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ELUSIVE QUALITIES OF A PATCHWORK QUILT:

TWO LITERARY VIEWS OF MODERN ISRAEL

by

Gary Tishkoff

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion  
New York, New York  
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Thesis Advisor: Professor Stanley Nash

### Preface

This Thesis has evolved considerably since its inception in the Spring of 1983. Initially, Benyamin Tammuz's HaPardes was to be translated. My Thesis Advisor, Dr. Nash, and I were very enthusiastic about this idea. Fortunately, I was planning to spend that upcoming summer in Israel where I could most comfortably engage in such an undertaking. Therefore, before I left, I wrote to Benyamin Tammuz informing him of my desires and requesting his permission to translate his book. When I arrived in Israel, his reply was awaiting me.

Mr. Tammuz very politely thanked me for my interest in his work and graciously offered his assistance. Along with this, he also informed me that HaPardes was just then being translated into English by someone at the Tel-Aviv University. I wrote this information to Dr. Nash and we even conferred on the telephone and agreed that since Tammuz is such a fine author, and since he was so warm and encouraging in his letter, that I should write him again and ask which of his works he would suggest I translate.

Meanwhile, while awaiting his reply (Mr. Tammuz was at that time serving as a Cultural Attache', I believe, while teaching at Oxford and writing in nearby Yarnton, England) my Israeli friends suggested a fruitful way of passing my time. Why not, they asked, practice translating by working on a short novella that I had read the previous summer? At least I would begin honing my skills in preparation for whichever of Tammuz's books I would eventually translate, and at best, this novella would be translated successfully and I might be able to incorporate it in my Thesis and/or publish it as well? The suggestion was a sound one

so I wrote to Dr. Nash and updated him while I began translating Yehoshua Bar-Yosef's Soul-Mate (Ahavat Nefesh).

About the time I finished translating that book, both Dr. Nash and Mr. Tammuz responded to my latest correspondences. Dr. Nash made some suggestions and ultimately said I was free to do as I saw best since all of the options before me were good ones. The major options were to translate just Bar-Yosef, just Tammuz, or both of them. Benjamin Tammuz suggested I translate either a book in his Eliakum trilogy or a children's book which he described as being for "Yeladim Zekenim" - "Old Children"! Since I didn't want to get involved in a long trilogy (I would have had to match my style with the rest of the trilogy that had already been translated) and since I was intrigued by this book for "Old Children" as well as the opportunity to deal with literature far different than Bar-Yosef's very adult style, I chose to translate The King Sleeps Four Times A Day.

These past few months could not have turned-out better. I spent them pleasantly and intensely engaged with the works of these two fine authors. I was able to enjoy some good literature, improve my knowledge of Modern Hebrew, develop some translating skills, and become sensitive to something unexpected. In all my contact with Israel these past twelve years, I have been exposed to, and been a part of, many different segments of Israeli society. I have been a part of the formal educational system on High School, Undergraduate and Graduate levels; I have travelled the Country extensively from Metulla to Sharm El-Sheikh; I have worked at numerous jobs in many Kibbutzim; have led tours through the Israel Museum, Yad V'Shem, Mea She'arim, and the Knesset; have lived with an 'adopted' Israeli family and nurtured many friendships among the variety of people, Jews and non-Jews, who live there; and have even been fortunate enough to live



in that Country where a good number of my immediate family also lived there. Then I read Bar-Yosaf and Tameuz. What is so striking about them is that they depict, in vivid details, many of those elusive qualities that form the patchwork quilt we call Israel. Much of what I have experienced, felt, and struggled with - from Zionism and Idealism to religion and dreams shattered by present realities - are all poignantly and eloquently described by these two authors.

### Introduction

Let us examine the life and work of Yehoshua Bar-Yosef in order to better understand how he illuminates this patchwork quilt called Israel. He was born into an Orthodox family of Safed in 1911. His family left Palestine to live abroad during the First World War and then moved to Jerusalem afterwards. Though he studied in Yeshivot as a child, Aryeh Lipschitz writes ("Jerusalem", vols. 9-10, 1975, pps. 188-203) that Bar-Yosef eventually came into contact with secular works, such as Turgenev and Hugo. These not only introduced him to a whole new world, yet prompted him to question the Orthodox one. He apparently tried very hard to combine faith and reason (pp. 202). As he drifted from Orthodoxy, he became more and more attracted to developing his own creative talents and began writing (pp. 188). Lipschitz suggests that that filled the void left by his Orthodoxy. He elaborates and says that Bar-Yosef's early works and desires were directed toward bridging not only generational gaps, but also the widening one between the religious and secular communities. Apparently, Bar-Yosef sensed the gulf between those communities and focused his writing abilities on themes which are best summarized in the article on Bar-Yosef in the Encyclopaedia Judaica: "Bar-Yosef views life as a constant battle between the spiritual and the temporal, the Will to Evil and the Will to Good, the sacred and the profane" (vol. 4, pp. 286). In another article, the E.J. touches upon a connected theme as depicted in "Bar-Yosef's 'Be-Simta'ot Yerushalayim' ('In Jerusalem Alleys', 1941), a dramatization of the tragic disintegration of a family. A conflict of generations and values,..." (vol. 9, pp. 1566). Another play, "Ya'akov HaZohak" ("Laughing Jacob", 1939) also deals with the tension

"between the values of traditional Jewry of Safed and Jerusalem, and their children who rebel against the suppression of eroticism in their society" (E.J., vol. 6, pp. 205). Certainly these themes are all interrelated.

Nehama Rezler-Bersohn ("HaDoar", vols. 26-27, 1973, pps. 424-5; 443-4) also explains how central "family" was for Bar-Yosef. She explains that the Orthodox family was a nuclear one with strong bonds revolving around birth, marriage and death in its continuous concern for continuity (pp. 424). Furthermore, she claims that his position as being in "the last generation of Orthodoxy and the first of Secularism" (pp. 443-4) is exemplified in his personal struggles with Orthodoxy. These battles are often fought in his writings and are expressed as "nostalgic" on the one hand, and "terribly critical" on the other (pps. 425, 444).

The story before us, Soul-Mate, is a classical study of Bar-Yosef's major themes. Certainly there is the tension between the spiritual and the temporal, good and evil, the sacred and the profane as well as conflicts of generations and values, disintegrating families, and much nostalgia as well as criticism of Orthodoxy. Could the conflict between Afternoon Services and Asherkeh's chess games illustrate the conflict between the spiritual and the temporal? How about the very many sexual references Asherkeh recalls from his youth as a Yeshivah student, his dreams and fantasies, his relationship with his wife.... Do they not all bring into question what is good and evil? Asherkeh's books exemplify the sacred and the profane. This is even overtly expressed in the fact that there is an open and a closed bookcase - one for sacred books and the other for secular ones. Generational conflicts are epitomized in Feibish's inability to understand and adequately deal with Hunne's insolent behavior which culminated in Hunne's buying a chocolate bar! Families disintegrate before our very eyes: Feibish's two sons leave; Asherkeh's children move away,

eventually destined only to be contacted by telephone instead of in person. And sure enough, amidst all these problems, there is still a tremendous amount of nostalgia that has a powerfully attractive pull. Whether foods or drinks, even snuff, are what Asherkeh recalls fondly - or the pious and fervent singing at the close of Shabbat during which time one is elevated to higher spheres - the meaning is the same. Parts of the Orthodox world are very inviting. The problem is, they are dying. The Rebbe is no longer alive to lead songs at the close of Shabbat. For how much longer will his disciples be able to live off his inertia and carry his momentum? Unless a bridge can successfully be built, Bar-Yosef must feel that Orthodoxy will be left on one side to wither-away slowly. It is dying because people like himself and Asherkeh can no longer be a part of and at peace with such a community. The "Faith" of Orthodoxy has no room for the "Reasoning" of modernity. When it comes right down to it, both Bar-Yosef and Asherkeh are religious heretics no matter how lovingly nostalgic they are.

All of these themes are brilliantly and lucidly expressed in Soul-Mate. Bar-Yosef creates for us a world rich in tensions and extremes, yet even richer in ambivalences and absurdities. After all, as heretical as Asherkeh may be, the facade he displays is enough to keep him included rather than excluded. And he is not merely included. The absurdity is that when compared to his peers, he is viewed as rather righteous! The ambivalence manifests itself in that he still basically observes the Commandments, and he is still able to enchant listeners with a few words of wisdom which gain him much respect. The world he created is such a gripping one for a very simple reason: it reflects reality. So much of his story rings true, the tensions and extremes, ambivalences and absurdities, that when we step back from the particulars, we realize that he has offered

us another glimpse of the patchwork quilt. He has shown us certain aspects of the Modern Israeli Society, one in which the Orthodox world is significant in influence if not in size. He has done us a further favor by resisting a simplistic monolithic approach, and by insisting on revealing some of the more intricate details of the quilt. He reveals the various ways of dressing within that world, the different kinds of food, and most importantly, the many types of people who live and think in the Israeli Orthodox subculture.

More than this though, Soul-Mate addresses a larger, universal concern, one that is not particular to Orthodoxy, nor even to Israel for that matter. Bar-Yosef employs his story in a way that emphasizes a serious malady of modern times: detachment. In a world where detachment and alienation have almost become synonymous with "Modernity", Bar-Yosef has shown us that even enclosed, "medieval" Orthodox communities are not immune to this modern malady. Asherkeh is a Modern Person in that he is cut-off from his community, his family, God, and even himself. He cannot establish contact with anybody or anything, with the possible exception of books and ideas. He writes of his community in a style as if he were an outsider, and states he is only superficially a part of it in order not to be thrown out of it. (He is smart enough to know that the secular world is no better, and most likely even worse. At least the Orthodox community has some remnants of a soul; of a family and mutually supportive communal structures). But other than this facade, he is not really a part of this community. He does not describe his many friends in the community or civic responsibilities - because he has none! Contrast the difference between himself and Feibish who is often immersed in community activities. Look at his relationships to his parents, wife, children, and even his two Professor chess partners. Despite some occasional

moments when sparks of understanding pass between himself and others, his relationships are mostly quite superficial. This situation contributes to his complete mental and social detachment.

This detachment causes him to cry-out in his concluding "prayer". He wishes to love God but can't, to be loved by God but isn't. He is in such serious shape, he not only is prevented from loving God, but is unable to love anyone else. He only goes through the motions with his wife but no one is fooled into believing that there is real love between them. And about Hunne, he says he loves him a profound love, but it is an ultimately impotent love. It is certainly deep and real in some ways, like his books and ideas are deep and real. Yet it is as unconsummated as many of his ideas. He is so detached from his own self, that he can't even act upon his sexual desires and the few relationships that may even save him - if not with Hunne, then with another. Likewise is he as impotent with his books and ideas. Instead, he lies paralysed on his bed, unable to dream, or read, or even think clearly, and is a miserable lump of lifeless flesh completely unattached to anything in the world.

This more universal theme of alienation and detachment is a very important one with which Bar-Yosef has sensitively dealt. This is just one more example of how deep and complex is Soul-Mate since it deals with yet another aspect and sub-culture of the Modern Israeli Society. Similarly with Tammuz, one is introduced to other segments of the Israeli society, other segments of the same patchwork.

By reading several of Benyamin Tammuz's books one begins to know the author and his major themes. These themes introduce the reader to a special world outlook that is sensitive, provocative, refreshing,



and hopeful. An outlook of another intellectual who cares enough and is bold enough to wrestle with ideas. Let us compare his short story "The Swimming Race" and his books The Orchard, Minotaur, The King Sleeps Four Times A Day, and Requiem for Na'aman in order to discover some of these common themes and ideas.

To begin with, each story has strong connections with the modern State of Israel. In his short story, a very vivid and warm description of pre-State Palestine is depicted. Tammuz describes the carriage ride, the countryside, the meeting of some people, conversations, and foods that are typical to the area and period. All of this helps the reader understand what Israel is at various times during her modern development. We certainly see that again in all four of these books as early pioneers are chronicled in The Orchard and Requiem, or as the modern State unfolds in Minotaur or is allegorized in The King. This is no surprise since the author was born in 1919 and writes from his experiences; as he saw and lived during the founding and establishment of the State. What is surprising, or rather, remarkable, is the richness and accuracy with which Tammuz recalls this era. The reader can actually hear the clip-clopping of the horses' feet in Palestine; can actually smell the eucalyptus groves along the way, as well as the dust; can taste the strong coffee and spicy foods; can really hear the conversations, sighs, and even groans of all the characters in his short story. And this is no less true were we to wander the citrus orchards in The Orchard, or participate in the talkative parties at the summer house in Requiem. We also feel the country in an interrogation room in Minotaur, and in the many absurdities found in The King. Tammuz has really done us a favor by capturing so vividly and through so many senses, the various Israels that live, and that have lived in recent times. To draw an analogy with American literature, Tammuz

has captured Israel in his works like F. Scott Fitzgerald captured the 1920's in The Great Gatsby. At least two significant differences exist though. One is that Tammuz has written, and is still writing, about a much longer time period - one that extends as far back as a hundred and twenty years ago, and continues right up to the present (Requiem is a perfect example of this). The other is that he successfully captures many different cultures, whether they be Russian, European, Arab, Jewish, and various other Israeli subcultures (i.e., secular, military, agricultural, political, intellectual, financial...). In this, truly, lies his genius.

Perhaps a better way of grasping his virtuosity is by examining his literary particularness as well as his overwhelming universal humanism. In Yitzhak Barzilai's article "From Canaanism to Cosmopolitanism" ("HaDoar", vols. 16-17, 1982, pps. 244-47; 264-66) Barzilai often illuminates this very point. On the one hand, he shows how particularistic are The Orchard and Requiem since they both are such thoroughly Israeli novels (pp. 264). They deal with many problems of Israeli society such as the crises of changing values and transference of power from the older, foreign-born generation to the younger, native-born one. He shows how this last point is exemplified in the difference between the "Jewish" father ("Yehudi") in The Orchard, and his "Hebrew" son ("Ivri") (pp. 265). Furthermore, on the same page he discusses the new Israeli Ideology and Ideologues as being one of acquisitions and power; not by shapeless kibbutznikim, farmers, and soldiers of the older generation, but by individuals, people of deeds. Despite the particularness of these conditions, Barzilai himself also mentions (again on pp. 265) that such occurrences happen to other nations and societies as well. Israelies certainly have no monopoly on problems connected to changing values and transference of power!



Other problems that Barzilai sees Tammuz raising in his literature can similarly be viewed. That is, while these problems are particularistic and unique in some sense, like his concern for Jewish-Arab relations (pp. 246) they can also be viewed as universalistic in a larger sense. The particular Jewish-Arab problems that plague the Middle East should be faced by dealing with the Arabs as humanistically as possible, and while making a concerted effort to become closer to them (ibid.). In this way, the peace and harmony about which Tammuz dares to dream, which Barzilai feels has elements of Jewish Mysticism (pp. 245), become Tammuz's universal message of his literature.

His children's books are especially rich in this, displaying great ideological depth. A perfect example of such universalism is found in the allegorical story about Yekuti'el, who stops a war with his magical musical powers in The King. We have well known motifs of the Pied Piper and an Alice in Wonderland World of absurdity and political satire. This is very skillfully woven into thinly veiled symbolism paralleling the Modern Israeli Society. A country surrounded on all sides by enemies; a satire on Jewish history (see especially Chapter 7 and the debates between the various schools of thought which can be likened to the highly academic debates on Biblical criticism and/or debates about different periods of times and schools of thought and/or archeological debates and/or modern political debates...); a satire on religion (compare the "Day of Truth" with the "Day of Atonement". In fact, look at all the holidays, and status of men and women, and compare them with present day Israel). Allegorical symbols abound and only a few have been mentioned here. As easy as it would be to go on, one must be cautious not to overdo the analysis. Not everything will fit perfectly - after all, this is still a story to be

enjoyed for its silliness and lyric melody. But one thing cannot be ignored, and that is Tammuz's philosophy. Everywhere we turn, especially in The King, we meet his personal philosophy of universalism and humanism. By showing us how truly infantile and futile are the nationalistic and cultural differences between the countries in The King, he successfully lifts us from our former, petty, particularistic position, to a much more universalistic and humanistic one. Yet never, in his literature, does humanistic universalism mean a total subjugation of one's particularism or individuality! All of his characters are still able to assert their individuality through their music, their Shabbat dinners or outings, their successes at work, their ability to dream. In fact, this very point is one of his most crucial universalistic messages: one can be particular and individual, (as far as retaining one's identity and character) while at the same time enjoying the fruits of the universal world. Perhaps this is the essence of Barzilai's message as he chronicles Tammuz's growth from Canaanism to Cosmopolitanism? This is supported by the concluding questions of the Cosmopolitan Tammuz in The King: Perhaps other fruits, melodies, thoughts, and ideas could productively be shared universally to the greater enrichment of individuals and particular cultures?

Yet behind all this humanism also lies a deep sense of realism. His realism is profound and often bitter. Notice that in these five works, each and every one is filled with senseless killing, and often outright murderous carnage. "The Swimming Race" describes the War of Independence as well as the senseless and frustratingly "unintentional" death of the main Arab protagonist. In The King, wars are fought based on the flimsiest of provocations, and the heretofore unseen and unknown enemy is mercilessly attacked, leaving both sides with grieving relatives until the next war

erupts. The other three books also talk of Israel's wars in specific and in general, and each describes the gruesome deaths of its various characters: the Arab beaten to death by his half brother in The Orchard; the musician who is castrated and killed in a Jerusalem cave in Requiem; the secret agent in Minotaur who strangles an Arab to death at his field school, sends a lover to his doom in his new sports car, and himself meets his end by an assassin's bullets in a café. Death and discord are certainly a part of Tammuz's world - precisely because they are part of ours! And each time another blow strikes so horribly, Tammuz shocks the reader into involuntarily crying-out "No!" - and then realizing the profound truth of our own cry. Therein lies the hope. If a writer like Tammuz can influence enough people to cry "No", then maybe this senseless slaughter we inflict upon each other will ease, will cease?

Somewhere between the particular and the universal, between the small and the grand, between death and life, reality and fantasy - lies love. For Tammuz is also a lover, as he is a dreamer. And like his dreams, his loves are fraught with frustration, misfortune, and just plain and simple human failures. While many examples exist throughout his writings, Minotaur is perhaps the most poignant one. It is a story of frustrated love - the title itself sets the stage for bitter disappointment. The characters each, almost comically, yet ultimately all too tragically, keep missing one another. The age difference between the characters, their correspondences, the disguises of the secret agent, the foolish circumstances under which he was arrested - all make us want to laugh if we did not know how very tragically true are his words. Love is often, and easily missed. Then we are reminded of the missed love between Ephraim and Bella-Yafa, or between Eliakum and his German lady friend,

or even the various bachelors and spinsters in Requiem. We are reminded of the bizarre loves in The Orchard between Luna and many of the other men in that story, including her own son. Tammuz is as obsessed with love as we all are, and he brilliantly brings love to life, and to death, through the pages of his literature.

All of this speaks eloquently of Tammuz's literature and his ideals. By so artistically and vividly creating for us reflections of our own world, he causes us to feel anguish, to see cruelty and injustice, to be moved to tears until we cry-out "No!". Then, as a result of that simple revelation, we are left to arrive at our own conclusions. The Master Teacher Tammuz has gotten us to say no to narrow, exclusionary particularism; no to accepting love that is not whole and mutual; no to violence as a means to healing the world. He has accomplished his task and then withdraws so as not to belabor his message. Finally, in his silence we are able to take the next step and say - "Yes!".

When Tammuz and Bar-Yosef are combined, their added dimensions and perspectives cautiously reveal much about Modern Israel. They reveal various subcultures within that society - an Orthodox one and a Secular one - and they caution not to classify and categorize too hastily. Both authors show strengths and weaknesses of their subcultures through nostalgia and criticism. And both authors pack their stories full of enough color, enough life, enough questions and ambivalences, that we are cautioned from boldly assuming to understand the whole quilt after seeing only a few of its patches.

It is my hope that these insights will enrich the reader's experience with Soul-Mate and The King Sleeps Four Times A Day. However, my views are

shared here only as a supplement to the works of art themselves. They are what Yehoshua Bar-Yosef and Benyamin Tammuz have created; so they should really speak for themselves and inform the reader in their own special ways.

I am happy to offer these works to the English reader who might otherwise have been unable to experience them. I hope my translations are readable and that they accurately transmit what the authors intended in their original Hebrew. Above all, I hope that this art both brings enjoyment to the reader and moves the reader as I have enjoyed and been moved.

Finally, my deep appreciation and gratitude are extended to many of my friends who helped and supported me along the way. To Carol Davidson and Stacey Weiss who patiently and carefully typed the manuscripts; to Arthur Gross Schaefer who offered me some sound legal advice; to Professor Harry M. Orlinsky who checked the Latin; to Michael Weinstock who edited my English style; to Ofra Venkert and Reuvan Porat who helped me understand the Hebrew texts; to Danny Kerman for his lovely illustrations; to the authors, Benyamin Tammuz and Yehoshua Bar-Yosef, who gave me permission to translate their books and were very gracious and encouraging throughout; and, of course, to Dr. Stanley Nash, my Thesis Advisor, who edited my English, helped guide my thoughts, and gave invaluable support along the way. To them all, my heartfelt thanks.

May this labor of mine bring as much love to the reader as I have to it, and it has to me.

SOUL-MATE

by

Yehoshua Bar-Yosef

This translation is dedicated to Reuvan

Translated by Gary Tishkoff

This translation is based on an original copyrighted work. It is with the permission of the author that this translation is made available to Hebrew Union College. Fall 1983.



All my life I've written for a living. I'm a scribe of Torah Scrolls, phylacteries and mezuzot\* with a quick quill these past thirty-two years, in other words, since I was fifteen. I write mezuzot and portions for phylacteries and sell them to exporters who send my handiwork to the United States. And I earn an honorable and profitable living. If truth is to be told: the work is very good and pleasant. So much so that I can stop after four or five hours a day in order to earn what an average clerk in a respectable institution would earn, or twice as much as would take another scribe to earn in eight or ten hours of work per day. The secret's very simple: my quill glides over the parchment twice, even three times as fast as any other scribes', even the fastest of them. In addition to this, I have a good reputation as an artist-caligrapher in adorning wedding contracts, scrolls for corner stones and festive documents, and once or twice a month I receive requests for such work from private parties and both religious and secular institutions. When I undertake this type of work I earn in half a day as much as I would in a week or two. And another minor detail: I don't pay income tax, not even one measly penny. A mere scribe who lives in Mea She'arim\*\* is not deemed by the tax collector as a citizen worthy of paying taxes. Thus, my livelihood flourishes, thank God, bountifully.

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\*Mezuzot contain parchment upon which certain Hebrew verses are written and then affixed to doorposts of Jewish buildings. (This and all other notes are offered by the Translator.)

\*\*Mea She'arim is an ultra-orthodox Jewish community in the heart of Jerusalem. Its name comes from Genesis 26:12 and literally means "a hundred fold".

