometimes in his despair he wondered if the amount of time, love, and effort that he invested in writing all of these books was worthwhile, and he routinely answers in the negative. He didn't believe that any of his books was "great." That belief prompted him to keep writing more books.

Chapter 28: The Metamorphosis of the Jewish Immigrant in America

In nine sections Scharfstein analyzes the differences between Jewish life in the European and American Diasporas. He devotes many lines to the subject of adaptation and

adjustment in the New World. Of course, his conclusions and impressions were written in 1954, a fact that readers of the twenty-first century will realize at once.

The first section of Scharfstein's analysis begins with the phenomenon of the Americanization of the Jewish immigrant. Scharfstein distinguishes three main phases in this process, which are similar to his description in chapter 23: the first phase consists of refusal to accept and rebellion against the new conditions and society; the second is compromise and submission to the inevitable; and finally there is the third phase—adaptation, positivism, and admiration of the new. He says that for the Jews who came from the industrial and more progressive countries in Western Europe, the process of adaptation was much easier than for those who came from Italy, Bohemia, the Balkans, and especially for the Jews who came from the agriculturally based regions of Eastern Europe.

The second section of the analyses deals with the American characteristic of "large size" as opposed to the "small size" in Europe. Most European Jews lived in small towns within the Russian Pale. But even the cities in which some Jews lived were much smaller in size than the American cities, and in general resembled more a collection of neighborhoods and small towns than one large metropolitan area. In Europe "the other side of the river or the lake" was considered "far away." People moved away only under pressure of persecution or other catastrophes, such as a destructive fire. In contrast, even though it is made up of forty-eight contiguous but separate states, America is one big country, a land of millions of square miles of prairies, huge lakes, mountain ranges, thousands of miles of railroads and paved roads, bridges, urban centers, and skyscrapers.

This difference in size was one of the first experiences that confronted the new immigrant.

The third section touches on the subject of movement and the lack thereof. In Europe most Jews succumbed to conditions of poverty and the lack of chance for any improvement, social or economical. Poverty was passed on from one generation to the next. Their only spiritual escape from the daily hardship was their imagination and hope for a miracle. In general, Jewish life in Europe was characterized by fatalism and frozenness. In contrast, America is characterized by dynamism. Here people not only dream, but they also take action to climb on the ladder of success. People who began their lives as simple workers or waiters advance in life and achieve economical heights. It is a country where people always look for the next step toward improvement, for innovation, for leaving the past behind and only looking for a brighter future.

The next section of this chapter looks at the concept of dependence versus independence. In Europe the young Jew, even the married one, was invariably dependent on his family for help, and often for a roof over his head. In America, even when they are in their teens, boys and girls find ways to earn money, save it, and are soon able to buy a used car, which they drive lawfully or otherwise, and enjoy their independence.

The fifth section of Scharfstein's analysis compares values. He says that in Europe spirituality and learnedness reigned supreme. Even when the dominant role of religion lessened in importance during the nineteenth century, the *maskil* was accorded with high respect. In America, says Scharfstein, the culture is based on materialism, a culture where people bow to the golden calf of "success." In America, he says, material wealth is much more important than spiritual wealth. Business, not academic

achievement, is the way to "make it" in America. The American says, "Whoever can, does, and whoever can't, teaches." In America they do not inquire about human qualities, but about the worth of a person in economic terms.

In the next section Scharfstein discusses the classes in society. He writes that in the European ghetto or shtetl, Jewish society had very distinct classes. At the bottom were craftsmen and peasants; above them, artisans of "cleaner" crafts, such as watchmakers and jewelers. Next came the shopkeepers and the *Balei Batim* (landlords), and on top were the few rich or middle-class Jews, who often had other people serving them, and the learned. In America, on the other hand, the division in classes is much less obvious, and it is more common for people to move, either up or down, from one class to another. Even those in the middle class, without a second thought, do not mind getting their hands dirty, painting their houses, and cutting the grass in front of their homes.

The seventh section of the analysis deals with the impact of public opinion. In Europe, says Scharfstein, Jewish public opinion had enormous power over the individual. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Scharfstein was still in Galicia, he noticed the constant criticism by Jewish society of those who became closer to the non-Jewish society and to subjects related to the Enlightenment. Scharfstein says that the Jewish immigrant in America was shocked at the freedom of speech, opinion, and behavior when compared with the European Jewish life. However, many of these immigrants soon adapted to these new conditions and took advantage of them. They began to express themselves freely and without fear of penalty, whether it concerned the Jewish religion, Jewish education, Zionism, Socialism, or the like. Much of this

nonconformity, says Scharfstein, has led not only to acculturation, but also to assimilation, even among the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community.

In the next section of the analysis, Scharfstein discusses the concept of adaptation and its difficulties in terms of the individual. He says that most Jews, as well as human beings in general, do not live by hard and fast principles, and they manage to compromise in order to minimize suffering. Some Jews, he says, would keep a kosher kitchen if this did not lead to much financial loss. On the other hand, there are those who pay respect to their tradition only as a token: they go to shul on Saturday morning, and from there to their stores, in order not to lose in the economic competition with the gentiles, who have no such religious restrictions against working on Saturday.

In the ninth and final section, Scharfstein talks about the tradeoffs in Jewish life in America. On one hand, he states, in the New World a lot of Jewish spirituality and knowledge has been lost, although many Jews recognize this fact and try to remedy this situation. On the other hand, it is American democracy that prompted the Jews to participate fully in American society. In addition, Jewish enterprise has not compromised or neglected the cause of the Jewish aid societies. Scharfstein is impressed by the accomplishments of the Jews in America and says that if for no other reason but these achievements, they have justified the term "A Chosen People."

Chapter 29: Bialik in America

Scharfstein writes about his personal acquaintance with Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934) based on two different occasions. Their initial acquaintance occurred during Bialik's two-month sojourn in America in late winter and early spring 1925. Their second

encounter took place at the hot springs resort in Karlsbad, Germany, in the summer of 1931.

In 1925 Bialik arrived in America as a guest of the Jewish community of New York, one year after he left Berlin and settled in Tel-Aviv. His visit was much anticipated, but the weather did not cooperate. Heavy fog, followed by a snowstorm, delayed the ship's arrival. A small boat with about one hundred Jewish community leaders, headed by Joseph Barondes, went out to sea to welcome the ship and its distinguished guest, but was forced to turn back. Eventually the ship anchored in New York's harbor, and from that moment on, various groups of Jews took upon themselves to shield and protect Bialik from the enthusiastic and welcoming public.

Bialik, a rural man at his core, was very uncomfortable in the huge metropolitan center of New York, with its nonstop motion and noise. He was just as uncomfortable in the tuxedo he was forced to wear for the opening banquet the next evening. The reception and banquet took place at the Mecca hall, and in spite of another ferocious snowstorm, more than four thousand guests came to welcome Bialik and hear him speak. Scharfstein was seated at the head table, very close to Bialik. The senior Zionist Louis Lipski opened the evening. He was followed by the Yiddish poet Yehoash, Judge Julian Mack, Abraham Goldberg, and Nahum Sokolow. For this occasion, Sokolow wrote a special poem in Bialik's honor. Finally, Bialik rose to speak, and as he was introduced, everyone in the audience jumped to their feet, shouting and clapping for a long time.

Bialik opened in Yiddish, but was hesitant. The hard trip and the foreign environment caused him both fear and discomfort. Gradually, he realized that he was in the presence of his own people, and his anxiety eased somewhat. Bialik was a modest,

honest, and frank person. He always spoke from his heart. He was known for his rejection of the Diaspora, which for him always symbolized danger and a temporary solution at best. But when he spoke at this gathering about his feelings and beliefs, he made the guests very uncomfortable. After all, they had found rest and prosperity in America, and could not compare their favorable situation with fifteenth-century Spain.