And since I'm not among those who are extravagant, and my wife is from Mea She'arim and knows what is to be done with every last cent, then logic dictates that I managed to amass a considerable sum as the years passed. It's enough to say that even after I married-off my son and my daughter and I spent a fortune towards apartments and furniture for them, I'm still left with a few tidy tens of thousands. How do I keep this treasure? Not in banks. I'm not that naive. Everything that's registered in a bank sooner or later winds up in the hands of the income tax people. I simply lend out my money at an acceptable rate of interest, not exorbitant, to a few shopkeepers in the neighborhood, and to a few study centers and charitable institutions that need a few thousand from time to time, and everything operates on the basis of mutual trust by oral agreement at the time of transaction. It's enough to say that until now I've never lost a single cent in such dealings. A word of promise by a person whom I believe is worth more than any bank document in my eyes.

I elaborated a little in matters of my livelihood in order to immediately present myself at the story's outset in a proper place. That is to say, I'm what others would call a very practical man who knows how to finance his affairs very well...incidentally, I forgot to mention my apartment. The apartments in Mea She'arim are almost all built in one style - one long rectangular room, with its forward third or quarter divided into a hallway and kitchen, and the rest - a parlour which is used as a living room and bedroom for the whole family. Twelve years ago an adjacent apartment was vacated, on the second floor, and the



elderly owner was in need of money. I suggested that he lease me both apartments for sixty years. I didn't make such a bad deal. By what would today be a measly sum, I converted the two apartments into one. I had a toilet and bathroom installed in the apartment. I also prepared a special room just for myself in which I write according to the needs of my profession and in which I read forbidden books for my own pleasure. In this room no one sets foot whether guest or family member. Except for my wife who cleans it once every week or two, I don't even invite my son inside. Here I have a few things that are best not revealed. First of all, secular books in Hebrew and in English. By the way, I already read English without the help of a dictionary. There were times when I was forced to use a dictionary, but now my English vocabulary is quite rich. I have a rather respectable library in philosophy, from Plato to Whitehead. I regularly buy good weighty English journals. I have a nice selection of classics, from the early Greeks until the latest moderns. These books I keep in a closed bookcase to hide them from the eye. My open bookcase, filled with religious books of law, Midrashim\*, mysticism, Maimonides, codes and books for the God-fearing and pious, stands on display in the living room. Sometimes I'm in need of one bookcase, sometimes of the other. From both of them I derive pleasure and gratification in my abandon. In my room two large windows are found through which it's possible to see Mt. Scopus. Luck is with me since opposite the windows, and the balcony which faces Mea She'arim St., stands a row of low houses from the Hungarian

\*Midrashim are religious legends and commentaries.

neighborhood. If they built second stories on their houses, they would obstruct my view of Mt. Scopus. Until now they haven't built anything. And there's room for hope that the very orthodox Hungarian neighborhood won't be in a hurry to build an additional story upon the row of houses opposite me. My writing table stands beside the window, and the expansive view pleases the mind and the heart.

Another small detail between me and myself: underneath the enclosed bookcase, in a place hidden in the wall, I've placed a small and strong iron box in which I'm storing Israeli money and dollars and some gold coins. I have a typical Jerusalemite mentality, that worries about a rainy day. We Jerusalemites learned from experience. Days of need and days of plenty follow one after the other.

Very few people in Mea She'arim, and in the surrounding vicinity, are as economically established as I am. And this is a secret just between me and myself. In the eyes of others I'm surely thought of as a scribe whose luck is with him. Were it not for my modest lifestyle, which almost doesn't vary from the majority of others who are engaged in some type of business - except, of course, the Yeshivah\* students who live in poverty and in clear hardship their whole lives - no one would imagine how much I've succeeded in establishing myself economically.

I elaborated a little in describing my economic condition in order to establish, at least for myself, that material matters don't trouble me a tiny bit. And not so much due to the fact that I've acquired all that I wanted, rather, that I accumulated all I accumulated and was able to do so without a great deal of effort. I was always free

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\*Yeshivah is a preparatory school/college of Judaica.

in body and soul to partake fully in matters of the heart and spirit.

And in order to clarify this point for myself, I'm amusing myself with these pages.

I'm a third generation Jerusalemite. My father's grandfather came to Jerusalem in his old age and married a young woman, one of the lonely widows that Jerusalem had plenty of in those days, and then departed to his world after two years. Yet before he died he managed to leave after him a little boy, my father's father, an orphan of one year. The widow supported herself her whole life from the money which her old husband left her. Her only son wasn't blessed with great talents. He was sickly and weak from the cradle to the coffin. Also in the study of Torah he didn't distinguish himself. To his fortune, his mother opened a small grocery store on the Jewish Street in the Old City when he was fifteen years old, and he hung out in the store around his mother and became, as it were, a shopkeeper. His mother married him off to a pitiful girl, who was also sickly herself, and the two of them with their offspring were sustained by the small store. The sickly woman was fertile. Fourteen sons and daughters were born to her as the years passed, yet all, except my father, died from childhood diseases. It appears that my father also was not very lucky with regard to physical health nor with mental capacities. He was short, shrivelled, bleary-eyed, and coughed continuously even though he never smoked in his life. At a very

young age, in his twenties, he became a teacher at a children's school, and thus he has continued until this very day. He's already seventy-one and hasn't yet retired. The directors of the institute are willing to pay his meager salary until the end of his days and pleaded with him to leave and rest from his labor. But he clings to his teaching with a persistence and energy that doesn't to any degree fit his weak body or soft character. Either from a lack of faith that the directors of the institute would honor their commitments and pay him his salary (as much as I explain to him that retirement benefits are obligatory under the law and that there's no reason to fear in this matter, I'm unsuccessful in easing his fears a hairsbreadth. Just recently he said to me "So, I'd be able to force them to pay after lengthy court proceedings, but where would I get the strength and money for a trial with such tough people as they are. They're able to put me in their small pocket") or from fear of remaining an old valueless man in a world that's strange to him. As a teacher he attracts looks full of faith and adoration from tens of children and his day is full. He teaches them the prayerbook and the Five Books of Law with Rashi's commentaries according to the weekly Torah portion. In his hoarse voice he succeeds in preserving the traditional melody, and the children from three to five years old go out from under his hand extremely knowledgeable in prayers, the grace after meals, and in the Five Books of Law. His only method is oral repetition. He sings by heart the prayers and weekly portions, whether it be the Biblical text or the Jerusalemite Yiddish translation, and the children repeat

after him. He's helped by a sugardrop that he buys regularly at the pharmacy to soothe the throat, and by a thin stick for those children whose imaginations wander to distant worlds. He rarely punishes with his stick. And when his stick falls upon the shoulders of one of the children, he does this with a great deal of gentleness. He's liked by the children and by their parents as well. Every father who brings his five year old child to a higher grade shakes my father's hand with gratitude that comes from the heart. In the majority of cases the father himself learned in his tender youth under Leibel Halper, and those same two years are guarded in his heart as spices in a box. Most of the parents give my father some sort of gift in honor of the occasion, whether a religious book or a gift of money. And my father, his bleary eyes fill with tears at these times with heartfelt feelings. These are the most precious times in his dreary life. Yet it appears that he likes his dreary life. What would he do if he left his teaching? He'd sit like all the old men in front of a page of Talmud? I fear that my father doesn't even know how to properly study a page of Talmud. And he's not very fond of reciting Psalms. It's not in vain that he stubbornly continues in his teaching. And the directors of the institute, which is a grammar school and a Yeshivah in one, plead with him in person to leave and rest, yet are secretly happy at his persistence. They're not only skeptical that they'd find a young teacher as good as he, but he also saves them an additional salary.

From the day I was aware of things, I felt a resentment, mixed with compassion, for my father who humbled himself before others. Not only before the directors of his institute did he behave as a trampled doormat giving them a look of a docile dog wagging its tail, but before everyone, especially my mother. If I were only to describe all the acts of mistreatment committed by my mother on my father, I'd be able to fill a large book. It will suffice if I recall the sugardrops. My father, as was usual, would hand over his whole salary unto his last cent to my mother. He didn't need pocket money. During his life he never spent a penny on cigarettes or tobacco or even on charitable gifts for the poor who used to come regularly to the synagogue and stretch-out their hands. Just on the evening of the Day of Atonement would he receive from my mother a few pennies to distribute amongst the poor and thus be free of the obligation of charity for the whole year. But what was his one luxury? Sugardrops. From the day he could think for himself this was his greatest pleasure. I guess that his great love for sugardrops he acquired during his childhood while in the grocery store of his grandmother. The sugar destroyed his teeth, and already while in his forties he had dentures. And even to satisfy this miserable desire he had to fight hard. My mother was the one who bought the sugardrops, and she was the one who rationed-out for him his daily allowance. I still remember from my distant childhood how he would beg her to add to his daily allowance just a few more small pieces, and she held fast - that he was a great glutton and wasted all their money on sugardrops. Even in my



childhood I felt the lie in her words. Sugardrops were among, and still are, one of the cheapest products there is. Even if she had given him what he asked for, it wouldn't have cost as much as one meager breakfast. Years afterward, when I started to earn a living by my scribe's quill, I freed him from his terrible enslavement to my mother. I would fill his pockets with sugardrops bought with my own pennies. And I still remember the astonished look in his bleary eyes when he saw the large package that I brought him, and his fear and hesitations if he was really permitted to accept and use such a dear treasure as this.

My mother is four years older than my father, which means she is seventy-five at least. Nonetheless, I can't think of her without deep resentment, maybe even outright hate. I was embarrassed of her during my childhood when I began to compare her with other mothers. She was big-limbed, clumsy, tall and fat. Her four chins stood out in my eyes even from early infancy. She had a deep, thick, hoarse voice like a voice that came out of a large, empty barrel. Her large coarse face was always opaque, as if she couldn't stop being angry with herself about the world and her lot. In truth, her lot was better than the lots of most of the Mea She'arim women, in that at least her husband brought to her every month his most humble, yet regular salary. And after I remained the only child from five offspring, three sisters and a brother died from childhood diseases that are apparently part of the blood of my father's family, she was able to look after a small family like ours very well. Families much larger than ours were able to live

on much smaller incomes, and were not angry at the whole world because of it.

As much as I try, I'm not able to recall even a single smile on the fat face of mother. The corners of her mouth were pulled downward in an arched wrinkle. Her blue eyes expressed apprehension and occasionally even fear of her surroundings. That same anxious, defensive look would not disappear from her even when she was to be found between the walls of her house without another living soul with her. Her head was small compared to her large body, and within that little head stirred distant fears. I don't remember her crying. Maybe it's because I was her last offspring and she had used up her crying over the illnesses and deaths of the children who preceeded me. And if she didn't cry, it meant she didn't pity herself. But neither did she pity any other. Usually she wouldn't converse with her neighbors nor with father, and not even with me - her only child, the last remnant of the fruit of her womb. Yet when she opened her mouth and spoke about whomever she was to speak she did it in an especially wicked way. One would not come clean out of her mouth. She always knew how to reveal the most ugly sides of every deed and every person. In all of Mea She'arim a shopkeeper or peddler couldn't be found who was not a corrupt black-marketeer who profiteers and comes only to rob the money of buyers. She suspected every living creature, everyone in the world, even the courtyard cats came only to do her in. She would kick them so they wouldn't draw close to her house and wouldn't empty the pots in the kitchen. And the cats would really stay away from her and from her space as much as they were able to.



To this day I don't know what distant childhood fears crept in her small head, but I'm sure that the most important one was fear of hunger. It appears that she was born and grew up in a household that was of the poorest of the poor. Her whole life she opened her mouth wide and consumed food without ever being satisfied. She was able to sit alone for many hours cracking seeds and nuts with a moundful of shells piling up on her bosom. Most of the time she would sit on the floor completely immersed in cracking shells, the muscles of her fat face moving in grinding and chewing motions, and her blue eyes illuminated in sheer delight. During this time she wouldn't hear anything. I already learned from my distant childhood not to ask her for anything during her cracking time. But she wasn't satisfied with seeds and peanuts. From each fresh bread that she would bring from the store she cut both ends, which was about a third of the loaf, poured sesame oil and salt over it, cut a few cloves of garlic and spread them into the bread pushing them with her fingers, and afterwards sitting on the floor and eating very slowly and with a great deal of satisfaction three, four ends, and around her mouth and chin oil would glisten.

I shrank from and was frightened of her. Even though the truth of the matter was she never hit me. On the contrary, sometimes her blue eyes would fill with a type of softness and she would call for me to sit in her lap and she'd try to feed me whatever she was stuffing into her mouth. I don't remember having ever responded to her even once. My throat would choke from hatred of the food that was in the palm of her hand.

I know I'm not fair towards her. She loved my father in her way and he loved her in his way. With his wretched salary of a teacher of school children she succeeded in managing her house in relative luxury. With her fat body she would cook and clean the house and wash and iron. The house was quite clean. Every day a prepared dish was put on the table. From the cheapest meat, like the head of a cow that was sold for pennies, she'd make many delicacies. The same applied to fish. At almost every lunch she would place on the table some portion of meat or fish, even if ground or stuffed in dough or vegetables, that is to say, just a pinch of meat or fish, which only tantalizingly spiced the flour or vegetable and were not real repasts. It hinted at which delicacies the mouth could have tasted if only real meat had been used. Yet even a meal of this kind was thought of as bourgeois in Mea She'arim. Yeshivah students that lived only from poor allotments wouldn't even taste flour or vegetables flavored with meat or fish from one Shabbat to another.

My mother wouldn't go out of the house except to buy things. She never went out to walk with my father on Shabbat or holidays. They had nowhere to go. Except for my grandparents, they had no relatives. They never went to a wedding or other family celebration, events to which most Jerusalemites were invited frequently. Quite simply, no one invited them. And if my memory serves me, since one's outward appearance is not highly regarded in our neighborhood, my mother didn't even have suitable dresses for such festive events. Until she sewed for herself a black silk dress for my wedding, she would wear a type of buttoned house-robe with an apron over it - in the house and when she

went out for her daily shopping. She had two robes like this, and they were properly patched. Even her Shabbat dress was of the simplest material, and it was thrown over her body like a stretched sack. She had three kerchiefs, one of them for Shabbat and holidays. A single pair of shoes lasted many years for her. For household needs and excursions into the marketplace of Mea She'arim she was satisfied with wooden clogs. Just for the Shabbat meal or to go to the synagogue for the saying of the memorial service would she wear her black shoes.

She would tyrannize my father terribly. If father, for example, wouldn't finish what she placed before him on his plate, she'd throw him a look of warning and that would be enough to make him force himself to swallow the most revolting thing to him. And when she would shout out "Leibel" father would stop instantly in his place as one completely paralysed. They almost never spoke between them. They had nothing about which to speak. Maybe when they lay down at night they would talk to one another, but it appears to me that even there they had nothing to say to one another. Each one of them lived in very confined worlds of their own. There was no contact between these two worlds. And they didn't take any interest in their neighbors. They didn't even have close relatives. Except for a few words exchanged by the table, or regarding dress or laundry, the two would go about the house as quiet as fish.

I slept on the wooden bench, that served at night as a bed, in the hallway. Father and mother slept in the livingroom, each one in a bed remote from the other. All my days I never heard or felt that in the dark of night they ever got together. The only clue that there was ever

closeness of any sort between them was his habit, or more correctly, his task, to take out the pail and empty it at dawn. When he passed by me, the smell of the excrement would hit my nose. It appeared that mother would take care of her needs at night in that pail, cover it, and put it out on the balcony over night. The toilet was in the courtyard, downstairs, shared between five neighbors. Father would rise early each morning with the pail to take care of his needs in the communal toilet and return with the pail empty yet still emitting an awful stench. Father would pray the morning service with the first quorum of the early risers. From the age of seven on, I was dragged behind him each morning to the same service. A morning service of old timers in the tiny synagogues of Mea She'arim. Even during the most bitter winter mornings I'd be forced to go with him with teeth chattering from the cold. This was a daily ritual from which there was no escape. Only after I was thirteen and had already studied in the little Yeshivah, was I exempt from this, for I prayed in the Yeshivah together with the rest of the students at a later hour.

When we returned from morning prayers we would find a table set for breakfast. Mother would have already managed to soft-boil eggs and to cook cereal. We would eat a fresh pita dipped in sesame oil with green olives and a soft egg, and afterwards a plate of sweet, hot cereal. The tasty and satisfying breakfast compensated me for the uncomfortableness of rising early and going to the morning services with father. After breakfast, father would drink a cup of coffee and receive from mother his portion of sugardrops and would go to work pacified and satisfied. I would go to school, to a class higher than the one he taught in the same school. He would grab me with his

small palm and not loosen his grip until we arrived at the big building in which the classrooms were.

For some years now mother has suffered from swollen feet. Every step she takes is painful. One can see the pain in the distortion of the fat face whose fleshiness even old age hasn't softened. Nonetheless, she goes down to the market every day and continues to cook for father his favorite meals and even washes the floor once a week in honor of Shabbat, and does the laundry and cleans the iron beds with kerosine. She doesn't tell a soul about her pain and doesn't try to attract attention by describing the aches of her body. She just groans to herself.

I habitually go to her once a week to bless the Shabbat wine after the morning service. The same refreshments are always prepared for me. A shotglass of Arak\*, spongecake, fish dumpling, a hard-boiled egg and noodle pudding. She's just stopped baking the sponge cake these last few years, she buys one already made. It's simply too difficult for her to knead the dough, to bring it to the bakers, and then to bring it back home. Everything else she still prepares by herself. And when I dutifully ask her how she is, she doesn't elaborate about her pain but just sighs a little and answers: "One gets old, blessed by God...."

She never asks about the welfare of my children. She's angry with my wife. The anger is very old. Maybe from the first moment. Even with regard to her grandchildren she's tightly closed. I doubt

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\*Arak is an aniseed-flavored liqueur.

if she's ever held her great-grandson in her hands, my oldest grandson. Maybe she's seen him up close two - three times. Her expressionless face doesn't light-up at all when she sees her grandchildren, or even me, her only son. Maybe towards father she sometimes reveals some close feeling, and this, in some quick, special glance.

In recent years I tried to break the ice, to appease her a little. I went and bought her a couple meters of velvet and of silk so that she could sew some dresses for herself. She took the gifts from me without even opening them in order to look at what's in them or to feel them, and didn't thank me even with a look of thanks. It was only as I left her house and she accompanied me to the door and said: "At my age I need burial garments, not dresses...."

The velvet and the silk still remain in their packages. She didn't go to a seamstress even after I told her explicitly that I had arranged with the seamstress that I'd pay for the sewing.

I live a distance of a few courtyards from my parents' apartment, and I don't go to them except for the traditional blessing over the wine on Shabbat. My son and daughter don't visit their grandparents except for on holidays, four or five times a year. Mother never visited my apartment her whole life. Father happened upon my apartment only three or four times.

We're a very strange family in a neighborhood where family ties are amongst the strongest in the world.



What induced me to describe in so much length and detail about mother and the relationship between us? - I don't know. Just as I don't know to this very day what closed her in her corporeal cage. Bitter women in my neighborhood have many complaints and addresses towards the Master of the Universe, or turn toward God with all the aspirations and desires of their heart. Mother never lets the name of God pass her lips. And when she sighs to herself, she doesn't roll her eyes upward. The sigh is within herself only.

Occasionally I see her as a mass of nauseating living flesh and am thankful in my heart for the thought that she didn't hold me in her brood lap when I was a child. I don't remember being craddled in her lap. I'm sure that when she nursed me, she held me in her bosom, but afterwards I only remember movements of rejection on her part. Her short, fat hand would always move from the body outward, and never the other way around.

Already at a very early age, maybe when I was still learning the alphabet in father's classroom, I excelled in my beautiful handwriting. Father didn't pay any attention to this. Yet the other children openly expressed their admiration and jealousy. The form of the letters enchanted me. What was amazing was that changes in phonetics and meaning were connected with the ornamental crownlets. Their symmetrical

structure. Every piece of paper that happened my way was immediately filled with letters of different forms. I very quickly became enamored of the title pages of the books that were found in the Mea She'arim synagogues. I would copy them with a great deal of pleasure. I immediately discerned the different forms of printed letters. I especially liked Rashi script, maybe because of their full, rounded movement. I would also copy the decorations of the title pages, the cornucopia, and the naked angels, and Moses and Aaron. At the age of ten - twelve I would paint with colors on a white board whether an "I have met the Lord always before me" chart, that was beside the pillar of the leader of the service, or an "Eastern" chart, or a "When the month of Adar begins happiness is increased" chart, or a chart for welcoming guests into the booth\*. With these pictures I was abundantly successful. Everyone grabbed the pictures from me and framed them under glass. I didn't receive, of course, a single penny for any of these charts. Yet I had a good feeling, that my scribblings were wanted by others. If I had only been brought up in a different neighborhood they would have certainly made me into an artist. In my neighborhood I was made into a ritual scribe and an expert calligrapher.

After I saw different exhibitions of artists in museums in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and especially after I saw circles of artists

\*The booth is erected during the Holiday of Succot, the Feast of Tabernacles. All of these charts appear on the walls of orthodox synagogues.



from the side and I listened a little to their conversations, I'm not so very sorry that I remained in the province of letters and ritual charts. My livelihood prospers and I don't have to flaunt myself with the trappings of art and mystery in order that people buy my work. For my product there are regular customers. The majority of Jews in the United States buy a pair of phylacteries for their children when they become Bar Mitzvah\*, even though the phylacteries afterwards lie around like an unturned stone. In the majority of Jewish houses throughout the world Jews affix kosher mezuzot to their doorposts. The merchants who export phylacteries and mezuzot pay me royally. They benefit and I benefit, and everything works out well.

Yet the greatest practical benefit I reaped from my infatuation with letters was my desire to read. In pursuit of the form, I was drawn to the content. I began with holy books, continued with books of the devout and Hasidic stories,\*\* and finally arrived at secular literature in Hebrew, and then in English. How did I come to know English without going to school or the University? One year I studied with a private tutor, an old American bachelor who made a living by giving private lessons to the youth of Mea She'arim. The teacher himself was a pious Jew. He'd walk around his poor house with a large skull cap made shiny by grease and perspiration on his head. He was one of the regular prayers at the synagogue and even

\*Bar Mitzvah - literally means "Son of a Commandment" and refers to 13 year old boys who "come of age" in Jewish law and are then responsible for fulfilling all the commandments.

\*\*Books of the devout are medieval pietistic works. Hasidic stories developed in the early 18th century by and about the Hasidim, a Jewish sect that emphasized joy, song, and dance, among other things, as distinguished from the "Mitnagdim" who were stricter in their understanding of Jewish law.

among those who went to the daily Talmud lesson which was given every evening in the Great Synagogue by the Yeshivah Master to shopkeepers and workers. To study English reading and writing with him wasn't thought of as a sin; on the contrary, it was regarded a boon for a pious young man to know how to write addresses and know a bit about worldly affairs. Father, who didn't know how to read or write a single foreign letter also countenanced my English studies, especially after I began earning my first pennies from the writing of mezuzot and phylactery portions and I paid for my lessons out of my own pocket. Afterwards I would take an English book with a Hebrew translation on one side and I would compare them verse by verse, sentence by sentence. I began with the Bible and continued on to Shakespeare's plays, and concluded with a few modern novels. I was helped by dictionaries. I worked hard until I was able to read freely. I never had the chance to test my knowledge of spoken English. It's clear to me that I'd stutter some sort of unintelligible English in an incorrect accent. Yet that doesn't trouble me in the least. The books and journals are open before me, and for more than this I have no need.