Still, Jewish admiration for Bialik did not wane throughout his stay in America. He paid visits to many schools, and Scharfstein was privileged to accompany him on many of these visits. Every place he visited, people welcomed him with enthusiasm, listened attentively to his words, and begged for an autograph. Once, at a Rumanian restaurant in New York, in the company of Mordecai Kaplan, Moshe Halevi, Scharfstein, and a few other Hebraists, Bialik exhibited his sense of humor and fairness. The restaurant entertainer began to dance and sing a song in Yiddish, the lyrics of which were very suggestive and embarrassing. All of Bialik's American hosts lowered their heads in shame, except for Bialik. When Bialik used a Talmudic phrase humorously about God's patience and love for all human beings, his hosts were greatly relieved, and they did not feel it was necessary for them to apologize for selecting that restaurant.

On the ship that took him back to Palestine, Bialik wrote a letter to Ahad Ha'am, in which he described his amazement at the "crazy" lifestyle and pace of American society. Yet in a speech in Tel-Aviv shortly after his return, Bialik was more ambivalent about his impressions. It seemed that the time he spent in America did not affect him only negatively, and his initial critical views softened. He could see then a lot that was positive in America, and he charged American Jewry with the duty to lead the way in the aid to the Jews who were left in Europe, and to those who made aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. Bialik

realized that American Jewry had an advantage over all other Jewish communities in the world, and he appreciated the uniqueness of that historical moment.

In the summer of 1931, both Bialik and Scharfstein happened to take a vacation in Karlsbad, Germany. At first Scharfstein thought he was the only Jew at the resort, but soon he heard Yiddish, and even Hebrew, spoken by the guests. One day he discovered that Bialik was among the guests, and the two renewed their friendship that had begun six years earlier. It was there that Scharfstein had the opportunity to get to know Bialik on a more personal basis. At every gathering of the *maskilim,* Bialik was the most dynamic in the conversation. Once, when he read in the Yiddish newspaper *Moment* about a fire that almost killed a girl in Eretz Yisrael as a result of an accident with a cooking stove, he expressed his outrage about the danger of these unsafe appliances. When the lady at the store mistakenly handed him a non-Zionist newspaper, he made sure she would never make that mistake again. And when he read in *Moment* about Zionists in Warsaw who called themselves by various military terms, he became angry about the callous usage of language.

In view of his momentary outrage, it is easy to imagine that his rebelling soul would find a way to express itself in a powerful poem, a poem like many he had written before, stemming from the suffering and passion that were burning inside him, until he could no longer contain them, and had to let the words out and free his tormented soul.

A List of Selected Publications by Zevi Scharfstein
(chronologically arranged by the year of publication)

ספורי המקרא לילדים. ניו-יורק: שילה, 1920

החנוך בארץ ישראל. ניו-יורק: עגן, 1928

פעורך: סדור שילה. ניו-יורק: שילה, 1932

דרכי למוד התנ"ך: שיטות להוראת התנ"ך. ניו-יורק: בית המדרש למורים באמריקה (JTS), 1934

עברית למתחילים על פי שיטת הנושא המרכזי. ניו-יורק: שילה, 1938

אוצר המלים והניבים: לכסיקון של מלים נרדפות וקרובות-משמעות. תל-אביב: שילה, 1939

שיטות להוראת עברית. ניו-יורק: שילה, 1940

עמנו: ספר מקרא לשנת הלמוד השלישית או הרביעית. ניו-יורק: שילה, 1941

החדר בחיי עמנו. ניו-יורק: שילה, 1943

תולדות החנוך בישראל בדורות האחרונים. ניו-יורק: עגן, 1944

פעורך: ספר היובל של אגודת מורי העברית בניו-יורק וסביבתה במלאת שלושים שנה ליסודה. 1944

יסודות החנוך היהודי באמריקה: קבץ מאמרים למלאת שלושים וחמש שנים לבית המדרש למורים. ניו-יורק: JTS, 1946

יוצרי ספרות הילדים שלנו. ניו-יורק: שילה, 1947

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