In my studies of the Talmud and the literature of Rabbinic Authorities I didn't excel. I didn't develop the reputation of a prodigy. Maybe it's because I wasn't terribly drawn toward all that nit-picking. I knew, of course, my portions of the Talmud. It's difficult not to know them after pouring over Talmud for ten years. I was more drawn toward the interpretations of the weekly Torah portion

and to the sayings of the righteous and Hasidic stories. And to this day I'm able to enthrall a group of worshippers in every synagogue and house of study, among whom are real scholars, with pearls of homiletical interpretation and righteous sayings that I pour out of my sleeves, and everyone listens to me with gaping mouths.

"This Asherkeh" - Asher Halper's my name - "is a walking library!"

"Asherkeh has a head of gold ...."

"He utters pearls of wisdom!"

The compliments that are whispered in my presence reach my ears clearly, and I enjoy them to this day.

Frequently I find myself pondering a constantly recurring thought: When and how did I lose my faith? Where's the turning point between one who has a living God and one who is faithless regarding the very essence of God's existence? How does such a great and powerful faith die in one's heart suddenly or even gradually? I have difficulty formulating this question. Every question I ask myself regarding this matter, appears to me as secondary and not touching the core. If I were only to hit upon the correct answer. I'm not able to remember the transitional moment from faith to faithlessness, or even the period in which it happened. I remember one moment when I stood under the wedding canopy. I was then eighteen years old and a few months. I wore a kaftan of Damascan silk with blue and golden stripes. On my head was a new fur hat, a gift from my father-in-law. The bride's maids and bride encircled me seven times. From all sides I saw the

old sweaty faces - it was a hot summer day - I smelled the fragrance of the lit candles that were being held in the hands of the best man. Suddenly I became nauseated, yet the sensation of nausea was not essentially physical. I had fasted that whole day as every upright groom, and was of course, hungry, thirsty, and excited by all the festive events around the canopy. I suddenly felt that everything happening around me was nothing more than a charade, that there was some sort of lie here, some sort of emptiness, behind all that was said, done, and heard. A crazy desire awakened within me to tear off my hat from my head and to cast it to the floor, to remove my glittering clothes and to escape, to escape.... That was some sort of momentary emotional and intellectual spasm. Only I remember it better than any other event of my wedding day before or after.

Moments of nausea like these attack me from time to time to this day. Only I don't escape now just as I didn't escape then from under the poles of the canopy. I don't escape simply because I have no place to which I can escape. It's worth my while to stay put and overcome my revulsion at the lie. Then, too, on the day of my wedding, it was worth my while to stay put. Following the wedding I received my reward in the sweet wine from the Kiddush\* cup, in golden soup, and in roasted pigeons. Each time I stay put I receive some type of compensation. But if I were to flee, I would lose the very ground beneath my feet.

\*The Kiddush cup is the cup of wine which is blessed.

The truth of the matter is that it was a perfect match for me. Others weren't able to understand how I merited such a find, and especially, how Feibish Sofer agreed to match up with such a pitiful family as my father's who was a mere school teacher.

Feibish Sofer is counted among the most esteemed of devout Jerusalemites, whether by virtue of distinguished family lineage or by his own merit. A fourth generation Jerusalemite, of a Hasidic, not Lithuanian family, from famous rabbinic stock. In outward appearance he was nothing more than a very lean person dressed throughout the weekdays in shabby clothes. Even his gait, his manner of holding his head, and his whole demeanor were those of some simpleton or beggar who was too shy to beg. Yet you wouldn't find a soul in Mea She'arim and its surrounding neighborhoods who wouldn't stop before Feibish out of great respect. It was to one's credit if Feibish entered with him into a real conversation. Everyone knew that Feibish was counted among one of the greatest scholars in the city and throughout the entire country. Rabbis consult with him in matters of law. If one collected all his letters of responses to different rabbis throughout all parts of the world one would be able to publish a book of responses that would spark a great deal of attention. And also in matters of mysticism he is a giant to whom all turn. When he expounds before the few elite in matters of the secrets of mysticism, the hall burns in rapt silence.

And this same Feibish doesn't exploit the Torah as a spade with which to dig. He's neither a rabbi nor a salaried judge and he's not even a Yeshivah student who receives a pitiful monthly allowance. He

lives off his wife's work, a woman of valour, who's called by all: "Feibish's Tsirl". Tsirl has a poultry and egg store amidst the market of Mea She'arim and everyone is drawn to her store whether because of her renowned honesty, Tsirl would never cheat a customer out of a single cent, or whether because of their desire to support Feibish. And Tsirl's not an idle housewife entirely free to support her husband. She's a fertile woman, praised be God. In twenty-five years she has brought into the world twelve children, and all are flourishing and establishing glorious Jewish homes in Israel.

This large family lives in a regular apartment in Mea She'arim, that is to say, in a one room apartment, a divided foyer and toilet in the courtyard. My wife is the second of his children. His oldest son married a year and a half before her. In those days Feibish wasn't yet as esteemed and accepted by people as he is now. In the twenty-two years that have passed since then, Feibish has managed to establish the "Flour for Torah Students" factory and his stature rose greatly. He rented a large, deserted warehouse in Mea She'arim to store staples for Yeshivah students. He turns to the "T'nuva"\* administrators on the spot and requests potatoes for less than the wholesale price. He wins the hearts of those very same heretic managers with appealing words and expositions on the redemption, and they respond to him and send to the warehouse a truckful of potatoes at half price. Here young volunteers come and unload the merchandise and distribute it in small

\*T'nuva is one of Israel's largest cooperative food distributors.



sacks, and so, there are potatoes for a complete month for a family at half the price. Similarly, cracked eggs whose price is a third of uncracked eggs, are also acquired. And fruit and vegetables that remain too long in storage, and all types of household cleaning items. Feibish takes the trouble to travel to the produce dealer or factory owner and wins over their hearts with pleasant words, and again - the warehouse is full. And everyone knows - Feibish promises payment for goods on a certain day! Then on that day in the morning hours a check is brought without delays or postponements. And if he's short some money, he just enters two or three banks in the city, and the bank managers are prepared to give him thousands and tens of thousands on the basis of his verbal promise only. Everyone knows, a promise by Feibish in money matters is worth more than all the bank pledges in the world. Feibish does all this without benefiting in any way. His wife does not receive less expensive merchandise from the warehouse at all, since her husband is not a Yeshivah student who lives off of the Yeshivah allowance. The whole operation supplies the household needs and food for about a thousand families with a budget of millions per year and is run without spending one single cent. Everything is done on a voluntary basis. Feibish has a little notepad in which he lists in tiny letters what he received, from whom, and when he has to pay for the merchandise, and the little notepad functions as successfully as tens of clerks in expensive offices at factories with smaller turnovers. No one complains of deprevation, and no one benefits more than what he deserves. And wonder of all wonders! Feibish is able to manage this great warehouse in only one or two

hours a day. The remaining hours of the day are devoted to study law, mysticism, to praying and piety.

I've put the cart before the horse. Feibish was enticed to the match, which no matchmaker had suggested to him, because of my beautiful handwriting. When his daughter was ready to be married Feibish went himself to Yeshivahs to carefully examine the candidates. He would enter the Yeshivah as one who comes to study Talmud for his own pleasure, and in an inclined glance would inspect whomever he could. He'd try to follow their facial expressions during the time of enthusiastic, melodic study. This one would curl his side locks while studying. This one would bite his nails out of mental exertion. This one would shout out loud. And another would whisper to himself. Feibish believed in the science of facial expressions. He certainly also looked at me from the side. I was very quiet in my studies. I didn't move nor did I chant aloud. I would sit and scrutinize the text and sometimes forget myself and begin doodling with my pencil in hand during my studies. He caught me red-handed. He wasn't able to resist himself and he came to see what I was scribbling with my pencil. When he saw the beautiful letters I had drawn unconsciously, he breathed in satisfaction and returned to his place. Two days later the matchmaker came to father and suggested the match. After the engagement he said to me in an incidental way:

"A great gift was given to you from heaven. Drawing letters of Torah is no light matter. On each and every letter celestial worlds are suspended. With one letter was the whole universe created. If you only know how to exploit your gift for holy needs you will attain a very high level...."

Yet he was intelligent enough to also appreciate a level of less stature - a matter of honorably earning a living from the writing of mezuzot and phylactery portions. A Yeshivah student makes a bare living with great difficulty, and a scribe with a quick quill like mine earns abundantly. And it's not a secular livelihood but a holy one. Every Yeshivah student in Jerusalem wished for himself and his offspring such an honorable livelihood. And he wouldn't be embarrassed to say that to me either.

Let's return to the desire to escape. I often feel as a leper trying to hide the leprosy. I know that if they find out about my heresy I'll seem to them worse than a leper. At the same time I feel the anxiety of my deluding them. And the anxiety weighs heavily and oppresses me. I'm often visited by terrible dreams, and one doesn't need to be a great expert in psychoanalysis to see in these dreams the tangible manifestations of this distress.

In more sober terms, I've got to weigh my options. If I remain in this neighborhood and continue growing a beard and wearing the traditional clothes which is accepted by all here, then I'm assured of earning a living. No merchant would buy phylactery portions or mezuzot from a ritual scribe who's an open heretic. The portions that he would write would be invalid. And if I were to shave my beard, and grow long hair, and shorten my coat I'd be completely helpless. I'd be a person without a profession and I'd have to begin from scratch as an apprentice.

However, let's assume I'd manage somehow to get some type of clerking or accounting job in one of the secular institutions - even so, my economic situation would greatly deteriorate from what it is now.

Yet even if we said that for the sake of freedom it's better to forgo financial benefits - what about my social situation? I'd turn into one of those faceless, petty clerks who walks around with an empty, pale face and eyes burning with jealousy and a heart full of pity for one's self and fate. I'd lose my whole social world. In my neighborhood I'm well integrated into the society. Everyone knows me and I know everyone. When I go out into the street I go into a world alive with familiar faces, smiling, and close to my heart. Prayers are just a small part of one's pastime, which also consists of small talk, listening to news, arguing and the like. And how can one give up all of those small pleasures which are connected with the whole Shabbat observance, the traditional dishes to which one is accustomed from childhood, the many festive family occasions, the melodies and dances? Orthodox people are like little children, in that their whole lives are filled with fun and games. And the real fun is that one who takes part in this does so in complete seriousness and with the heart full of true piety. More than once I have been tempted to burst out in laughter at the sight of one who gathers with awe and reverence the four fringes of his prayer shawl in order to kiss them with an audible kiss during the morning prayers. It especially tickles me when the same worshipper is a thick bearded man with a pot belly and large body - the exact opposite of a child engrossed in playing. And likewise, all the adorning commandments connected with the citron and palm branch, the unleavened bread of Passover, in essence, everything to do with Shabbat and holidays, dress and movements. Little insignificant details take on a great significance. One calls the Creator of the Universe into every little detail of the different games.

I enjoy this. No theatre in the world would give me an abundance of pleasure like the theatre in which I live year round. I've read Shakespeare; I've seen a few plays; I've seen a few select films and I can judge without prejudice. The experience which I am privileged to have is non-mediated. Maybe more real because it doesn't have the slightest shade of a game. This and more, my actors I know through and through. Children playing God, and I know all the rules of the game very well.

Not so long ago my father-in-law asked me what I saw at the theatre. I go once or twice a year to a play the critics laud with praise. I go alone. My wife has still never been to a movie theatre or playhouse. She has no desire "to see such nonsense". And it's been a few years that I haven't been going to the theatre furtively. I tell my wife and even my father-in-law. In the playhouse or movie theatre I sit with a skullcap on my head. My father-in-law sees in this a waste of time and money.

"So, what new sensations did you see in your theatre?"

"To my great dismay, nothing but vanities!" He likes that answer. At least his son-in-law isn't a fool engulfed in vanities, and he's not, God forbid, a transgressor or heretic.

"How much did you pay for the ticket?"

"Five pounds" - I really paid fifteen.

"What do you say! With those same five pounds you could have done something really useful. You could have donated them to charity. Well, at least from now on maybe you'll learn a lesson? Not, God forbid, that I think you committed a grave sin, but this doesn't add to the health of one's soul...."

"It doesn't add and it doesn't detract" - I try to balance the situation a little.

"Whatever doesn't add, detracts. This soul that's taken from beneath the Throne of Glory and is sent to the crude, material world, if you don't always add a small good deed or a pinch of sanctity - it will gradually choke...."

"Regarding this matter..." - I make my face stern and let him know I don't like being lectured.

And he stops by giving my hand a pat.

"Ah, don't mind. I didn't mean, God forbid, to lecture you."

My poor father-in-law doesn't know how to handle me. Two of his children and one of his sons-in-law had been corrupted by the secular culture. I observe the commandments. It's best to draw me nearer as much as possible.

I arrived at a sort of acceptable compromise with my surroundings. First of all, with regard to dress. I stopped wearing the fur hat on Shabbat and holidays already two or three years after the wedding. But I wear a black felt hat with a skullcap underneath. I wear a suit and tie most of the days of the year. The coat is long. When I go to the synagogue I wear a halat, that is, a long coat with a belt. I grow a trimmed and well kept beard, and the side locks are swallowed into the beard. I've never walked with an uncovered head, not even at the theatre or at the café where I go almost everyday to play chess. I wear the "four corners".\* And because I'm growing more and more bald

\*"Four corners" refers to the small prayer shawl worn under one's shirt which has fringes on each of its four corners. The "problem of forehead curls" in the next sentence refers to long hair which was frowned upon since it is too close to the styles of non-Jews.



each year I'm exempt from the problem of forehead curls. In my neighborhood a great deal of attention is placed on one's dress and outer appearance. The stricter one is with regard to the traditional dress the greater that person is defended against the enticements of the evil inclination. Dress places a wall between the strictly observant and those who are secularists. The fur hat distances one from all sorts of places of iniquity and licentiousness and draws him closer to the circle of Torah, prayer, and fear of God. Every group of the devout has its own little nuances of dressing and recognizing one another. Some wear a kaftan of Arabic fabric with thin stripes of gold and black, others, especially the Hasidim of Poland and Galacia, a coat of satin or black silk. Some wear red socks on weekdays and white ones on Shabbat, and others only wear black socks period. Some close their shirts with thread, others with a regular button. Some push their pants into their socks, others let them down over their socks, and still others wear puffed pants of a white material, without underwear, whose cuffs are tied above the knee connected to the edge of their stockings. Likewise with hats. The hats of Jerusalemites and Galacianers are of velvet, with a form that's short and round. The hat of Tiberians and others - while also of velvet, has a taller build. Hats of the Hasidim of Gur are felt. And with regard to belts during prayers - there are those who are satisfied with belts sewn into the halat. The Hasidim of Gur and others wear a silken sash above their clothes for prayer. And the old timer Jerusalemites wear a wide Arabic belt over their kaftan. There are even differences in handkerchiefs. And I haven't yet enumerated the special manners connected with prayers, washing of hands, voices, sighs, groans, ways of cleansing one's nostrils and the like.

One is known by the manner of dress and customs which delineate one's social position and belonging. And these matters trouble and occupy many Jerusalemites and are sources of strife and arguments and occasionally even family tragedies. One who aspires to complete one's character, must aspire by the same token, naturally, to perfect one's whole appearance. By doing so, one guards deep-rooted family traditions and steadfastly clings to the ways of the Righteous. And most importantly, this is important due to one's social status. One who shows the whole world that he dresses scrupulously according to the ways of certain pious people, declares by this that he's also making every attempt to behave like the best of them in other, more important matters, like prayers and stricter observance of dietary laws, and Passover laws, and a whole world outlook. There's also a bit of social obligation to act accordingly.

Father, for example, wore the clothes of the least observant, the accepted dress of shopkeepers and common laborers - halat of a simple material and a felt hat on week days, and a fur hat and kaftan on Shabbat. He didn't wear a juba, a red, blue or black velvet cloak without sleeves over his kaftan - a festive dress for Shabbats and holidays. A poor, minor school teacher doesn't wear a juba. Just like a shopkeeper, carpenter, or tinsmith wouldn't make a fool of himself by wearing a juba. In order to be worthy of a juba, the wearer must be of a noble family, or a Yeshivah student completely immersed in Torah and Piety, or one of an honorable status like the director of an institute or treasurer of the community chest, etc.

In contrast to him, my father-in-law, Feibish, wears a juba and all the other fine details of dress that are fitting for the juba. Four

of his sons and three sons-in-law follow in his footsteps and perpetuate the tradition of the juba to the last minute detail. I'm thought of as corrupt, not only because I didn't rise to the level of my father-in-law, but rather because I descended below my father. I'm a man-in-the-middle. Not a middle-man between two different groups of pious Jews, but between strictly observant orthodox and liberated Jews. Two or three generations ago they would have caused me a lot of trouble and thrown me out of every lowest synagogue. A generation ago they would have viewed me as a problem with which they had to come to terms. Today, I'm received with outstretched arms. Yet I'm not granted any great honors since I'm a man-in-the-middle and I'm not included in closed circles, this is self evident. Though, on the other hand, I'm honored because I keep the commandments and because I haven't been enticed into the ways of the heretics and licentious ones. And I'm honored because I can entertain any group of pious people with a pleasant exposition or appropriate saying or excellent tale of the righteous. And I have another great virtue; I have an open hand when it comes to giving money for any type of synagogue needs whether it be to marry a bride or fix benches. I buy the privilege to bless the Torah and bestow it on other congregants whose learning exceeds their money. At all three Shabbat meals I bring a bottle of drink. And all of my contributions cost me less than a theatre ticket or chess game at the café. And if some Yeshivah student is in need of a few pounds, he knows to turn to me. And up 'til now I've never lost a single cent from any of those various loans that I gave to sundry students.

My membership in the pious community doesn't cost me much money.

My wife Reizel is similar to her mother Tsirl, the woman of valour.\* A handsome woman big-boned, plump yet not fat. Not like her prolific mother, she only brought into this world a son and daughter. And this is my fault. If she had a truly observant husband she'd have been no less prolific than her mother. Already after the birth of the girl I told her that I didn't want more than one more child. I said this from purely selfish reasons. I explained to her that I didn't want to turn into a slave to my children. I like the luxurious life. I am not willing to work at my profession more than four hours a day. And I need money in order to buy secular books that cost a lot of money. I want to be free in the afternoons to play chess and in the evenings to read my beloved books. More than this: I laid bare all my cards in the third year of our marriage. I said that I had lost my faith, yet I was willing to observe the framework. I promised her I wouldn't desecrate the Shabbat nor would I do anything that might upset her, her family, or the neighbors even within the walls of the house. I explained to her that if we wanted to continue to be married she had no other choice than to come to terms with reality. The household would continue to function like all the other households in the neighborhood. The Shabbat would be observed in her

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\*"The Woman of Valour" refers to Proverbs 31 in which are mentioned the attributes of "the ideal woman".

house no less than in her father's house. I myself would continue to pray in the same synagogue as her father. Aside from my private room I wouldn't be a bit different than any other person. And even in my room I wouldn't sit with an uncovered head and I wouldn't desecrate the Shabbat in any way.

For some weeks she went about with a frozen and tense face until she finally reached a decision. She didn't confer in her struggle with either of her parents, since she already knew beforehand their response. She struggled with herself day and night until she decided that it was best to preserve the framework of marriage. The possibility of being the object of pity and pious gossip by all deterred her. She knew what awaited her as a divorced woman with a small child in her arms: some widower or divorcee twenty or thirty years older than she burdened with children from his previous wife. In addition to this, she could expect a difficult life without even being sure that the man would be better than me. I treated her with respect from the very first day of our marriage. I never rebuked her or got angry with her. Whenever there were differences of opinion between us I would contrast the points of both sides. I would articulate the pros and cons of her position with the pros and cons of my position and then ask her to make the final decision. In this way she always realized that I was right. And she recognized that I valued her as an equal and never relied on the prerogatives of a husband to force her to my opinion. As is the way of other orthodox women in our neighborhood, she only learned how to read and write in a special orthodox school for girls. She learned the

prayers and the blessings, and the Tza'aina Uraina\* in Yiddish. Her mother would also read for the girls Nachalat Zvi and Menorat Hama'or in Yiddish. Yet she heard in her house many conversations in matters of Torah and piety and she had a broad background, surprising for women of our area, in real life matters. She spoke fluent, correct Hebrew. Where did she acquire such Hebrew? She actually absorbed it from the air. In her parents' house they spoke Yiddish and in our house we've continued in Yiddish, between ourselves and with our children. Yet when she questioned me about the news and daily matters, she changed to Hebrew. And I answered whatever I answered in Hebrew. And she understood it all and asked astute questions and raised thoughts no less intelligent than those that are raised in newspaper articles. For many years I've had a subscription to the daily orthodox newspaper, mostly for reasons of social prestige. Reizel read it regularly from the first line to the last. In addition to this I would read the morning and evening papers.

Reizel was contented with domestic and family concerns. Her many brothers and sisters, with their offspring and their family gossip, supplied her with material of adequate interest for her needs. Every day she would hop over to her mother's store and help her in her work, and incidentally hear from her mother all that was happening and brewing in the pots of her in-laws. At every family gathering, from circumcisions to Bar Mitzvahs and weddings, she would take the most active part. It was she who counseled all in matters of dresses

\*Tza'aina Uraina is a version of the Bible with homiletic additions read primarily by orthodox women for moral instruction. The two books mentioned in the next line are similarly for moral instruction.



and shoes, and she knew to which doctor to go if a child were ill and in which public clinic one could get good care for free. Were it not that she was diligent in guarding my personal privacy, she would have turned the house into a family center. But since she knew how I busied myself in my private room she tried to discourage the family from visiting us.

"Asherkeh can't stand noise, not even the quietist of conversations when he's immersed in his work...."

"Shhh! Asherkeh's working...."

"Don't you see that Daddy's working?"

Thus it was with her family and also with our children during all these years. She preferred to run about the households of her family that needed her as long as they didn't come over to our house and didn't, God forbid, violate my private space. She knew very well what existed in my private space. It was she who straightened my room and my bookcase, and it was she who assiduously made certain that the terrible secret would remain between us alone.

In any event, after she arrived at the general conclusion to safeguard our marriage, she did all she could to be a good and faithful wife to her husband. I never heard from her mouth one complaint of any kind that I was occasionally absent from public worship, or that I would get up from the table without saying the blessing after the meal. She was very punctilious in observing even the most minor of commandments, and regarding me she came to terms and accepted me as I am. And what's even more surprising - one could see

in her eyes looks of jealousy towards her sisters and sisters-in-law who were burdened with little children; and despite this she never raised even the slightest complaint against me. Her female relatives would always wish her a speedy recovery and roll their eyes heavenward that the Holy One have mercy on her and give her many sons and daughters like any healthy woman. And she would act pious and add her prayer to theirs. She made sure that her family would know that the doctor found some sort of problem and that she "goes to doctors" in order to be blessed with more children. And she even "went to doctors" in order to get birth control devices.

Reizel was subjugated to me heart and soul, and I'm grateful to her for that. She tried to cook my favorite foods, and was satisfied that she was able to go from time to time to her mother's house to taste her favorite foods. She understood with a hidden sense when her presence was needed and when I preferred to be alone. When I closed myself in my room, she'd never disturb me except to bring me Turkish coffee and even then never before asking from behind the door if I wanted a cup of coffee. After the children were married and left the house I remained in my room at nighttime also. She slept in the living room, and I on the couch in my study. This was a comfortable arrangement for both of us. I'd read 'til after midnight, and she'd go to bed at nine and contemplate in the dark whatever she contemplated until she fell asleep. I never saw her naked. Even when we slept in the living room, I upon the bed by the right wall and she upon the bed by the left wall, she'd never undress in my presence. She'd always

undress in the dark by her bed. Her night gown revealed no more than what her day dress revealed. She is scrupulous about cutting her hair even to this day. And her shaven head is well tied by a tight kerchief even when she sleeps. Except for her face, neck, and hands, every part of her body is covered, as is proper, for a modest and upright lady. The most orthodox husband would not find in her dress or mannerisms even the slightest blemish regarding her modesty.

I've read a lot about matters between a man and a woman. This subject occupies most of the authors of the world. I don't know how to say what there is to say about this. If I try and discuss this matter based on my own experience, I simply wouldn't know what's being spoken of. When I was a lad amongst the Yeshivah boys I naturally heard all sorts of obscene stories and a variety of conversations and hints about matters between men and women that would awaken waves of laughter or brought a deep blush upon one's face. Scattered among the Talmud pages can be found many sayings that deal openly with this very same subject, and I too was attracted to them like the rest and I blushed while I read them. Similarly, matters of marriage arrangements and everything connected with them was quite a lively topic among the seventeen and eighteen year old Yeshivah boys. Yet when these things reached the point of materialization in my life, I didn't sense any connection between all that was hidden behind the gigglings of the Yeshivah boys, or what was hidden behind the Talmudic passages on this same subject, and what I felt. I saw Reizel once before the engagement. A pleasant young woman of seventeen - Reizel's younger than me by three quarters of a year - with a bright, pretty face, large brown eyes, and two braids of shiny brown hair that fell on her chest. This was

during the official interview before the engagement. The adults left us alone so that we might speak amongst ourselves and hear each others' voices well. I didn't notice my heart beating nor did I even blush much. I just felt uncomfortable that I had to speak for the sake of speaking. Everything I thought then to myself was: she's a pretty bride and will certainly be a good wife, and if she agrees to the match I'd be very happy since girls like her don't come along often.

After the engagement I saw her two or three times from a distance, and again didn't feel any special throb of the heart. I almost didn't have any sinful thoughts. I almost couldn't imagine myself lying with a woman. I had never even had an emission even though I was a full eighteen years old. And not because I didn't feel the mysteries of the body. I had dreams about naked bodies, and in the dreams I knew sweet and terrible fears. Yet in all of those dreams I didn't see a single face of a woman, or image of a girl. There were different embraces that were not at all clear to me. Yet in all of those forbidden dreams the image of a girl or woman that I knew or didn't know never appeared. And the strange thing was that I'd forget the dream instantly. Just in some hidden corner of my consciousness did I know that I dreamt something strange and improper, I knew that live limbs touched live limbs in some sort of forbidden and vile way, and that those limbs and the same forbidding contact were related in some way to me and to my secret dreams. Yet when the time came I knew I could cast away these dreams into the bin of forgetfulness, and that they have no hold directly or even indirectly on my everyday life. And how much the more so that it didn't occur to me to connect them in some way to Reizel or some other girl.

Yet the astonishing surprise, I wouldn't say the disappointment, was awaiting me the night of our marriage. According to all of the ideas that were embedded within me, due to the influence of my surroundings, this event should have been something very important for me. The Yeshivah boys saw this as the climax of adolescence. I myself imagined this as some great thing that would sweep my body and soul together. In actuality, the whole thing passed as something utterly tasteless. Father spoke to me that same day about the great commandment that fell upon me. Even my father-in-law took me aside and said to me whatever he said about the subject. The things I heard from their mouths, more than exciting me or startling me awakened within me disapproval. I was silent and didn't react to their words even with a nod of the head. When I found myself in one room with Reizel after the wedding, both beds by either wall apart from one another, with new bed linens, and a small shaded lantern burning on the chest of drawers. It is Shabbat eve, and one can neither light nor extinguish. A strange silence falls upon both of us. Reizel wears her bridal dress, with braids shorn and her tight kerchief on her shorn head, not knowing what to do with herself. All that we both know is that we are to get undressed and go to bed. We both know that we have to fulfill the commandment. Yet how does one do that? How can one at all just get undressed before the eyes of the new partner? If they at least hadn't left the lantern lit!

And here Reizel came to my help. She made herself heard in a slightly trembling voice: "You should turn with your face toward the wall until I undress...."

I did as she requested and thanked her in my heart that she brought me out of my stupor. After a short time she said, and this time she found a playful tone to her voice: "Now you can undress, I'm lying down with my eyes closed...."

I undressed slowly and didn't give a single glance toward her bed. After I stood in my undershirt and shorts I didn't know what to do with myself. I knew that it was my responsibility to cross over to her bed in order to fulfill the commandment. Yet my feet were as if paralysed and nailed to the floor. Again Reizel brought me out of my stupor. This time she chuckled out loud and said: "Come Asherkeh" - the first time she had called me by my full name - "I'm waiting for you...come! Don't be shy! It's a commandment...." I went to her bed. She lifted the blanket in order to make room for me beside her. Her night gown was hiked up, and in the flickering light I saw a round belly and two thighs. I immediately became erect. When I laid beside her she grabbed me tightly and looked for my mouth to kiss. She kissed my moustache and my beard. I immediately got on top of her. She opened her legs. When I entered into her slowly she let out a soft cry. I tore her hymen with my first push. Immediately afterwards she began moving her stomach up and down and sideways and her insides, which were dry, began to get more and more moist. I immediately began going in and out and she held me tightly, I really felt her nails in my back, and she began groaning and whispering: "More! More! This way! Harder! Hard, hard...."

And I pushed and pushed with all the strength of my body and she jolted within herself and remained lying there without moving. I



needed to continue a little longer for myself, then she awakened afresh and again began tossing her stomach this way and that and only then did my semen spill out. And she held me close to herself even after I emptied myself, and tossed herself this way and that until she groaned again in great pleasure and ceased with me. After I got off of her she handed me a small towel and took for herself a small towel, and then covered herself with the blanket up to her neck. A short while later she said: "Good night, Asherkeh...."

"Good night, Reizel...."

She fell asleep instantly in her bed, and I laid a long time in my bed awake and thinking. I felt as if I had been deceived. That's all? People make such a big deal of this? Not that I didn't enjoy it while it lasted, it's just that the pleasure seemed wretched and small compared to what I expected. And there was another thing that disturbed me: the scent she emitted. This was something new for me. Not very pleasant. And I haven't been able to free myself from that unpleasantness even to this day. Every time I search my memory in order to compare that smell with other unpleasant smells, or to any type of comparable smell, I can't think of anything. That smell awakens within me a revulsion I myself can't understand. And there's something in this revulsion which I felt in my childhood when father used to pass by every morning with the pail, even though there's no similarity in the smells.

In any event, from the first night after the wedding unto this very day I only feel I'm fulfilling my husbandly duties. I do enjoy it a little while it lasts, yet I don't have any expectations before the act, and afterwards I always feel the old lingering revulsion from

that same smell. To my good fortune, we've agreed between us, as if it was understood beforehand, that I'd come to Reizel only on Friday night. And since two weeks each month she's forbidden to me since she's ritually impure, then I have to fulfill my personal obligations only twice a month. This arrangement isn't so bad for me. I fulfill my obligation as is required, and Reizel most of the time gets to the point two or three times during the deed to emitting groans of pleasure and shudders of the body. I sense by the way she looks at me that she'd be grateful to me if we had intercourse two or three times a week, yet she accepts the present situation with understanding, and never hinted to me even in the slightest way that I don't satisfy her in this way according to her needs. After I read in books about sexual matters, I learned that unknowingly and unintentionally, all those years I was doing just what was necessary for a man to do in order to bring the woman to an orgasm. If only Reizel read like I did those same forbidden books, she'd certainly censor it as "all that nonsense", and if someone came and told her that because of her orgasms twice a month she puts up with all of my whims she'd laugh right in his face. Crazy ideas!

When I thought a little about that, I arrived at the same conclusion. With Reizel marital fidelity, implanted in her from birth, is more important than any of "those" matters between us. One doesn't divorce a husband unless the situation is unbearable. A husband is like a father, mother, son or daughter. And if, for example, I were to go about the house with an uncovered head, or desecrate the Shabbat, all the orgasms in the world wouldn't help me a bit. She'd

leave me and return to her father's house. Even now after twenty-eight years of marriage.

And with regard to my children, my daughter Rivka and my son Aaron David, I feel a little distant from them and what's worse than this - apathetic. I'm a bad father. Not in the way most people think. My Aaron David didn't lack anything at all by the standards of the community. He studied in a day school and a Yeshivah. At sixteen I sent him to do courses in clerking. He studied in the evening accounting, typing, English and business correspondence. And even before his wedding he received a position in a new, orthodox bank. The manager of that bank is his in-law, R.\* Ya'akov Pollack. My son-in-law, Rivka's young husband and the son of R. Ya'akov Pollack, is the one who got him this respected position. Both young couples live far from us in a new neighborhood of young Agudat Yisrael\*\* couples west of Jerusalem. In order to get to them one has to be tossed around on two different buses for about a whole hour. They live in nice, large apartments, three rooms and a hallway, in many storied buildings. There they have a large synagogue where they

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\*"R." refers to the Hebrew "Rav", "Rabi", or "Reb" and while it may mean the person is a rabbi, more often than not it is just an honorific title of respect.

\*\*Agudat Yisrael is an orthodox political party in Israel.

study a page of Talmud in the evening under the direction of the rabbinical college dean and where public celebrations occur during holidays, festivals, the three meals of Shabbat, and weekly post-Shabbat festivities. Almost all of the residents of that area are young men who came out of orthodox communities, and who work as clerks in city institutions. They scrupulously observe the Shabbat. In every house there is an automatic switch to turn the lights on and off during Shabbat. Radios fall silent on Shabbat, and one doesn't bring a television into the house due to the ban that was placed on them by the court of the orthodox community.

The distance and the difficulties in the journey created, and were maybe just translated into actuality, the distance between us and them. The situation is very difficult for Reizel, who treks over to them once or twice a week. I see them once every six weeks, or even once every two months only. That doesn't bother me. Reizel really suffers physically from this. She's torn between her attachment to her children, her very offspring, who live far away. If she wasn't so connected to her parents' house, she'd certainly have pushed me to uproot ourselves to an apartment closer to the children. Now she's dreaming about installing a telephone. She already gently raised the idea that it'd be worthwhile for us to install a telephone in our house and to help Aaron David get one in his. Rivka already has a telephone. And when she begins "to get ideas" then it's sure to follow that she won't calm down until I fulfill her request. Sooner or later she'll have a telephone and she'll be able to talk to her heart's content with her daughter and daughter-in-law and her grandchildren that will come in good time. Both the daughter and daughter-

in-law go about with swollen bellies. The only thing that the poor woman doesn't understand is that the telephone will only distance her from them. Without the telephone she still troubles herself to go to them once or twice a week. With a telephone she won't see them more than once or twice a year.

That's the trouble of many in our area. The old Jerusalemites always excelled in their strong family ties. Now, the package has come apart. All the young Yeshivah students who aren't supported by Yeshivah funds move to distant communities, and the physical distance causes an emotional and spirital distance, or augments and deepens that distance.

I'm not so terribly unhappy myself. On the contrary, I have a rather good feeling that I got rid of my obligation toward my offspring in a smooth and pleasant way. My spacious house is quiet and given completely over to my use. In the eyes of others I'm an exemplary father. I took care of a good match for my daughter and an excellent profession for my son. More than this, I educated both of them in the spirit of Torah and piety. And when they got married I participated with a generous contribution of buying beautiful apartments for the couples. What else could one ask for from a devoted and faithful father?

The truth is, because of the duality and the lie in my lifestyle, a gulf, hidden from the eye, was created between me and my children. They sensed very well the heresy in me. They never heard a derogatory word or a renunciation of my tradition or commandment, or saw me transgress in any way. They certainly quickly felt the difference between me and other fathers. Every orthodox father in the neighborhood doesn't cease lecturing his offspring, and he doesn't stop

from keeping an eye on them in the synagogue so they didn't become engaged in an idle conversation during services and skip, God forbid, the response of an "Amen" after the reader. I didn't pay too much attention to Aaron David's behavior in the synagogue. And instead of being thankful that I didn't come down too hard on him, he held it against me. And certainly the forbidden books in the closed bookcase didn't escape his or Rivka's attention. It's difficult to hide a thing like that from the eyes of children. But they never asked me a single thing about them. Maybe they didn't grasp the complete significance of such books. They just knew that their father was different from all the other fathers in the neighborhood. Something's not quite right with his mind. He closes himself up in his special room. He possesses locked bookcases. He doesn't lecture his children. He doesn't pray with excessive intention. He smiles strangely when he hears things that bring others to be deeply impressed and to sigh piously.... Reizel's the one who was strict about having the children bless the meal before putting food in their mouths, pray properly and not go four steps without washing their hands. The role of educator was taken from me. The children certainly saw all this and smelled something rotten in the air.

Yet all of those same startling hidden things never came to the surface. The neighbors, and especially the children, know very well how to keep unpleasant family secrets. In many houses in the area one can find people affected to various degrees with mental illnesses. The majority of older Jerusalemites are offsprings of strange types. A well-adjusted person of sound mind, even if he's an old Talmudic scholar, wouldn't leave his birthplace and family and come alone to Jerusalem, as did father's grandfather or hundreds of others like them.



Whoever came here is, by necessity, eccentric in some way. And this is very much manifest in their offspring. But everyone learned how to keep household secrets from strangers. There are but very few of the old Jerusalemite families that are totally spotless. I myself know tens of families in which one of their sons or daughters committed suicide or tried to commit suicide. And between the walls of mental hospitals Jerusalemites are there in a higher per cent when compared with the rest of the population. And in many houses one can find many queer and wretched people who should be in a mental ward. That's the price that the grandchildren and great-grandchildren have to pay for their grandparents' whims. Just as I read in an American journal this symptom is well known among the descendants of their founding pioneers. But, as was mentioned, Jerusalemites know very well how to conceal this affliction and hide it from the eyes of others. Good manners dictate not to touch upon the subject, not even in a round-about gossip way. My family was spared this affliction because of the high rate of child mortality. Had more of them stayed alive, some of them and their offspring would have most certainly been affected by this disease. I, apparently, am a healthy remnant from a sickly stock.

My son and daughter also sensed what they sensed and decided in their hearts, as is the way with good Jerusalemites, to cover up and hide the trouble even from themselves. Poor father suffers from the most embarrassing disease - he's different from all other people. Yet much to their surprise they found out that father plays the game of concealment very well. Father is quite accepted by others. Everyone assesses him as one whose luck is with him. Everyone ingratiates himself with him. Everyone listens with great attention to his words. Father plays a double game with his

children and with others. It's still possible to deceive others, but not the children at home.

I let Aaron David study in grammar school and at the Yeshivah and wear clothes more orthodox than mine. Until he was fifteen he grew long curly sidelocks. Afterwards, he rolled his sidelocks like a button above his ear. Nonetheless, he remained devout in his heart and soul. I kept track of him from an early age. I looked for a spark of special talent for something. He was average in everything. If I had only seen even the slightest spark of a noble mind I might have destroyed his faith and drawn him to the secular world of the forbidden books. Since I saw what I saw I said to myself that I couldn't destroy his life. He's a product of his environment down to the last stitch. He'd have to stay in the fold of the community in all senses. His faith is mechanical. He doesn't embrace the arms of the world with flights of his imagination. His faith is a type of shield and not a chariot of fire. Therefore, I didn't want him to remain a Yeshivah student and live a poverty-stricken life. Only one with both faith and imagination is capable of enjoying the poverty-stricken life of a Yeshivah student. At first I thought I could teach him to be a ritual scribe. Yet I immediately saw how heavy his hand was when he wielded the quill, and I arrived at the conclusion that he'd be an excellent average clerk.

At fourteen his rough face (he inherited the structure of his face from his grandmother, that is, my mother) beamed forth some sort of strange spiritual light. For a short time I was given to the illusion that I had erred in judging his character, that here was a young man bursting forth and growing with a great soul and I almost made an unforgivable mistake - to initiate him into my world. I don't know what really stopped me at the last moment. Maybe the silent feeling that we speak different

languages. With my father-in-law Feibish, for example, I feel that I speak one language. Despite the vast difference between us, we both understand very well what's said between the words, and a small hint is enough for both of us to burst out laughing. Not so with my son, my flesh and blood. In every one of those conversations I tried to conduct with him during that short time, I felt that an invisible axe cut the connection between what I was saying to him and what he answered me. I stopped myself in time. I didn't find in him the smallest hint of that whirlpool of thoughts and feelings that raged deep within me. I soberly decided his future.

And indeed about two months later, it seems, the same light that beamed forth from his face was extinguished. He returned to be the ordinary boy who sways when he prays and shouts out the prayers, more to make an impression on others and less to silence the storm of longing in his heart. His heart did not roar during services not at any other time. Despite this, and maybe precisely because of this, he used to give a look of reproach at my cold manner of praying and my perfunctory stance during services.

Involuntarily I began to feel a resentment of his every movement. I occasionally saw in him my mother in her crass bearlike movements. And he apparently felt this and responded measure for measure. If truth be told, his feeling of contempt for me had a basis. In his eyes I am a hypocrite who deceives others, will inherit hell, and is deeply immersed in impurity and heresy. But all I have against him is his coming to terms with the surroundings in which he was raised and educated, and his identification heart and soul with all the things he heard from his teachers, his rabbis, his mother and his whole family. It's as if I'm angry with him for not sinning as I did.

He's got a healthy spirit to the point of being nauseating. He does everything, up to the smallest movement, he thinks the neighborhood requires of him. When he opens his mouth in a group of people, he always says the most predictable things, something that neither offends anyone nor provokes any type of thought; it's accepted by all and known by any ordinary person. And he's satisfied with himself, his body, and everything that's his. He's not even thirty and already his paunch is swelling and growing larger daily. His face is pudgy and he's very pleased with himself. His eyes sparkle in sparks of a young bull. When he eats one can hear from a distance his chewing and the noise of his tongue against the roof of his palate. He condescendingly pats the back of his young pregnant wife and she melts with pleasure. I'm completely on edge in anger which I can't understand when I'm around him. His every movement irritates me.

Occasionally I have pity on him, as one pities a beast for being a beast, and I fault myself for not opening his eyes at the right time and not shaking him up and moving him to come to some sort of an original thought. I find fault with myself for egotism. It's much simpler and easier to allow another, even if he is your own son, your own flesh and blood, to leave him embedded in his dunghill, than to try and get him out of it. I did what I did from personal comfort, and behold, the excellent fruit!

Yet from this I'm reminded of my two brothers-in-law, who were corrupted religiously and the comparison between him and them. The superficial comparison calms my conscience.

Everything I did with regard to him was only for his own good.

My two brothers-in-law are two open wounds in the heart of my father-in-law Feibish. About eighteen years have passed since the two fled from their father's house, and the deed is still fresh and the shame is still as strong as on the day it happened. When I married Reizel, Moshe was thirteen and David was twelve. I still remember Moshe's festive Bar Mitzvah which was about three months after the wedding. Feibish bought him for his Bar Mitzvah a new fur hat, fitting for a respectable family and agreeable to people. The fur hat fit Moshe surprisingly well. The circle at the edge added a kind of halo of light to the beautiful young face which was filled with a spirituality not of this world. I really couldn't take my eye off that young head in it's fur hat. There was some sort of touching contradiction between the tender, youthful smile, and respectful air of piety and holiness which radiated from the new fur hat. The women melted: "The Divine Presence covers him...." A year later they also bought a fur hat for David, and his face also, it seemed, shone with the radiance of the Divine Presence. All of Feibish's children stand-out in that they have faces of abounding spirituality, especially the males among them. I closely followed after the two boys, and except for their special beauty, I didn't notice anything unusual about them. They studied in a Yeshivah like the rest of the youths of their age and didn't distinguish themselves from the rest in any way for the worse or for the better. When Moshe reached the age of eighteen the matchmakers began coming and going. Very quickly a good match was found for Moshe and the date of engagement had already been set. Three days before the engagement Moshe and David disappeared from the



house without leaving behind them any sign of their escape.

The matter became known to me only on the night of the second day. The parents reacted in accordance with the ways of old time Jerusalemites. First of all one must guard the secret so that it not be publicly known. Even before me they were cautious. Only when they despaired at the return of the children did they turn to me. We tried to track them down without raising the neighbors' suspicions, but in vain. Two days passed of running around the police department and hospitals. On the third day they received a letter signed by the two. The letter fell like the blow of an axe on Feibish's head. They wrote in it - no less and no more - that they had stopped believing in the faith of their upbringing and couldn't find for themselves an easy way except to leave home. And please don't worry about them, they'd find their way in life. And please don't look for them, since they couldn't be found, and if they could - they wouldn't return home.

I don't have to describe what Feibish went through those days. Yet even I, who secretly enjoyed what had happened, was completely shocked. How did I enjoy it? It's very simple. During that time I was just beginning the first stages of changing my dress, and I received a lot of advice and lectures as I deserved. And here it became apparent to them that next to their two jewels I was by comparison the most righteous of the generation. Even my Reizel, who accepted upon herself the burden of our agreement as if a demon forced her, began to look at me afresh. My status in the family rose with the disaster and the disgrace... but at the same time, I was as agitated by the deed no less than the miserable parents. The two escapees had been fortunate to receive since their infancy family warmth that very few other children enjoy. The house full of children was full of laughter and bright hearty faces. One would almost never hear a rebuke, not from



Feibish's lips who was by nature as tender as a soft reed, and not from the lips of his wife Tsirl. The older children cared for the younger and played with them and helped them at every step. Feibish is the one who radiated with his very existence that atmosphere of generosity and efforts to help others. Every one of the children, even to the smallest pipsqueak amongst them, knew their obligations and tasks and cheerfully fulfilled them. The entire household was conducted like in a good fairy tale.

What then brought the two most loved and respected sons to rise and leave all that goodness and blessing and to seek their fortunes out in the wilds? What would they find there that they couldn't find here? The loss of faith? Good. What sort of new faith would they find in place of the old? Since without believing in something, one's not a person - let it be a seventeen, eighteen year old who leaves the safe nest to wander in a barren desert. What are they seeking in the new place, and what does one find there? This question troubled me for many years. Maybe because I never went to look for new beliefs. Maybe because I envied them bitterly that they dared to do what I hadn't dared to do.

Two or three years afterwards there were some good Jerusalemites who took special pleasure in throwing salt on Feibish's wound and brought him fresh regards from his two jewels who were hanging out in Tel-Aviv. One saw David walking around in public with a head full of wild hair. Another saw Moshe smoking in the street on Shabbat, and a third saw him walking with loose women on a Tel-Aviv beach. In short, every time he received regards it was worse than the previous one, and poor Feibish would hear what he heard and be silent as a rock. Once Feibish grabbed me by my shoulders and said to me: "Asherkeh, do me a favor and hop over to Tel-Aviv. Maybe you can influence them?"

"How will I influence them? To return home?"

"No, Askerkeh. I'm not that stupid. They're lost in this world and in the next. But maybe you could convince them to come once to the house. Even if just once for the Passover Meal, or something like that...."

"That they should come as they are!"

"What, will they cut their hair and grow a beard and sidelocks? Of course they should come as they are. If the Lord in Heaven says: 'An Israelite, even though a transgressor, is still an Israelite' then what do you want from a mere mortal father?"

Feibish would cite verses and explanations especially when he was in very excited states. He did this deliberately in order not to reveal his agitation.

I travelled to Tel-Aviv. At first I didn't know where to find them. I looked in all sorts of places that came to mind: at the beach, different coffee houses, in the area of Beit - Brenner. Until I tried my luck at the study of a Jerusalemite rabbi who has followers in Tel-Aviv and the surrounding vicinity. I presumed that all sorts of Jerusalemites that were around Tel-Aviv would frequent this courtyard, and might have spotted them in the city? Were they not the source of the occasional gossipy regards? And from the afternoon-evening services I received from one of the worshippers their address. It was a dark and mildewed room in a southern Tel-Aviv neighborhood. The stifling heat was unbearable and the smell of rancid frying hung in the decrepit apartment. The owner informed me that both of the boys served in the I.D.F. and that they would be found in the room only on their days off, sometimes Moshe, sometimes David, and sometimes both of them together. I left them a letter and returned that same night to Jerusalem.

I didn't tell Feibish about the room and how it looked, but I told

him that they were serving in the army. When he heard that, his face lit up: "That means that they're not just dropouts like I thought...."

Had they stayed in their father's house, they would have been exempt from service. I myself got out of it my whole life by claiming I was a Yeshivah student. During the War of Independence when there were terrible shellings on Jerusalem I still studied in the Yeshivah, yet I was already as far away from the Yeshivah in my thoughts as is East from West. Afterwards I didn't have a bit of a guilty conscience due to my evasion. Maybe because I never really felt myself to be a part of the secular society, and political matters or messianic hopes didn't interest me at all. I said to myself: "In any event, I wouldn't do much good in the army, so why should I be pushed into troubles?" If they call me, I'll go since there'd be no alternative. I won't lie to them." Yet since they weren't disturbing me from living my comfortable life why should I be oppressed and look for difficulties and troubles of training and a military life? Now I felt a bit remorseful. Here they are, they had the strength to do what you didn't! Yet the matter didn't bother me or my afternoon nap.

Incidentally, I'm used to sleeping for an hour everyday after lunch. The sleep helps me digest the meal and also divides the workday before lunch from the leisure time which includes a game of chess and reading of books in the afternoon. Everyday it's as if I live two days, and it's all thanks to the afternoon nap. And one of the reasons I evaded the service was undoubtedly secretly due to the fear that while serving in the reserves I wouldn't be able to sleep in the afternoons and I wouldn't feel as if there were two days in one, and there wouldn't be a friend to play chess.

Anyway, David and Moshe appeared one day, after they had exchanged with me some letters, as guests in their father's house. They came on a week-

day. They came in the morning and left in the evening. They walked around in their army uniforms. Both were sergeants. Feibish was practically speechless. They both went with him to the synagogue for the afternoon and evening prayers. The worshippers inspected them from top to bottom. In everyone from the neighborhood, also within me, there's a sort of hidden esteem for military uniforms. And in addition to this, for the rank of sergeant, so that all in all such a great disaster didn't happen to Feibish. It's very possible that the two even observe the dietary laws and don phylacteries in the army; after all, the army does have lads who are strictly observant.

Afterwards the two came to the Passover Meal. And as the years passed, they popped in from time to time on weekdays to visit for a couple hours, whether alone or together. They didn't want to be in their father's house or the neighborhood on Shabbat, since it was difficult for them to give up smoking. Moshe's the one who revealed that secret to me. And I really could sympathize with him. I myself was tormented greatly until I was able to overcome my desire to smoke on Shabbat. When one believes in the sanctity of Shabbat and in the great sin of desecrating the Shabbat, one's almost unable physically to smoke a cigarette on Shabbat. If one doesn't have that strong belief, however, it's very difficult to resist such a strong temptation. After I leased the adjoining apartment and built in it a new bathroom, I began to deceive myself that from now on I'd be able to smoke in the bathroom on Shabbat. It's quite probable that this delusion spurred me to lease the adjoining apartment and build for myself a separate bathroom and toilet. When Shabbat came I'd always be seized by restlessness due to the absent cigarette. My hands would begin to shake. Not during services at the synagogue and not in the street and not at home in front of Reizel and the children but when I was alone in my room or when it

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appeared to me that I could sneak out to the bathroom to smoke a cigarette without being seen. This mostly happened to me after the Shabbat evening meal. For a moment it seemed to me I'd be able to innocently go to the bathroom and smoke one or two cigarettes and no one would notice it. I was afraid to smoke in my room lest the cigarette smell pass into other rooms and the other people of the house would notice. Yet my intellect told me that I'd be caught in my deception as long as everyone else hadn't gone to bed. So I waited impatiently until Reizel would return from the bathroom and begin breathing in the way I could tell she was asleep. And after the whole house was deep in sleep, I got down in bare feet and stole away into the dark bathroom and lit myself a cigarette. To this day I don't forget the tremendous pleasure, maybe it's more correct - the special significance of that cigarette. I smoked three cigarettes one after the other and returned to my bed pacified. It seemed that I had given myself a rare gift. Yet the following morning I felt as if I stank all over of cigarette smoke. I sensed the smell in the bathroom. I smelled it during services in the synagogue. I was sure that every worshipper sensed the smell, and looked at me with a weird look. The next Shabbat evening I again tried the experiment. And again the same stench stuck to me like tar. Yet worse than that - Reizel's eyes were swollen from crying. It seems as though she had cried in her bed all night. She had probably followed me. That whole Shabbat day she didn't say anything. It was as if she was dumb. Only on the day after did she say to me that if I planned to break the agreement we had between us then she wouldn't have any choice but to leave home. I was good and shocked. I was shocked at the prospect that Reizel would divorce me. The whole order of my life that I had built and nurtured throughout the years, would collapse as if it had never been. I promised her on my word of honor. Since then I honor my promise completely. And more than that, I was instantly and miraculously freed from my sick desire for cigarettes



on Shabbat. The clear knowledge of the conditions of my life came to me that I'm not able to even smoke a cigarette on the sly in the bathroom without the proper punishment influencing me like fear of desecrating the Shabbat influences a fearful Jew. Just at the closing of Shabbat am I attacked with a great deal of nervousness and my fingers shake as I look into the sky for the first three stars.\* Yet a great many of the observant are weakened by this affliction. More than this, this weakness publicly testifies that its possessor keeps the Shabbat, just like one who fasts looks nervously for the stars, and one who doesn't fast doesn't pay any attention to them.

Let's return to Moshe and David. After they were released from the Army they found work and wives and set up houses in Tel-Aviv. Moshe works in a warehouse of a large company and he eventually got to the level of a department head with that firm: and David became an insurance agent. Both of them live in two and a half room apartments in the suburbs and both have children: Moshe - three; David - two. The connection between their parents and themselves has shrunk to short visits once or twice a year. They show the grandchildren that there's a grandmother and grandfather in Jerusalem. None of them ever stays to sleep overnight at their grandparents' home.

\*The first three stars that appear on Saturday night and holidays signal the end of that day.



On Shabbat morning I usually go to morning prayers by the Western Wall. I wear on my shoulders the prayer shawl and go out to take the slow and enjoyable stroll. On the way I meet a lot of Jews each one going to his synagogue for morning prayers, and almost everyone knows me and greets me with a "Good Shabbos", or even stops by me to receive a pinch of snuff. The snuff box was given to me by father, which he received from his father and so forth back some generations. The box was made from pure silver in Prague in the seventeenth century, so it's engraven on the bottom, and it's pleasing to the eye and pleasant to hold in the palm of the hand. I buy the cheapest snuff, yet every Shabbat morning before I leave the house I drip a few drops of pear essence liqueur into the box. All the snuff experts are filled with excitement from the taste and fragrance and don't dare ask me about the great hidden secret of that special snuff. I evade giving answers, and everyone understands my meaning. They also wouldn't hasten to reveal such a secret were they in my place.

The fact that I don't hesitate to walk from my house to the Western Wall and back wearing a prayer shawl, greatly adds to my prestige. Everyone certainly asks himself: "This Asherkeh isn't a very righteous person. Yet he's one of us." Even my father-in-law who wears a juba, a fur hat, and white socks in honor of Shabbat - his face lights up from joy when he meets me wrapped in my prayer shawl in the street on my way to the Western Wall. At that time he relinquishes his desire that I also pray with him the Shabbat morning service, which he has because it's my custom to buy him the special honor of blessing the Torah on Shabbat and because he wants to be convinced that I pray properly. At those moments he's even prepared to forgive me for the lack of a fur hat and a kaftan under the prayer shawl. And he shows me his pleasure in that he asks for a pinch of snuff. And he sniffs it with wide

open nostrils and sneezes two or three times, and by the time I say "Bless you", he's already praising the snuff.

I myself enjoy the excursion no less. Tourists photograph me with their big cameras. Strangers look at me with a type of hidden reverence. I'm rather tall and broad, my beard is short and neatly kept, my shoes are shined, my suit is clean and pressed with the prayer shawl over all of this - and this really isn't a simple matter. There's something theatrical in my appearance, and I enjoy, no less than others, the impression I make. Even the Arabs by the Damascus Gate make room for me.

By the Wall itself, more than I pray in any particular group, I go about from group to group and take pleasure in looking and meeting anyone whether a close friend or acquaintance. Sometimes I meet so-and-so who plays chess with me. The visit usually comforts and fills me with pleasant feelings of slight tiredness which follows physical exertion. And when I return for the benediction over the wine at my father-in-law's house, where my mate Reizel is already waiting for me, I begin to feel some hunger pains in my stomach. Before services I had only had a cup of Shabbat coffee, and last night's meal has been digested for a long time. I already find in the house my father-in-law and a few of his children who have come for the benediction. I dip sponge cookies in a shot glass of Arak and conclude with fish dumpling, a hard-boiled egg and pudding. Reizel stands on the side, gets pleasure from seeing the prayer shawl over my shoulders, and from my great appetite. And when we return to our house for lunch, she walks a few meters behind me with her head bowed and an overflowing heart filled with joy.

On Shabbat afternoon, after a heavy sleep and after the hot meat stew and two or three cups of Shabbat tea, I don't retire to my room in order to be with my forbidden books, but rather I sit at ease on the veranda which faces the open street and read Midrashim. The neighbors from other balconies

look at me sideways and Reizel gets a lot of pleasure.

On Shabbat I belong to Reizel and the neighborhood. On Shabbat I make my belonging stand-out not only be me reading and wearing the prayer shawl. On Shabbat nights I sometimes hop over to the Karliner Yeshivah boys who are singing Shabbat songs and dancing intensely together in their synagogue until late at night. When R. Ahrele was still alive I really liked going to his "table" on Shabbat night. Now that his disciples, members of the Neturei Karta\* gather there to sing without him - I still go to them from time to time. And to every place I go, I never come empty-handed. I always bring with me three bottles of wine stamped as fit under the supervision of the court of the strictly orthodox community. And everywhere they willingly accept me, not so much for the wine as for my sweet voice and my immersion in the melodies of devotion. There's nothing more beloved to me than melodies of devotion sung very slowly and at the right tempo. At those times my whole being hovers in higher worlds.

Almost every day of the week, except Friday and Saturday, I go to play chess. I walk slowly as a stroller, stopping once or twice to catch a conversation with people who meet me on the street. I look about me at the noise of the street and think to myself: "I'm happy I'm free from this chaos. I'm able to allow myself a slow walk. I don't owe anything to anyone. I don't have to hurry to any meeting. I don't have to run around to earn a living. I stroll and play for my own enjoyment."

\* Neturei Karta are ultra-right wing anti-Zionist orthodox Jews

Everyone desires to play with me since I simply play for enjoyment. I don't taunt my opponent and I don't play for money, even though ninety out of a hundred times I win. I like experimenting in every game. The league players of Jerusalem have been after me for years to join the league and I put them off by saying that for me the game is only for pleasure and that I'm not willing to give up even five minutes for a competition. I've already managed to play with a few well know players, and from most of the games I come out on top.

I don't know chess theory, and everyone's sorry about my contempt for theory. In their opinion, if I were only to invest a year or two studying theory I'd attain international acclaim. I laugh and respond that I'm not very interested in international acclaim and it doesn't interest me a bit which master made what opening move in some game or another. My enjoyment is derived from logically thinking on the spot of possibilities that are precisely unconventional. In any event, I invest all of two and a half hours and I rise with a good feeling and leave for dinner and to read the books that are beloved to me 'til one or two in the morning. During the winter I'm absent from the afternoon and evening services at the time I play chess. During the summer I still make it to the synagogue for evening services and to chat with a few of the worshippers.

For the last three years I regularly go twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays, not to the regular café but rather to the house of Professor Nehili. The host and his friend, Professor Bitan, are already involved in a game by the time I arrive. I play the winner, and then from then on until the end of the evening, I sit beside the chess board and the two losers play one after the other with me.

Professor Bitan is the one who would play with me from time to time for some years at the regular café, and he's the one who dragged me along by

force to Professor Nehili's house. After a few games we established the tradition as if it was known from the beginning. Professor Nehili lived in a small house surrounded by a garden in the area of Behavia, and the way to his house is twice as far as that to the café. Even so, I cheerfully walk, and with a feeling of importance, as I cover the extra distance.

Most of the time the two hours pass in concentration on the game and nothing else. Mrs. Nehili brings us coffee and cookies, and she doesn't disturb the three men at play. Professor Nehili wears a black satin skullcap on his head. The skullcap is large and his head is bald, and it seems to cover his whole head. He's short in stature and leans toward being heavy. For this reason apparently, he's strict not to add sugar to his coffee and he's cautious not to touch the tasty cookies, home baked by his wife. He wears very thick glasses which means his vision is impaired. He appears to be around fifty.

Contrary to him, Professor Bitan is tall and thin. His locks are thick and gray. And he appears to be younger than Professor Nehili. He puts three spoons of sugar into his coffee, and he devours the cookies with great pleasure. During the game he himself is capable of finishing an entire bowl full of cookies. I'm the moderate one between them, both from the point of view of my restrained appetite for cookies, and my physical build.

Sometimes I find the two immersed in solving some chess problem. Nehili thinks in more abstract ways and doesn't touch his pieces and tries to find a solution to the problem in this way. Once I said, as if I was thinking outloud: "One can see here the difference between a professor of philosophy and a professor of biology. One works abstractly while the other must see laboratory tests before, or while, thinking...."

The two exchanged looks of admiration at what I said. Then Bitan asked



me: "And how are you?"

"I don't have a format. A Yeshivah student tries to solve mysteries in different ways. Whether by intricate arguments about an egg hatched on a holiday, whether by prayer, by a melody or by strict observance of the nuances of dress and exact observance of all commandments."

"And does he succeed?"

"Some do and some don't. Some think they have, and some think they haven't."

"And where can you be found?"

"Among all of them."

"A real mixture...."

They don't know how to classify me outside the framework of chess. On one side I'm some Mea She'arim loafer who surely lives in some wretched hole and who earns a few measly pennies from writing mezuzot, a dullard who never in his life studied even in an elementary school; and on the other side, I surprise them from time to time in strange flashes. Nehili knew his portion of Maimonides and ritual law, yet regarding Midrashim and how much the more so regarding Hasidic literature, I'd correct his mistakes right and left. Even so, he looked down at me. Since I hadn't studied at the University and my learning is not in their established pattern, then I must be a dullard and simpleton. At best I'm a pitiful autodidactic who knows how to open his mouth from time to time and to sound brilliant somehow. Yet this shouldn't be regarded with so much importance nor could one conclude from this that a poor loafer like myself is capable of being placed in the company of two professors. This angered me more than once. Yet since I myself suffered to the same extent from snobbism, I valued even more my regular meetings with two respected professors like them.



My father-in-law Feibish lived the most daily routine commandments with a concentration of the body and soul. He, for example, wouldn't taste even the smallest morsel of bread until he really felt hungry and wouldn't drink even a drop of water until he was really thirsty. His reasons were his own. One who didn't really feel the full taste of bread, how could that person feel the full taste of the blessing over the bread? What's greater than blessing God who brings forth bread from the earth and creates everything by command, if we're not really hungry and thirsty? Likewise is he when he takes care of his needs. When he blesses the blessing of people being created in God's wisdom with orifices and cavities, he stops himself and wonders and conjures up before his eyes a picture of one whose orifices are completely plugged or opened, and he senses each time anew the wonder of the orifices that aren't completely open nor completely closed but are opened and closed according to the needs of the body. And since every matter of the body's existence exists only as a receptacle for the soul hewn from the throne of souls that are the Creator's gems, then when one blesses the wonder of bodily functions, that person blesses the wonder of the entire creation. Not in vain are found in the neighborhood those who say that even Feibish's blessing over creation goes heavenward. He clothes his entire body in commandments tied to bodily actions, and there's almost no bodily movement without an appropriate blessing. Sometimes my whole body is seized with a type of nervous awakensness which drives me out of my skin. At such times I'm not able to speak with anyone, to read, to play chess, not even to take a walk. It seems that I feel a real physical sensation that something's rotten to the core. Since this recurs with me quite frequently, sometimes

once every two weeks, I'll try to describe the situation as it is. First of all, I don't have a headache or any other unpleasant physical sensations whatsoever. I simply lose the desire to put something in my mouth, even a cold drink. So I fast a day or two. Even the taste for cigarettes is taken from me, and I don't smoke for the entire period of the strange attack. Since I don't want to run into anyone, and aimless wanderings outside the city don't calm me, I close myself in my room and sit or lie idly and quietly. Reizel's already used to this and she almost diminishes herself and disappears from my life until I return to my strength.

From my room I look upon Mt. Scopus, and the mount looks to me as if it has a form and no meaning. Also my own furniture and books appear to me as void of all sort of meaning. I look at my hands and they seem to be strange hands. Every second seems like infinity, and I wonder and remain silent without being able to reflect even lightly upon anything that's connected to another.

At night it's very difficult for me to fall asleep. The cavity of my head, it seems, swells with over-awakeness, with thoughts that jump from here to there without any connection or relationship between them. It's as if I fall asleep while awake, with no connection to day or nighttime hours. I sleep with open eyes, see the room and know that I breathe as one who sleeps. And in this condition between sleep and wakefulness I dream all sorts of strange thoughts.

What's the difference between a thought while awake and a thought while dreaming? A wakeful thought is usually abstract and controlled by logic, and a thought in a dream is dressed in all sorts of forms and people and different, weird events, without any logic ruling it. Since I'm a person who believes in reason, I don't attribute to them any meaning and forget them and blot them from my memory. To my great surprise a few of the thoughts from

these vast collections of dreams lurk within me, especially the more logical of them, and I'm not able to rid myself of them. I'll try to recall some of them.

In one I'm sitting in front of the window and look out at Mt. Scopus and wonder to myself what happened to the mountain that its soul was taken from it. And I answer myself: "Not from the mountain was the soul taken but from you yourself. The soul of the mountain is nothing but a reflection of the clothes in which you dress it. When you come to it empty-handed, it remains completely naked despite its buildings and trees and horizon and circles of its base." I sit on my chair and walk on the desolate mountain. I look for something that has its own soul, even though if I find something with its own soul it will ignite the soul that's extinguished within me. I look at the dry, dusty brush.

Father says to me: "Take, Asherkeh, a sugardrop which harms the teeth and helps the soul."

"How does it help the soul?"

"It blots out from your heart the desolation of mountains. Such a scholar as yourself! From where does that same sweetness of the sugardrop come? And for what, as you think, is that same lump of sugardrop prepared, which is nothing more than mute matter, to sweeten the roof of your mouth? You must then say that it's in order to show you that you aren't an orphan in God's world. You don't need a burning bush that isn't consumed in order to hear God's voice. It's enough that you have sugardrops."

"If that's so, then even a glass of water brings me God's voice..."

"Yes, that's the point! Why, as you thought, did the sages establish a blessing for the enjoyment even of a glass of water? The Creator of the Universe needs your blessing? Tens of thousands of ministering angels stand

and eternally praise the Holy Name and who is a worm like you and your blessings to God? From this you must conclude that the blessing is nothing more than a simple reminder of God's voice in the taste of water. And that's the secret of the covenant between God and the nation Israel. And a non-Jew - who, if he wants to - hears God's voice in a glass of water; if he doesn't want to, he doesn't. A Jew, even the lowest of the low, blesses the blessing of enjoyment and hears against the will the voice of the Creator. Turn back, Asherkeh, from your frivolity and from all those forbidden secular books, take a sugardrop and hear and understand the voice of the Creator...."

And suddenly I'm floating in a warm body of water. I'm a child. A child who doesn't yet see the abyss. He still senses the freshness of stones and of the burning bush which is aflame within them. I also feel myself in warm water as one who floats between heaven and earth. Two other children float like me in the warm pool. We start riding on the backs of each other. The touch of the stomach on the back tosses my whole self in a fever of joy that's beyond understanding. It's less than being tickled, yet more pleasurable than I've ever known. I'm enthusiastically attached first to the back of one child and then to the back of the other and feel myself as if in the Garden of Eden. Suddenly a great blow falls on my head and I hear God's voice expelling me from the Garden of Eden. It was R. Ya'akov the butcher who struck me thus on my head and the face was red from pale anger, he shouted: "Wretch!

I don't know what my transgression is, yet I curl up my whole body in the warm pool. Tears well up in my eyes and fill my throat. Without

understanding I feel that I've committed a terrible sin. The other two children also feel as I do. We three crawl out of the warm pool, with a taste of dust in my mouth.

And here my brother-in-law Hunne, the fourteenth child of Feibish, stands at the head of a set table and expounds his Bar Mitzvah speech. He explains whatever he does about the laws of phylacteries, but I don't listen to the point of his words but rather am completely given to intently looking upon him. He wears a fur hat on his head. 'Very few of the Jerusalemite boys wear fur hats on the day of their Bar Mitzvah. Feibish's sons are counted among these privileged ones. The halo of the dark brown fur of the hat reflects a special light on Hunne's face, something spiritually pure. I never imagined to myself that a youth of thirteen was able to contain within himself such an abundance of heavenly beauty. Each eye shines with a special light, and both eyes together impart a look full of pure faith. The two curled sidelocks which fall from beneath the edge of the fur hat elongate his face. His gentle nostrils quiver in movements of opening and closing. Yet the most important - his living mouth that moves when he speaks. The soft red lips bend a little in a type of knowing smile and the full, white teeth are brilliant. What a low desire overcame me to grab that sweet mouth and kiss it in a long sucking kiss. My eyes were glued to the movement of the mouth. The movements really strangled my throat with a type of restrained lust I'm not able to understand. Hunne concludes his speech and blushes from head to toe from the effort and the excitement. Those seated round sigh a sigh of satisfaction and relief. Hunne's mother wipes her eyes with the corner of her pinafore. Reizel blows her nose with her white kerchief. I'm completely confused by that flash of strange desire, that already passed, to kiss Hunne's



mouth. Everyone lifts a glass "Lechaim!"\* The fragrance of Arak flows in the room. I also drink. And on my spinal cord quiver aftermaths of a strange shivering.

I've mentioned just some of those dreamy thoughts which are somewhat logical, that it's easily possible to find in them the thoughts that are troubling me. I am of course also visited by the types of strange dreams in which distorted logic prevails. Like walks in unending deserts, or that I float in space, or climb up cliffs and rocks. Or that I speak and no one heeds me, and other such things and images from the treasure of the lord of dreams. With these I don't deal. I don't like trying to solve riddles. The simple and clear are complex enough riddles for me, what's the use of engaging in the riddles of dreams?

In any event, inside of a day or two I return to myself and my strength, and again all the same thoughts of the dreams appear to me as insignificant things. The gaping abyss belongs to the world of dreams. An awake person is too troubled by thousands of daily details to be preoccupied by the fear of the gaping abyss. And I am, when it comes down to it, a very practical man who knows very well how to manage his affairs, and all that absorption in thoughts of dreams appears to me as the amusement of an idler. I return to my daily routine and to the chess games with Professor Nehili and Professor Bitan. The day-to-day is less interesting yet more real. So then it seems possible to live very well with the gaping abyss, whether it is wrapped in forgetfulness or it flashes periodically in one's memory.

\*"Lechaim" is Hebrew for "to life", the traditional toast that is made when one drinks.



My father-in-law Feibish visited me suddenly on a weekday. Luckily, I was then writing mezuzot and my bookcase was closed. His eyes brightened with ease to see my parchment and scribal pen in hand, and to see the large skullcap placed on my head. Only when his glance passed over the closed bookcase did a cloud cover his face. I suspect that he knows very well what trouble is enclosed in that bookcase. Yet he accepts the verdict and in his naive heart hope is kindled that sooner or later I'll completely return and be a fit and faithful Jew no less than himself. In any event, the visit was a complete surprise to me. Feibish doesn't come and visit in order to chit-chat. The transgression of being lax in Torah study haunts him. Any action not connected with the fulfillment of a commandment is akin to being lax in Torah study. Why did he trouble himself and come? It's still difficult to discern his intentions. He still looks about him with wise eyes. Thus he thinks what he thinks while looking about. Reizel, who was surprised not less than I, and got more excited because of the visit, offered him a cup of coffee, and he declined the offer with an "ah!" accompanied with a gesture of the hand. Reizel hastened to get away in order not to disturb the men in their matters. A true Jerusalemite woman who's kosher and humble. Curiosity filled her to know first hand what's between her father and husband, yet despite this she went away to the kitchen in order not to eavesdrop against her will.

After a few more bright smiles and glances Feibish came to the point. It appears that Hunne, my brother-in-law, who was already fifteen years old,

even though he's a good student and absorbed in the study of Torah, is seized by a certain obsession to draw letters and faces, an obsession which distracts him from Torah study. Feibish understands that one can't get rid of such an attachment by scolding or lecturing. Therefore, an idea came to him maybe to direct the lad's desire to a sacred matter, in other words, that I teach him how to be a scribe. That's one side of the coin. The other side is more complicated. If the lad learns to write phylactery portions and mezuzot and occupies himself thusly two or three hours a day, there wouldn't be any sort of laxity from studying the Torah, and the money he earns by this work is a type of commandment, that would help to support the family. Yet he fears that if they take him out of the Yeshivah, even if only for one or two hours a day, his regular Torah studies would be affected. But this matter can be resolved by my agreeing to teach him during the evening after the evening prayers when the Yeshivah students have already gone home. Yet here rests the most delicate matter, which especially depends on me. And what is this matter? It was difficult for Feibish to bring the words to the tip of his lips lest he accuse a kosher Jew like myself of something I'm not guilty. It's just that he wanted to know if I was willing to promise not to discuss with Hunne even in passing, anything that was mentioned in those books (here his worried, hurt look moved to the bookcase) and not to teach him chess, that even though there's not a prohibition against playing chess, it detracts from Torah study, and that I in general take upon myself not to harm in any way Hunne's complete faith and fear of God. What did I think of the suggestion?

From the moment I grasped Feibish's intention to send Hunne to me to study the trade of a scribe, my heart began to flutter from some kind of anticipation of peculiar happiness. Since his Bar Mitzvah I felt that I

loved the lad a profound love. Actually, I didn't know what the nature of that love was, yet I was filled with a strange delight whenever I was near him. The very glance sent his way filled me with a type of exaltation which I can't even describe by name. I loved to hear his voice. I loved to look at the movements of his soft and tender face. I loved to feel his very presence in the same room with me. And when I was able to stroke his cheek at an appropriate acceptable time, the very touch transmitted from my finger to my spinal cord a current of pleasure. I was attracted to my father-in-law's house because of him. Each time I found some new excuse to go to my father-in-law's house, and when I saw Hunne at home and heard from his mouth even a sentence of a few words, or I was able to feast my eyes on him with a few quick glances, I'd feel as if I had been completely rewarded. And the whole matter was a sort of frightening puzzle for me. I didn't understand what was going on inside of me during this time nor about what and why I was so attracted to him. And maybe because of this fear I would try keeping anyone in the household from discerning what was going on inside of me. I'd at first direct my glances intentionally away from him. I'd act as if I didn't see him and didn't sense his presence at all. This great effort to ignore my desire and strange inclination was precisely what intensified feelings of stolen pleasure from every glance and note of his voice.

And now Feibish comes himself and suggests that I be secluded with Hunne every day for an hour or two in my house. I still wasn't capable of grasping the complete meaning of the surprising suggestion. Yet my heart palpitated curiously. Again rose my cautious nature about this strange relationship between myself and Hunne, not to reveal my inner excitement even by a faint hint. I listened to Feibish's words slightly humming to show my attention.

I didn't interrupt the flow of his words except for the slightest clarifications. I revealed by acting as if I was intently listening that I joined him in his worries and understand his meaning very well. Feibish concluded his words with a kind of apology: "Look, Asherkeh, if I ask you to agree, it's not that I suspect, God forbid, that you'll bring Hunne to frivolity, but rather that Hunne's the son of my old age, my favorite of all my children, my most beloved child, and I want to rest assured with regard to him."

I agreed and Feibish's thin, wrinkled face lit up.

When I explained to Reizel later on what her father wanted from me and how we concluded, a kind of cloud passed over her face. She suspected me more than her father did. She simply knew better than he just how much I was immersed in the depths of heresy. I also promised her that I wouldn't speak with Hunne about matters of belief and opinions, and that I wouldn't let him even peek at any of the secular books. Reizel wasn't comforted by my promise yet kept her mouth shut.

Hunne's face was lit with expectation at the beginning of his studying the secrets of scribal arts, and I was inundated with feelings of his special beauty. A face, which is completely alive, radiates its beauty forcefully and abundantly as an oven well lit radiates its warmth. I don't know if his excitement about the lesson caused his face to appear even more beautiful than normally, or maybe it was my excitement about being together with him that caused me to see in his face that same evening a special kind of beauty. In any event, from the moment he entered my house I sensed an elevation that is indescribable. Every attempt to

speech was achieved at a great effort. For the first lesson I prepared a few feathers and a sharp knife and I intended to teach him this time how to prepare a scribal pen according to all the religious rules and regulations. But I feared I wouldn't be able to succeed in this because of the trembling which had suddenly overtaken my hands.

I looked from the side at his slim youthful body. He was dressed in long clothes according to the ways of the strictly observant Yeshivah students and everything was covered-up by clothes. Despite this my imagination was able to conjure up the naked body beneath the clothes, marvel at the movement of the limbs and their posture, try to grasp the round curves, and was suddenly sobered by the attempt. For the first time in my life I felt that I had never looked that way at any girl or woman, not during my adolescence nor since I married. Even so, this sobering didn't disturb the feeling of elevation within me. On the contrary, it intensified it, like horseradish intensifies the taste of gefilte fish. The feeling itself, that I'm found together alone with Hunne, inspired within me the feeling of drunkenness.

At first, I left the door between my room and the living room open. Reizel's face was too worried when she left us alone, lest I dare shut the door behind her. Afterwards, I felt a sort of compulsion to shut the door. I wanted to sense the privacy in its entirety. And I mean the privacy itself without any other ulterior intentions. Simply to sit beside him alone in an enclosed room, as if the air that encircles us brings us closer. I didn't even dare to think of any other type of closeness. My right hand raised up more than once without my knowledge to caress Hunne on the back, yet I succeeded in bringing it back down in time before Hunne felt the intention to caress. At those same solemn moments the pleasure of looking at his every movement was enough for me. His face fully alert spread



out a form and took on a form, and it was as if everything happened within me. Yet Reizel immediately returned and opened the door, and even took a chair and sat beside the open door. Her face was pale with anger. She suspected me, that I intended to rid the youth of his faith. She sat like a zealous watch dog beside the open door, so she'd hear every word that came out of my mouth, so that if I said, God forbid, anything that had the least bit of heresy in it, she'd go and tell her father. Despite Reizel's scowling presence I felt spiritually and physically elevated. When Hunne left for his house I tapped him on his shoulders and said to him that he'd come tomorrow at the same time. Reizel didn't understand the great happiness that overtook me. She looked at me hurt from lack of understanding. And I was utterly exuberant inside. And when I laid down on my bed I began visualizing in a type of unending happiness what my eyes had seen in Hunne's presence. His every movement was freshly resurrected. I fell asleep drunk with joy. I slept a good, deep sleep.

Hunne was a gifted student. In six weeks he learned the scribal art perfectly. He very quickly grasped both the structure of the letter and the correct direction in which to move the quill for each letter. Yet he was still very slow in his writing. He still lacked the confidence that came with practice. Feibish feasted his eyes on a mezuzah that the son of his old age wrote, and in my whole life, I've never seen his eyes so bright. He simply didn't know how to contain in himself his happiness and pride over the magnificent work of the hands of his beloved son of his old



age. He chuckled in a manner unlike him and blushed and then paled, and stuttered when he mentioned his hope and aspiration that Hunne write for him a Torah Scroll. Feibish had a secret dream that he himself would someday write a Torah scroll and go to immerse in the ritual bath before every writing of the ineffable name. Now he hoped to actualize his dream through his son the apple of his eye. Hunne didn't respond at all to Feibish's enthusiasm. He gave him a short sideways glance of astonishment and negation in one. Hunne not only wasn't prepared to immerse himself in the ritual bath before every writing of the ineffable name, he wasn't even prepared to begin writing a Torah Scroll, which even by veteran, tried ritual scribes takes two to three years. By that short glance I realized that the whole matter of scribal art was for him nothing more than a game of self-aggrandizement that would increase his status in the eyes of others. The lad was too lazy to even sit and write mezuzot or phylactery portions, let alone a Torah Scroll. He is a good-looking and spoiled boy to whom everything comes easily, and he isn't the least prepared to work for something or someone. During the six weeks that he sat with me he didn't ask one question that would testify to his intellectual curiosity, not even in the realm of Torah and faith. And as much as I was able to learn about him, he wasn't a great scholar in religious studies. He knows how to put up a front, he's apt at raising problems in Talmud that make an impression on his listeners. His only interest was just to make an impression on others. He's exacting in his dress and curls his sidelocks. A type of dandy of a Yeshivah. Reizel feared for nothing that I'd make him a heretic. He's not capable of being a heretic. He's not capable of being something that his immediate community of friends doesn't like. All his thoughts are for being pleasing with the least amount of struggle. Feibish

doesn't know this. Feibish is blinded by his great love for the child of his old age, by the great aspirations he hangs on him. Poor Feibish, greater disappointments still await than that the Torah scroll won't be written.

Meanwhile, I completed my task as teacher. Feibish bought for Hunne all that's needed for writing mezuzot and portions. From now on Hunne would be able to sit in his house and occupy himself with holy work whenever his time was free from Torah study. Occasionally he'd come to me for advice in matters of the work. Thus concluded a strange period in my life. Something dark, something scary not understood by me. I had very filthy dreams, yet I slept a deep sleep. Startled and embarrassed by the dreams I'd try not to come into any kind of bodily contact with Hunne. Despite all this, when our hands accidentally touched one another I'd feel a prolonged surge of pleasure run down my spinal cord. I never achieved more than this except in my wild dreams. I was embarrassed by my dreams and I was proud of myself at my restrained behaviour when awake. Hunne didn't imagine at all what was hidden behind my desire to teach him the art of being a scribe. Not even Reizel, and how much the more so Feibish. I withstood a double test between myself and my surroundings. With regard to myself it became clear that I'm affected with that deviation whose name I don't want to pronounce. And with regard to the surroundings, that I'm able to hide it from the eyes of others. This revelation unsettled me in many ways. First of all, I was quite shocked. Intercourse with another male is one of the most serious transgressions in the Torah, and regardless of my heresy with which I'm afflicted, I still accept heart and soul, but not logically, the meaning of the serious transgression and the ingrained revulsion from it. One immersed in a transgression such as this appears to me as subhuman and as one who's condemned to death, for severing from

the human community. Yet I know that such-and-such famous author and such-and-such genius painter were immersed in this, and they're thought of even by me as giants of their generation, yet this doesn't change a bit my revulsion and nauseating feeling by this when speaking of people who are simpler than I. From this point I see myself as one afflicted with leprosy that's hidden from the eyes of others. The leper has nonetheless thus far succeeded in hiding the leprosy, yet that person must carefully guard every movement so that the disease not become apparent to all. Indeed, if it becomes known - then that person is subject to complete ostracism. Despite the fact that I'm used to camouflage in my daily life, the detection of such a thing is not like the detection of a minor transgression. I thought of myself as in the parable of one who suddenly finds himself in a nightmare stuck in a deep mire not knowing how to be freed from it.

Yet hand in hand with the great panic I felt a type of irreverent joy that I had discovered deep thoughts like these. During the few weeks that I spent in Hunne's company my body knew a shuddering of pleasure that I had never known before. The facial movement, the blinking of an eye, the twist of a lip, nuance of a tone - things like this going on in the body of the other are able to excite your body so much and to cause such wild joys as these. The mystery of the thing amazed and enchanted. You look at something and are then already able to sleep deeply afterwards. You see a line of vivacity in the face of a youth and your spinal cord already shivers in warm delight and in wild joy. What's going on here Master of the Universe? What's the nature and meaning of this wild wonder?

At this time I see it as a gift of wonders especially granted to me. No one around me is able to sense a thing from all this fleshy joy that

I feel from the look of a fifteen year old boy's face. No one from among all those people I know can even imagine that something like this exists, just like I myself didn't know it beforehand.

My daily schedule still continued as usual, yet each walk in the street turned into a type of confusing and titillating hunting trip at the same time. My eyes followed against my will young boys of fourteen and fifteen, who were in a stage of passage from youth to adolescence. There's something not quite ripe in their movements which distinguishes them from the rest of humanity. Some sort of hesitation in their movements. Some type of attempt to match themselves with their bodies which grow quickly. And there's a sort of softness in their faces, especially around the chin and the mouth. Most of the time, I'm able to look at them from their backs. Since a youth coming towards me, our meeting point is short - from a distance of a few meters until he passes me. I haven't yet gotten to the point, thank God, of turning my head to look after him, I satisfy myself with what my eyes can see during the short point of meeting. And if a youth walks in the road before me, I can match my steps with his and hold his figure in the field of my vision until he goes into some house. Thus I sometimes find myself walking to some place I didn't at all intend to walk to.

My street walks sometimes turn into aimless wanderings. I arrive late at the coffee house for my chess game, I arrive late at my regular game at Professor Nehili's house. I'm forced to invent excuses. Yet the two look at me with a sort of amazement. Apparently, one can discern my confusion

on my face. Everyday I decide anew to be satisfied with what my eyes see on the way to my goal and not to be dragged into aimless wanderings after a lad going another way, and everyday I revert to my evil ways. I myself don't know how I went each time anew to walk after a boy whose face I haven't even seen. I don't derive any pleasure from it. On the contrary, I'm tortured by pangs of embarrassment and regret and fear lest passers-by who know me notice my strange behaviour. The contact between me and those anonymous youths is exclusively just a look at the movements of their backs. With strictly observant youths who wear long coats I don't even see the movements of their thighs. Just the silhouette of the back which goes away at an unchanging pace. Nonetheless I'm attracted to them just as much.

Sometimes it appears to me that I'm attracted to the sufferings, after the feeling of degradation in the thing, as if I desire to punish myself. The great sin crouches within me like a mountain and a silent punishment awaits me by the hands of the Divine Judge. If I punish myself by my own hands, I'll lessen just that much the awaiting punishment for me by others. And maybe this is nothing more than a trial to see if I can influence myself to improve my ways. It seems, I say to myself: "Come and see where you'll end up if you don't suppress your sick deviation." And the greater the degradation, the greater the chances I'll learn the lesson in time. Yet I don't learn. Sometimes I can't stay home in the evening. I'm not able to read even my beloved books or journals. When I read what I read, it seems to me that the things don't relate to me. They're strange to me and everything about me. My intellectual curiosity disappeared as if it had never existed. My thoughts turn more on what I saw or didn't see that day in the street. The four walls of my room begin to oppress me and I feel that if I don't go out to the street I'll suffocate from the heaviness of the house. And I go out at night to empty streets. I wander without



any rhyme or reason. I certainly know that there aren't any youths to be found at nighttime on the streets, that I don't even have any hope of having my dubious joy of a distant glance. Nonetheless, I'm not able to return home immediately. I continue to wander about the lit streets and half-dim alleyways, give a glance at the emptiness of the public domain and am maintained by the disappointment and anger of myself from the torment and embarrassment. When I return home late at night I hear the restrained sighs of Reizel. She's sure I'm playing with loose-girls or visiting prostitutes. She's quiet as is her manner, and expects that with my aging I'll return little by little to the right way. Thoughts of the approaching grave turn many Jerusalemites to penitence. This Reizel learned from life experience. Neighbors and frivolous acquaintances who used to shorten their dress and shave their beards during their thirties and forties, when they reached their fifties they began lengthening their clothes and moving at first from shaving cream to an electric shaver and then to a trimmed beard, and finally to a real beard and to sidelocks. And I who am approaching fifty, not only is my beard not lengthening, I'm just now beginning to wander at nights under very suspicious circumstances. Despite all this Reizel doesn't despair. In another two or three years I'll return to the fold. Yet until then one has to accept the torment. Hence, her restrained sighs and maybe even her hidden tears.

I come into my room with feet tired from all the aimless walkings in the street. My body's broken and exhausted but my brain bristles with the most sharp awakesness. I know how difficult it will be for me to fall asleep. It's already after midnight and I'm awake without any remedy. If I was only able to absorb myself in one of my books I'd finally arrive at redemptive sleep.



Yet my hand doesn't rise to take a book. I know from the outset that I wouldn't be able to read even one line. I remain seated on the chair and my thoughts flood out. My whole body is caught by a kind of strange fever. I clearly see all the stupidity and tastelessness of my situation. That very same aimless walk in city streets in search of glimpses will completely destroy me. I must gather my strength in order to overcome my dreadful weakness. I must forbid myself from leaving the house. I must stop for a period of time my chess games. I must imprison myself in my surroundings. And I don't know if my strength will be equal to the task.

It's been five days that I haven't played chess nor wandered in the city streets. I have a strange feeling as if I'm lashing myself, with whips, and the pain is good for my body. I try to stay away from my father-in-law's house and from the Yeshivah in which Hunne studies. I'm like one who's fasting, and the torment of hunger gives one a feeling of pride and self-congratulation since one knows how to withstand the pain of fasting. I conscientiously turn my eyes from every boy who comes within the field of my vision. I'm still not able to concentrate on reading a book, yet I'm able to sit every evening for two whole hours in a Talmud lesson that's given by the rabbi, the Yeshivah Headmaster to the worshippers of the Mea She'arim synagogues after evening services. The ones who attend the lessons are shopkeepers and workers tired from the day's work who try with their whole strength to concentrate on the subject which demands effort beyond their capabilities, and to grasp what's said, even though the rabbi tries with all his might to explain the subject in the simplest language and in great detail, like an adult might explain

whatever he does to little children. I don't get anything out of the lesson since the subject is already known to me and the level of the rabbi's explanation is low; yet I find a great deal of interest in the faces of the people who listen to the lesson. I know each of them. Here they receive new meaning. Next to their counter or work tools they're nothing but miserable people whose only interest is in the pennies they earn; here their faces are spread with an expression of spirituality. One can really see on their faces the difficult struggle to understand and grasp what's being said and the battle with their heavy eyes that yearn to be closed. The people believe in the magical power and sanctity of the very words. The Aramaic language is wrapped in mystery. Something not from this world, something from higher worlds is interlaced and interwoven in the Aramaic words by virtue of their strange sound. And they taste, each one in his own way, the hidden treasure of those same higher spheres. The grocery storekeeper and vegetable seller and carpenter and blacksmith and cobbler live for an hour or two in the Garden of Eden of holiness and mystery. I escape from some sort of monster that lurks deep within me and try to grab hold of the edge of their Garden of Eden. My heart aches with jealousy.

Yet even the lesson and the simple people trying to elevate their souls do not help me. I very quickly lose all interest in the lesson and the empty hours weigh on me. I wander around at night in the alleys of Mea She'arim, Beit Yisrael, the Hungarian section and around the Ethiopian street. The alleys are silent. Here and there I hear the voice of a single person beside an open page of Talmud or a voice full of grief and yearning of one reciting a chapter of Psalms alone. The voices bring me a quiver of remorse, embarrassment and a feeling of personal degradation.

In my empty meanderings in alleyways I lived in constant fear that I

not be caught up in my perversion. What would become of me if someone discerned that I walk about at night on city streets aimlessly? If they would only suspect that I'm being afflicted by that perversion, then I'd be totally ruined. Everyone would treat me as a leper with whom it's forbidden to touch or have dealings. Each and every social contact that I've cultivated throughout my life would come apart as if it had never been. No one would greet me in the street. And it's very likely that my livelihood would also be adversely affected. I'd be unfit to work as a ritual scribe. No self respecting dealer would purchase my work. It would be excommunication in its simplest and most frightening sense. I'd be cut off from every contact with the surroundings.

Yet this fear is exaggerated - as of now. No one is yet able to imagine to oneself to even the least extent what and why I go out as a lone sleep-walker at night. At most, they could sense that something's not right with me. Maybe I'm struggling with thoughts of penitence or thoughts of heresy, which are both two sides of the same coin. Maybe I suffer from emotional disturbances somehow connected with emotional illness. Yet the trouble is no larger than this. The people of Jerusalem are used to this.

Beyond the fear lives and grows the feeling of loneliness which gets sharper and sharper, since the fear that one is different from others with no remedy, is loneliness in its naked harshness. And if beforehand I felt different from others in my neighborhood, it wasn't due to any feeling of degradation and embarrassment. My heresy was logical and justifiable. In addition to this, I wasn't so alone in my epicureanism. Outside of my neighborhood most thinking people are heretics like I am. And if I wanted to, or was able to move from the neighborhood, I'd merely be among people with the same thoughts as mine. But this is not the case with my new

strangeness. Here there's no escape from the absolute loneliness. If the chess players would discover that I'm afflicted with what afflicts me they'd despise me openly. Even Nehili and Bitan, who are professors and men of broad horizons, would stop playing with me. From this there is no escape. And if I don't want to be thrown to the garbage, I've got to guard my terrible secret from all. If only I might have the necessary strength to do this.

I'm trying to analyse the situation for myself. What exactly do I want? Do I desire to have sexual relations with a fourteen or sixteen year old boy? The picture of sleeping with a male still doesn't even enter into the sphere of my imagination. And when I try to imagine it actively I suffer from an attack of revulsion and even nausea. The only thing I want is closeness, being together, to caress, whose climax is a long kiss on the lips. I'd even settle for less, with a sort of close spiritual friendship with a lad, who would appreciate me for my intellect and experience and learn from me wisdom of life. If I was, for example, a high school teacher for boys, and I was liked by my students and earned because of that, looks of appreciation from a few of them; to realize gifts of longing looks - to be close to the teacher, to hear his words with curiosity, to be worthy of a caress on the cheek and things like this...such a vain dream. I am what I am, and in the circumstances of my life I must try to find what I want.

And if I find it, then what? - logically speaking - nothing. Just the same mysterious physical joy, the same shiver of hidden pleasure that passed along my spinal cord when I sat in one room with Hunne, or the same low feeling to look and look at the back of some youth passing in the street and at the movement of his head and shoulders, the same good sleep which visits me after

I've satisfied my eyes with naked images of young boys' movements. My body needs to see the images of youths like one who needs air to breath. There's no logic to this. On the contrary, everything is illogical.

And maybe there's some sort of hidden cry of the aging cells in my body towards younger vivacious cells. The cry of a drowning person clutching anything that can be held. A kind of desire to be found among the young and vivacious.

I immerse myself much in these futile thoughts and know that when I do so they're not based in reality. It's enough that I describe to myself how everyone whom I could imagine would respond were I to tell them what I think to myself.

In spite of all my desires to create for myself a world of laws that conform to my inclination, I'm too realistic to waste time in infantile imaginings.

I returned to Hunne. Not that I found the courage to court him or to try meeting him more frequently face to face. I returned to him from the point of my feelings. It wasn't my will that I began to speak to him. I'd suddenly see his face in my mind's eye. I'd suddenly hear his voice. I see this movement or another movement of his. And the very image would throw me into turmoil. For a long time I wouldn't be able to think of anything else, and how much the moreso I wouldn't be able to continue my work or reading.

Again I didn't find anything in my street excursions. It was enough for me to return to my imagination of Hunne and I'd already be completely filled with the same inexplicable internal excitement.

In my sober intellect I knew how far the real Hunne was from the illusory one. In addition to this, I clearly saw how dangerous was this game that I played for my sanity. Hunne, apparently, sensed with a sixth sense that some-



thing wasn't right with my relationship to him. He began to make light of me and even mock me openly. He would speak to me in a mocking tone, and this in the presence of his father, mother, Reizel and the rest of the family. And I didn't answer him as fitting. I was as small as field grass in his presence. Everyone sensed it, and looked at me and him in open wonder. I knew that any closeness between me and Hunne wouldn't be, even a closeness of light friendship. He despised me for my weakness, he really revealed feelings of revulsion and hate toward me. This revelation came to me in a flash. I couldn't even imagine the slightest reason for his attitude toward me. I assume, that he himself doesn't even know. He just sensed how much I'm willing to degrade myself before him in order to openly win some kind of low pleasure accompanied with terrible torments from that senseless delusion.

Maybe I looked unknowingly for some easy out from the street walks. After all, in my own delusions, I'm not so derelict in the eyes of the passers-by.

I travelled for a few days to Tel-Aviv. I wanted to escape from the house and neighborhood in which Hunne lived. I told Reizel that it was worthwhile for us to go for a couple of days to bathe at the beach. I feel that the sea would help my health. I knew that she'd refuse and send me alone. Reizel's not willing to be uprooted from her surroundings even for a few days. She smiled bitterly to herself when she told me: "You go Asherkeh, you know that I don't like traipsing around hotels and eating in restaurants ...."

She knew that I suggested that she join me knowing that she'd refuse. And she was sure that I intended on carrying-on with loose women in Tel-Aviv. Nevertheless, she let me go alone. Apparently she came to terms with herself about my temporary breakdown.



I took a room in a cheap hotel by the beach and engaged in dumbly looking at the bathers. I sank into a comfortable chair reading, as it were, a book, and my eyes were drawn toward the young bathers. I wanted to forget Hunne's face, but amongst the depths of that very crowd of young bodies attired only in bathing suits Hunne's face kept popping-up with his mocking smile. I went to play chess at the Lasker club which closely overlooked the shore, I sat hour after hour with coffee above the shore looking at the blue sea and the passers-by. At midnight I'd return and walk looking at the same youths that came here seeking-out a mate. If the truth be told I didn't come to Tel-Aviv except for this short walk at midnight amidst these youths. I apparently had fuzzy hopes that I didn't even dare think about properly. Yet no youth, from among all those shadows who sought out one another, turned to me. They allowed me to wander about on the promenade to and fro as if I was a passing shadow.

With a choked throat I'd return to my cheap hotel room, and for long hours roll around in my bed until I slipped into a fitful sleep.

Feibish came to me to spill out his troubled heart. He's not happy with Hunne. Not only doesn't the boy occupy himself during his free time writing mezuzot and phylactery portions, he's lax in his Torah studies and is beginning to slacken his observance. It's difficult to awaken him in the morning from his sleep. Everyone rises with the dawn and he sleeps 'til nine, ten in the morning and doesn't go to public prayers. He quickly prays an abridged morning service at home, and then goes out for a couple of hours to the Yeshivah. The head of the Yeshivah complained to him not only that Hunne

himself isn't studying but that he's influencing other students and causing them to be lax in their studies. And he began to nag them, Feibish and Tsirl, in matters of food. He doesn't like anything. He comes out and asks for meat dishes during the week. You eat like paupers. For breakfast one must give him two eggs. And when the package of halvah is placed on the table so everyone can spread a little on the bread and the margarine is sliced thinly in order to spice up the bread, he hoards down all the halvah without bread. What a voracious appetite's seized him. One day he went and bought a large and expensive chocolate bar and devoured it in one breath. And how he blesses before and after each meal. Woe to the ears that hear and the eyes that see! A nobody from the marketplace blesses with more heartfelt intention. And as if all this isn't enough, he's begun to behave lightheadedly in matters about which all God fearing Yeshivah boys are most scrupulous. This refers to, of course, matters in which modesty is most important. He really looks unabashedly at the neighborhood girls. His bold looks really linger on in front of everyone. The girls blush and run away, and this licentious person's face shines in great enjoyment. People are already whispering behind his back... and every effort to speak directly to the point with the boy, proved fruitless. On the contrary, it seems to him that every chastisement is more damaging. Since the lad becomes even bolder, not in speech, but in his dastardly glances. He mocks his father.

And here Feibish looked at me with petrified eyes opened to the fullest, eyes that grew wider and split in their very center, and whispered: "Asherkeh, you're more knowledgable than I in the ways of the world. You certainly know better than I how one must speak to a boy like him. I'm an old man who belongs to the previous generation. You read gazettes and booklets. Maybe you can give me some sage advice how I can penetrate his heart...."

Where have I seen eyes so hurt as these? In Tel-Aviv, by the sea shore, under a street lamp, at ten-thirty at night. It was during my second trip to Tel-Aviv. When I was there just one day. I travelled with the intention to linger at night by the beach. I stood leaning against the wet railing of the promenade staring at the lonely people searching for what they searched from one another. Suddenly an older man stopped by me, one with a ploughed face and broken lines. He looked at me a little as one who tries for the last time to discern my character.

"The gentleman's from Jerusalem?" - he asked as one who whispers a secret.

"What do you care?" - I answered questioningly.

"Actually it's not important..." he answered defeatedly - "yet one who comes from Jerusalem in order to stand here alone and look and look...that's something? Isn't it?"

"I don't know you sir, and I don't know why you're hanging around me."

"My name's Ya'akov Avrahami, a one time high school teacher, and I'm hanging around you out of loneliness. All day I haven't exchanged a word with a living soul. I thought, sir, that you were lonely like me...excuse me if I erred in my judgement."

"You didn't err" - I answered against my will.

"Maybe we can enter a coffee house for a cup of tea? This night darkness from the sea isn't good for my rheumatism...." At the café they were already busy taking in the tables and chairs. Yet in one corner were still three occupied tables. By two of the tables sat couples, prostitutes with their pimps. Beside the third, two single youths. We got two cups of tea. The hand of the man shook. He looked weak and ill. I sipped my tea quietly, and the man talked and talked. Apparently he was hungry for someone to talk to. He whispered what he whispered with dark satisfaction of relief.

I never imagined to myself that a person in our time was able to be so alone. Avrahami himself discovered his ailment at an early age. His whole life he was a Bible and literature teacher at a high school. He was sustained by glances, by occasional caresses. Two or three times he experienced strong love affairs that passed peacefully. Students would come to his bachelor's apartment to get assignments, and everything managed accordingly. Yet there were, of course, a few failures. Luckily, or unluckily, the failures came after he had taught for twenty years. There were inquiries and internal litigations and he got out of them by the skin of his teeth. Yet, in the end, he fell. He was fired from his job without a pension. Since then he engages in peddling from house to house. He sells tea, chocolate, cigarettes - things that every housewife needs. They buy from him out of pity. He earns a bit from his work, and if he wasn't afflicted with what afflicted him, he'd even be able to save something for his old age. Yet he's forced to buy from time to time the love of boys, which costs him plenty of money. Many nights he wanders here on the promenade knowing very well that he won't get anything, all because of what he lacks in the pocket. Approximately once a month he brings one of the youths to his house. He really saves from his own mouth for that night. In effect, his whole life hangs on those secretive meetings bought with the little money he saves throughout the month.

"I don't know you sir, and maybe that's why it's easy for me to speak to you the way I am. It's filthy, mister. It's completely and absolutely foul, and I'm addicted to it heart and soul."

"Why is it filthy and foul?"

"If the gentleman asks a question like that, it's a sign that he's never been tried by the degrading transaction that takes place before the deed, by

the brashness of the blackmailing boys at that time, by the open violence and disdain that they reveal towards a man like me who's older than fifty, nor by the filthy and disgusting taste that remains in the mouth afterwards. They don't trust you. They demand the money in advance and after you give them the money, it's as if they do you a great favor if they even agree at all to do what they've been paid to do. They despise you, curse, call you a dirty old I don't know...it's not important...I tell you mister, it's a horror."

"Despite all this, what's the foulness of it all?"

"The foulness is the lie. To that same boy who earns his bread from prostitution, there's no connection, no shadow of human feeling, or even physical satisfaction from what he did for the money. He has boyfriends of his own to whom he's connected with ties of feeling and love. Yet since he's lazy and doesn't have any desire to work he makes his living with old men like me who need him and his likes. He hates and despises himself for it, and that hate and spite he pours on those from whom he makes a living. And the lie is twofold, also from the side of the buyers who pay money. There's no compensation for the money. And the buyer knows there's no compensation. A man dreams romantic dreams about the love of boys, afterwards he goes and chucks that same love in the shit pail, and more than this, he pays for this debasement with money, palpitations of the heart, contempt and self-degradation. And after it's all over the same man's left with an empty pocket and heart together. And the worst thing of the whole affair is that I know all this perfectly well from the start and have no possibility of preventing it. I return against my will to hell, I seek-out against my will the degradation, contempt, regret, and nauseating taste that stays in my mouth...."

"How much do they take?"



"It depends on the type of merchandise and type of buyer. There are those whose prices are a round figure that I don't make by peddling during a complete month. From there the prices drop to a much lower price of three days' worth of my work. Even those miserable creatures earn more in an hour or two than I after three days of running from house to house and climbing steep flights of stairs and pleading and degrading myself before the housewives who look at me as a beggar. I don't envy them, God forbid. They're just young. They receive the wages of their youth. When they get to their thirties and forties they'll need to pay new youngsters, the more they age, the more they'll need to pay. That's the biological law, and one must accept it resignedly just like we receive the rest of the biological laws, and the esteemed Angel of Death too."

His large eyes opened widely, and the color in them almost split open and mixed together. He continued:

"I come here every night. Everyone always knows me. No one pays any attention to me, as if I was a shadow. Sometimes a few urchins whose price is too much for my pocket mock me, and I'm quiet and receive their ridicule with a bowed head. Finally they do me a favor by allowing me to look at them as they are. I look at their build and allow my imagination freedom to engage in images of prostitution. I say to myself: 'If you only had money for this pretty boy or that one, he'd come home with you...' thenceforward I'm completely burning with my images, while my ears hear their mocking laughter and curses. And if I didn't give in and degrade myself so openly, I would have caught a knife in my stomach long ago. These guys react very wildly. But I appear to them so miserable and weak that they see touching me as a lessening of their honor. And that's what saves me from troubles and complications with the police...and believe me mister, I'm an excellent teacher. But what does



it matter? Now I am what I am. I belong to the promenade by the beach at night. Nothing will uproot me from there. And I've got to accept the scale of values that are acceptable here. I am what all those young boys think - an old man, aimless, lust stricken, and penniless. All my brilliant thoughts are as worthless as garlic skin."

I was entirely unsettled by his words. Why did he tell me all this? Did he intend to save me in time from a similar fate? Did he want to extract from me money? He poured out his heart to me because I'm a stranger, because it seemed to him that I'd understand. I had brought with me a hundred pounds in order to buy what my conversant desired so much, and I already promised to myself to reveal this gallant generosity and give him the hundred pounds so he could take home some expensive boy, and I'd go home with the proud feeling that I conquered my desire. But I immediately came to my senses regarding this gallant feeling, and was still sensible enough from being attracted to such generosity. I settled for paying for his tea and I parted from him with a shake of the hand without telling him my name.

He remained in a defeated posture. As if I also betrayed him. His mouth widened for a moment, yet immediately closed. He completely contracted and I turned my back towards him and returned to my hotel. For the first time since I knew my own mind, I recited the She'ma\* while listening for the

\*The She'ma is one of the central prayers in Judaism declaring the oneness of God.

meaning of the words that came out of my mouth. I didn't find much consolation in the verses that in my childhood brought me comfort and security. The redemptive angel did not hover over my head. I was in a strange world to which I was attracted to against my will and am completely filled with revulsion and fear of it. Many times in my life I've felt alone, yet this was the first time I felt the physical side of loneliness. My fingers felt the loneliness, even my toes. Around me was total loneliness and I wasn't able to sleep that night. One who feels such physical loneliness cannot sleep, since in every sleep one can send oneself into something, be it a dream, the house, the protective bed, memories or hopes. I was lacking at that time any affinity for anything, either real or imagined. I lay on my bed completely awake as an animal running from the hunter and knowing that it's forbidden to fall asleep even for a second in order not to fall in the hands of its pursuer. And the same hunter crouches within me. And I saw him eye to eye....

And from this whole episode were emblazened in my memory his opened, pained eyes...now I saw something similar in Feibish's eyes that were torn wide open. I almost burst out laughing inside. Feibish's great and terrible despair! Hunne ate a complete bar of chocolate! If Feibish only knew that deposed teacher! Yet Feibish wasn't even capable of imagining that a Jew could sink to such depths. His tragedy was in the province of proper and innocent pleasure. And despite all this, the same pained eyes, breaking-up inside themselves, the same mixture of pain and wonder....

I didn't know what to say to Feibish. Some little demon jumped for joy within me: here's a chance like no other to get close to Hunne from the beginning! Tell him to send Hunne daily to you so he'd write mezuzot and phylactery portions under your supervision. Feibish expects that....

Yet at the very same time I heard a voice warning me of a renewed meeting with Hunne.

I didn't answer him at all. I acted as if Feibish's whole confessional was nothing more than to ease his aching soul.

I love Hunne a profound love. Nothing helps me. I think of him more than I think of anything else. And at the same time I know it's nothing but a vain dream. Yet I like to think of my love, and like, nonetheless, to think of the obstacles that stand in its way. And the more the obstacles cause me to despair, the deeper is the tormented pleasure and the sharper is the feeling of self punishment. The whole world stands between me and the love of my soul. Every thing and cause that one can think of distances us from each other.

I would have dedicated my whole life to the ability to free myself from my craving for him. If I were only able to answer to the sweet command of 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul'. Simply to love the one who created you and the one who's truly worthy of love. To love one who returns your love a hundred fold in every prayer that you pray, in every thought that you think. What's simpler than this? What's easier than this? Yet the accursed intellect that's within me prevents it. The fruit of the imaginary tree of knowledge. A venom infected me by those forbidden books, and I'm completely poisoned with no remedy.

THE KING SLEEPS FOUR TIMES A DAY

by

Benjamin Tammuz

Listen,

Maybe you know the difference between a children's book and an adult's book - I don't.

When I was a child, it seemed to me that every interesting book was a children's book; and every boring book - apparently, was destined for the adults.

Now I'm not a child - from the perspective of age - and I divide books into two categories: good and not good, or: interesting and boring.

The trouble is, that I also don't know much about the difference between children and adults. It's acceptable to think that during childhood everything's nice and beautiful, life is sweet and easy and the whole world's like a giant scoop of ice cream; and about adulthood, people say it's full of problems, troubles and difficult matters. It's clear that such thoughts are complete nonsense.

Here, for example, our Yekuti'el - the hero of the story before you - it's possible to say that he was born mature and slowly arrived at his youth and childhood. What I have to tell of him contradicts some accepted things. It seems to me, that when you finish reading this book, there will be many matters less clear to you, and the number of questions will be double the number of answers.

This is, essentially, the subject of our story: to ask questions, and to be wise enough to know that there is not one answer, yet at least two. And both of them are doubtful.



Regional Map  
Scale: 1:500,000,000  
  
1mm = 1 Kilometer



Benyamin Tammuz

THE KING SLEEPS

FOUR

TIMES

A DAY

From national legends of Northern Topsy-turvyland  
which resides on the other side of the Nodding-warf  
Mountains from the prairie to the Not-without-water River  
(as shown in the map)

Drawings and cover by Danny Kerman

This translation is dedicated to Ofra

Translated by Gary Tishkoff

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to Hebrew Union College. Fall 1983.



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Chapter One - The Yard

The deeds about which I'm going to tell happened in a small, distant country and even if I tell you its name - Northern Topsyturnyland - you wouldn't know a thing about it. But there our hero is known to all. His name is Yekutiel.

Yekutiel was a boy whose back was defective from birth, and his right shoulder was higher than his left. This blemish inhibited his growth. And his height - when he was eleven, for example - was as tall as an eight year old. For this reason, his head appeared larger than the heads of the rest of the children his age, even though he really had a head just like other heads, and in many ways even a better head; that is to say, his wisdom was greater.

His blemish was first noticed when he was about five, and children his own age - whose understanding is small and imagination unruly - were afraid of him, and if they didn't tease him, stayed away from him. Finally he escaped from kindergarten and refused to leave the yard of his house. The truth of the matter is he feared his friends in kindergarten more than they were frightened of him. At first he thought they stayed away from him because they were cruel and bad; later he thought they excluded him from their group because he, Yekutiel, had done something awful; and finally he tried to block them from his thoughts and find some preoccupation so he could forget the ban that was placed on him.

At eight in the morning, after his father went to work and his mother was busy in the house, he would go out to the yard and shut the wooden gate of the high fence. The featherpalm bushes reached great

heights, along the fence, and made the yard like a separate hall from the outside. Two plum trees stood to the right of the gate and a small storage area was in the rear of the yard, with tools and unusable furniture in it.

This was the kingdom in which Yekutiel ruled singly for a complete year, until the day he was forced to go to school, when he was six.

Most people are envious of rulers, of kings and other powerful people that have their own kingdoms, and do as they like. But Yekutiel learned from early childhood, that happiness extends only to things when it's possible to divide - the happiness - with someone.

When Yekutiel would stand for many hours in front of the plum tree and see with his own eyes how the purple flowers blossomed in Spring, and open up so slowly you wouldn't believe it, and lurch about and tremble in the cold air, really before his eyes - he'd feel a great joy and understand that he was a witness to one of the great and marvelous secrets of the world; and most people think that only people and animals have the ability to move; and here Yekutiel found out that plants are also able to open an eye, to wink an eyelash and wave a small hand hello, and maybe they even cry a teeny tiny shout, inaudible, saying: Here, we've come! Look, we're here! Hello, Yekutiel!

And he wanted to tell his father about this, but father was at work. And when he wanted to tell this to his mother, he grew afraid lest she not believe him. And she was also busy and worried about the housework. Therefore, Yekutiel told those things to himself. And since he had a lot of free time, and also so he wouldn't have to be afraid lest they called him a liar - he began weaving a story for himself, telling himself, sometimes whispering, sometimes outloud, all sorts

of things about which only a few of us are even capable of dreaming.

"Good morning," Yekutiel would whisper to the pale, trembling flower. "Where did you come from?"

And the flower would answer and say: "I came from the depths that are underground, from the hidden world that's under your yard, from the place where flowers wait their turn. And today, my turn arrived."

"Tell me" requested Yekutiel "about the underground world. Is it true that there are bad flowers and good flowers? Are all friends, or are there arguments, to the point that the bad flowers expell the good flowers? And maybe you're a poor flower whom they expelled from that world, and therefore you burst forth to our yard to find a good friend here for yourself? I, for my part, am ready and waiting...if you agree, of course."



And the flower said: "When we're underground, we listen to stories and songs, in which the earth tells us about all the wonders which are possible to find on its surface. And we patiently wait, and when our turn comes, we burst forth upwards; and here I found you, Yekutiel, and I know that all the stories and songs that I heard are nothing compared to what I see.... I send you my blessings and implore you to be my friend."

And Yekutiel blushes from happiness and from embarrassment and lowers his eyes, and tears of joy trickle from them and he whispers: "I'll be your faithful friend my whole life...."

Yekutiel came daily to his flower and they told one another things, that might bore you now; yet one day we'll return to these things.

And then one day, when Yekutiel was standing in front of his friend, the purple flower, he noticed something that he might have noticed a day or two earlier, but was afraid to become aware of. He saw that the flower had aged. Signs of withering appeared on the edges of its petals, and the voice of the flower - the voice that was so clear - was slightly hoarse, weakening, and sinking into a sleep.

On that very day Yekutiel met for the first time the thing that people call death; and since Yekutiel was tender in years and inexperienced, he was greatly startled and almost fainted.

"Don't leave me" he cried out to the plum flower, "you're my only friend!"

The plum flower was so startled from the cry, that one of its petals fell to the ground; but it smiled - flowers smile in different ways. Yekutiel's friend smiled by shaking in the wind, and said:

"My dear Yekutiel, I'm not leaving you. Companions never disregard their friends. What your eyes see is nothing but a change in



form. Just as I look at you everyday and see how you grow more, are more handsome and wise, so do I also change before your eyes and pass from the stage of being a flower to the stage of being a fruit; and in the end I'll pass from the stage of being a fruit, to the stage of being a pit, from which will grow a new tree, and then I will again return to you from the depths of the tree in the form that we first met, and for the second time you'll see the flower that I was on the day of our first meeting. These are the rules of the game."

"My dear" pleaded Yekutiël, "can't you please stop the game for me! Stop and remain a flower as you were."

"Yekutiël," said the flower, "time can't be stopped, and there's also no need. I also see you change, and I'm happy about it. You should be happy to see the withering of my crown, and remember that soon I'll reveal myself to you in my full glory the ripe fruit; and thus we'll both go from strength to strength; don't be sad. In one of the reincarnations I'll meet you, when you're a very powerful man and your height will reach to the top of the tree, and I'll caress your face and tickle you under your nose."

Yekutiël laughed upon hearing these things, and the tired flower, who was changing for the next reincarnation smiled and said: "That's how I like to see you, jolly and understanding."

"It hurts me so much to understand" said Yekutiël.

"Everything that's beautiful is acquired through pain," said the flower. "I also hurt a little when I dry out and change form. Yet in the end I'll be happy. And so will you."

At night when Yekutiel fell asleep in his bed, he saw a dream, and in his dream he descended in fragrant, twisting tunnels to the underground world, and from the end of the tunnel his friend the purple flower floated towards him, and he took it in his hand and carried it to the place where flowers waited for their turn, and behind them the plums waited in myriads, and behind them pits and tree trunks. And beyond all this stretched a great and vast void, a void in which naked spirits roamed singing songs in the darkness. Yekutiel listened to the songs and strained to remember them by heart.

When he got up in the morning, he sat at the family table to eat and afterwards patiently waited until father went to work and mother would move on to the kitchen. When a complete silence spread throughout the house, he took his flute that his father had bought him as a gift, went to the yard, locked the gate, sat in the shade of the featherpalm bush and struggled to remember the tunes that he had heard at night. And as much as he remembered, he blew in his flute and played. And when the tune became a song, he went to the plum tree and played for his purple friend. The flower listened with an overflowing heart to the tune that it knew from the days when it belonged to the depths of the earth. Petal after petal floated from amongst the crown, and when Yekutiel finished playing his flute, the flower was completely scattered at the foot of the tree, on the ground, with the color of the petals like that of the earth, and Yekutiel knew that soon it would appear in its new reincarnation. Then he lifted his eyes to the tippy-top, and in the place where his best friend, the purple flower, had been hanging, he now saw a type of bud shining and small.

He looked at the bud a complete day and before his father returned home, Yekutiel was able to discern how the bud swelled from within, struggling with all its might to be a fruit and longing for the day in which it would discuss with Yekutiel about the joint secret.

It's doubtful whether you or I would be able to notice any type of movement of that same small point on the end of a branch. But you and I are immersed in a great confusion which people, wagons, radio, and television have created around us; and Yekutiel was given to the heart of the world and saw things we couldn't imagine and understood things we couldn't guess, and played melodies we couldn't hear, and heard voices about whose existence we couldn't even dream.



And when we played football, and when we threw stones at neighborhood cats, Yekutiel knew the pain and loneliness of which we had no part, and so he knew the place of a treasure which - if we don't pay attention to the story before us - we'll never never know.

Chapter Two - The Classroom

Before Yekutiel was taken to school, the wise teacher explained to the children, that Yekutiel had an impediment, that his back was defective, and it was necessary to treat him nicely, not to insult him and to draw him into the group.

The teacher didn't know, and the children certainly didn't know, that Yekutiel no longer required to be defended. The year he passed in his yard with the plum tree, gave him strength that no other person knew or could grasp. At a glance Yekutiel was small and had a bent back, yet his soul was steeled and his spirit soared to places where the maliciousness of the children could not harm him.

Together with this, one can say to the credit of the class, that they received the teacher's words with understanding, and everyone treated Yekutiel with extraordinarily and even inordinately gracious manners. Yet since he would not have paid attention to taunts, if he had been taunted now, he didn't notice the inordinate exaggeration in the outpouring of politeness around him. Yekutiel smiled at his classmates pleasantly and with a nice countenance, yet everyone sensed that he was living in another place. Teachers call such a child "scatter-brained"; yet it seems, the correct name is really "a concentrating child"; since Yekutiel was completely occupied with things that were beyond the apparent. When everyone saw a flower - Yekutiel saw the great depths of the earth in which all the flowers that were in the universe were waiting for their turn to burst forth. And when everyone heard the chirp of a bird passing by the classroom window, Yekutiel heard a measure of music from a song of the darkness, which he had heard in a distant dream of his.

And so it happened not once, that when the teacher asked Yekutiel: "What are you dreaming about, boy?"

He'd answer, to everyone's surprise: "About the return of the flower when its turn comes."

The children would break-out into laughter and the teacher would become concerned and tell his parents that Yekutiel doesn't concentrate on his studies; and Yekutiel's parents would implore him to study better; but Yekutiel himself didn't understand why the children laughed and why his parents worried; since he spoke the truth, and he spoke about a very important matter; certainly not less important than two times four.

Step by step Yekutiel learned three things that were very important to him. The first - that he has his own thoughts about the order of importance of life matters, and that his thoughts differ from the thoughts of most people. The second - that he mustn't reveal his thoughts since they're not accepted, and everyone responds to them in laughter. And the third - that he must find a way to be liked by others, despite his being different, and so that they not oppress him with their wonderings.

And when he arrived at the third thing and thought about it a lot, he concluded that if he was able to entertain the school children and to bring them to have fun and excitement, they'd leave him to himself. Since most people like to be entertained.

Very quickly he found the ways in which people get pleasure and give thanks. He began imitating for the children of his class the sounds of birds and animals, and would also imitate the sound of the winter wind which would shriek across the silent windows and strike the tops of the trees. And to these imitations he would add funny movements,



or gracious movements, according to the need. One day he performed for his classmates a short skit, in which he alone played many parts. And on that very same day his classmates really began to like him. And if it happened that they found reason to be angry with him, they were angry with him. Since if you really like someone wholeheartedly, you're not afraid to be completely open. Thus went the exaggerated politeness with which they treated him at first (before they really liked him) and between Yekuti'el and his classmates were established simple, true relationships, a normal mixture of friendship and arguments, cordiality and strife, as it follows from the nature of relationships among people in our world.



And so passed one, two and even three and four years. And in the fifth year when Yekutiel was eleven, something happened in the class: the literature teacher assigned the children to write a free composition about any topic which they chose for themselves. And when the teacher took the compositions of each child home, in order to read and grade them, the teacher paused at Yekutiel's composition, read it, and was astonished. The next day the teacher came to the class and said to the children: "I'm going to dedicate this lesson to Yekutiel's composition. I'll read it to you and then we'll discuss it afterwards."

And these are the words that the teacher read from Yekutiel's notebook:

#### "A Free Composition"

"Many years ago there was a country in the world, a distant and remote country, beyond the mountains of darkness, beyond the rivers of fire, and beyond the forests of iron. In this country, all the people, men, women, and children, were born hunched-back, with their right shoulder higher than their left and a large head on a tiny body.

"The people of this country were very happy and satisfied with their lot. And when they spoke of their friends and praised them, they'd say: 'My daughter is so beautiful, no one could resist her charm. Her back is hunched and bent more than any other girl I've seen my whole life.'

"And the listeners would get excited, not really believing what their ears heard. And the proud and happy father would pull out a

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picture from his pocket and show it to his friends, and all would excitedly agree: 'It's really so, we've never seen such a hunched-back in all our days. It's really a wonder of wonders. This girl will be a beauty queen when she gets to be eighteen!'

"This is how the people of that country lived, they enjoyed every moment of their bent life, and during their holidays they would dance a special dance, in which they would express their joy for all that fell to their lot.

"Until one day a catastrophe occurred, and in the family of the mayor of the city a tall straight-backed child was born with straight shoulders. From year to year his defect so stood out more and more, until when he was ten he reached the height of five feet, a real monster!

"It's impossible to describe in words the suffering and affliction that were the fate of that child. From the day he was an infant, the rest of the children were afraid to play with him, and when the time came to go to school, the parents were forced to accompany him to every lesson, in order to protect him from the mockery of the rest of the children. Yet the child was courageous and intelligent, and said to the parents: 'You don't have to protect me. I can manage by myself.'

"And very quickly he was liked by the other classmates, since he was able to do for them whatever they were unable to do. Because of his height, he was able to pick fruit for friends from the tops of plum trees, and was also able to peek above the fence at the football field and tell his friends about the progress of the game and the score, without needing to buy admission tickets to the field. And he was also the first to see from a distance - because of his height -

the King's coach when he came to the city, and would announce to its inhabitants the coming of the King.

"And because of his tall height, he heard sounds from afar, and knew if a storm was closing in, or if the first signs of Spring were around the corner, and due to this, the residents didn't need to waste money buying barometers and didn't need to pay the wages of a weather forecaster. And if a heavy snowfall covered the roofs of houses, the invalid would remove the snow from the roofs with his hands, during a stroll in the city streets

"All this important work he did without payment, since he tried to be liked and not mocked. And in the end, the people of the country forgave him for being an invalid.

"But the parents thought that he suffered, because he was different from the rest, and they were very worried. They travelled from city to city, and searched in every place and sought to find a medical specialist who would be able to heal their child from the defect. Until one day it was made known to them that in the capital city could be found a world renown surgeon who specialized in this field who would be able to save their child. Miracles and wonders were told about this doctor. They said, some years ago the doctor already treated a case like this and succeeded in getting rid of the defect completely; and after a long and complicated operation, the physician was able to bend the back of the straight child and make that child bent almost like all other normal children.

The parents announced their wonderful discovery to their child and said that no price was too great for them, they'd pay the doctor all the money in the world.





"Much to their surprise, their child told them that he didn't at all want to travel to that doctor, that he wanted to stay as he was.

"But why?" the amazed parents asked.

"Because I want to be like the rest of my kind," the child said.

"The rest of your kind?" said the parents. "Where did you see someone like yourself?"

"I'm sure" said the straight child "that I'm not alone. I'm sure that there's a place in which everyone's like me."

"Nonsense," said the parents, "we read papers from all over the world, and we've never heard about a child like you. Except for exceptions...defective children like you."

"It's possible that in the papers no one writes about the land of people like me," the child said, "it's possible that it's a very small, remote country. It's possible that it's not a country at all, that just here and there people like me can be found. But we're all one special type, and it's forbidden for us to forego our rights."

"Your rights?" questioned the parents not understanding. "What rights are there for people like you?"

"There are," the child said, and smiled, "for example, we're closer to the sky, therefore we hear sounds and see things that normal people don't know about at all. And that's just one example."

"And then the parents were so shocked, that they took the child to a mental health physician, upon whose door was written 'Psychologist' as well as 'Doctor'.

"And this doctor talked with the child face to face, privately. After the doctor heard all that the child had to tell, the psychologist said to the parents:

"Leave your child alone. He's absolutely fine, if not even better than fine."

"And such it was. Until this day he remains an invalid, going about the world upright, inhaling the fragrance of plum flowers from up close, straight from the highest branches of the trees, and the flowers caress the child's cheeks and tickle him below the nose. And the child laughs. And the laughter is a sign of happiness. Sometimes."

The teacher finished reading from Yekutiel's notebook, and complete silence fell over the classroom. No one opened a mouth to say a thing, then the teacher asked if anyone had anything to add. One person offered and said:

"In my opinion, this whole story couldn't possibly be. What do you mean that a straight child would need to have an operation in order to become bent? Being straight is better than being bent...."

To our good fortune - and maybe to our misfortune - the bell rang, and we all burst outside, escaping from the classroom in a run. But thereafter we weren't able to escape from the words Yekutiel wrote in his composition.

### Chapter Three - The Illness

During his last year of study at school, when all his classmates were studying for the final examinations, Yekutiel caught a cold and was bedridden. His temperature rose, his thoughts were foggy, he hallucinated and would toss and turn in his bed saying things that made no sense. His mother called the family doctor, and the doctor prescribed medicines, gave him shots and placed ice pads on his forehead.

After a few days the temperature fell, but the doctor ordered Yekutiel to lie in bed a complete month, until he completely regains his strength. Another child would probably have recuperated from the illness more quickly, yet Yekutiel wasn't a strong child, and therefore the illness continued until the end of the school year, and Yekutiel wasn't able to take the final exams, and he didn't receive a diploma; since then until the end of his days he lived without a diploma.

During his illness his classmates volunteered to come to his house and tell him about the lessons he was missing; even the teacher would come to visit him and promised that they'd administer for him a special examination when he got better. And his parents promised him that they'd hire a special, private teacher to study with him what he missed during his illness.

For all of this Yekutiel was really full of thanks, and deep in his heart he was happy that he was bedridden, since during his illness he came to know how much everyone liked and respected him. Yet together with this he wasn't interested in the suggestions that were lavished on him. From the day he fell ill he began hearing a voice speak to him; and this voice - which wasn't the voice of a person, and wasn't even

a voice that spoke in words, spoke in a type of melody; and not exactly a melody, yet a combination of instructions and Revelations, like secrets and solutions, things that are essentially impossible to describe - this voice captured his heart so much, he no longer had patience to listen to all his well-wishers. Out of politeness, and out of recognition of goodwill, he'd listen; yet in his heart he wished they'd leave him alone, so he could return to the voice and speak with it.

Sometimes it was the voice of the purple plum flower that he recognized from then, which had been revealed to him in his early childhood. And sometimes it was a voice from within the dark depths, from the same songs he heard in his first dream about the place flowers wait for their turn; and sometimes it was a completely new voice.

When his illness abated, and when the house was completely still, Yekutiel would take his flute, blow in it, and make notations in his notebook; blow and write down musical notes. There was no other way to commit to memory the things that the voice told him. Just musical notes - and the voice of the flute - gave some sort of expression to the things he heard in his hallucinations.

Then strange things began happening around the house.

One day Yekutiel's mother was busy in the kitchen paring plums, when she suddenly heard the sounds of his flute coming from her ill son's room. She listened and smiled to herself. She was happy he was entertaining himself and not getting bored. Yet the more she listened, the more she was amazed. The sounds were familiar to her.

She was reminded of the days of her youth, the days when she was a little girl, playing in the yard of her parents, dancing with her young girlfriends. Then Yekutiel's mother put down the knife from her hand, forgot the plums and the pot in which water was boiling, and like in a dream spread out her arms to her sides and began dancing, in the middle of the kitchen. She floated and began singing. The walls of the kitchen were to her like a garden of roses and pine trees giving off a fragrant smell, and the charred ceiling was like an expansive sky, with summer clouds sailing across it in the morning breeze.

"Good Heavens!" cried Yekutiel's father when he returned from work and went into the kitchen to say hello to his wife. "Have you gone mad?" Water's spilling out of the pot, the food's burnt in the oven, the kitchen's full of smoke, and you're dancing and singing?!"

"Quiet" whispered Yekutiel's mother to her husband "do you hear the voice of the flute coming from our son's room?"

The father inclined his ear, and listened for a long time when suddenly tears of happiness began to stream from his eyes, and he took his wife in his arms and the two of them celebrated and carried-on in the kitchen which was catching fire, and their spirits floated with the flames that surrounded them, and they knew happiness, which only once in a lifetime one might know, if at all.

Then suddenly, the sound of the flute ceased and complete silence fell over the house. The mother looked around her and was shocked at the pots and walls, and the father woke as if from a dream, and went to the oven to remove the scorched pot.

Afterwards they went to Yekutiel's room and found him sleeping on his bed with an expression of peace and contentment on his face



like that which you find on the faces of angels as they appear in pictures of ancient artists.

In those distant days, when Yekutiël was sick in bed, I lived in my parents' house, next to Yekutiël's house. One night I awoke from my sleep to the sound of a tune rising up in the quiet of the night. It was the middle of the night. I looked from the window of my room and saw a weak light emanating from the east, where the sun would rise in another hour or two.



Even though tens of years have passed since that night, I remember what happened with complete clarity: the trills of music intoxicated me, and without knowing how it happened, I found myself floating in air, from inside my bed, sailing like a spaceship passing over the fence that divided the two houses, then right after, I found myself hovering in front of Yekutiel's open window. His room was filled with a bluish light, which blinded the eyes, and in the light I saw flaming wings hovering to the tempo of the melody.

"Fire!" I shouted full of panic and excitement. "Fire!" Then my parents burst into my room, touched my shoulders, and I saw that I was lying in my bed.

"What happened?" my father asked.

"Yekutiel's house is on fire" I said and pointed my finger towards the window.

My parents looked out the window, and immediately discovered that blinding light was coming from Yekutiel's window.

My father grabbed a morning robe over his shoulders and ran to the neighbor's house. When he returned after a little while - and the sun had already begun to rise and a bright light flooded our street - he told us that he knocked on the door of our neighbor's house and told them what we saw. My father and Yekutiel's parents burst into his room, yet were immediately calmed. Yekutiel was sleeping soundly, with the flute resting beside him on the blanket, and his face was smiling.

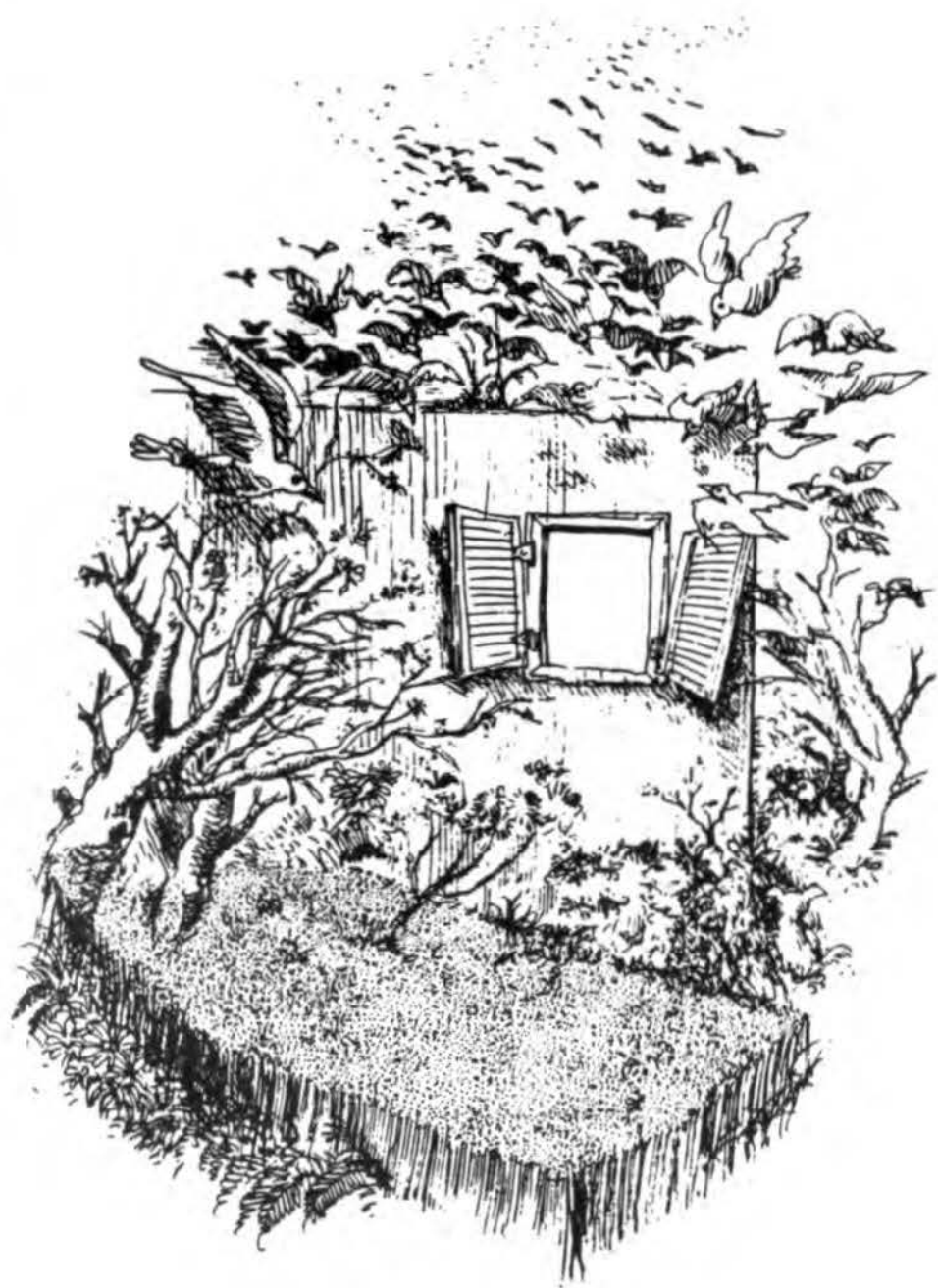
"Despite the fact that he's defective" my father said, "I must say that in my whole life I've never seen a more beautiful child than that boy who was lying in bed. But if it was the same Yekutiel whom we know, I'll never know."

That same morning, before I went to school, I went over to say hello to Yekutiel, the truth is, I wanted to be convinced that it was the same Yekutiel, or see if they switched him with another boy at night, as my father had hinted.

But it was the same Yekutiel. That is to say: a small change had begun to occur, yet then I thought that the change was due to his illness. One whose temperature is high will have a pinker face and his eyes will burn a little. That same morning I hadn't yet discerned that Yekutiel was beginning to change.

And before Yekutiel got better and rose from his bed, another incident happened, which was the most astounding of all.

One day we finished our studies at school two hours early. I therefore returned home at mid-morning, when none of the parents, mine or his, were at home. My father and his father were at work, and our mothers had gone out to the market to buy food. Our house and Yekutiel's house was empty and I dropped my bag on the steps of our house and decided to go visit Yekutiel. When I set-out across his yard I stopped and heard those same sweet trills of music. I stood in my place and listened. Such a melody I had never heard in my life. But what I saw at the same time was even more wonderful. It was a clean, clear day. No wind blew and the air was fresh and quiet. Despite this, I saw, to my surprise, that the trees in our yard along with the plum trees in Yekutiel's yard, were bending and swaying from side to side, as if a storm was raging. Very quickly I learned that the branches of the trees and their trunks were bending towards Yekutiel's window, and there they were frozen to the spot as listeners. Afterwards came the



strangest thing of all: at first the stray dogs and cats of the neighborhood sat on their bottoms in front of Yekutiel's window; after them birds began coming by the tens, hundreds and thousands, flying in the air and landing on the fence, on the windowsill, on the roof shingles and on the branches of the trees. And from the time they landed, they didn't move a feather or even chirp. Even those very same birds who don't stop screaming and calling in their throat like the ravens and the rooklets, the swallows and bulbuls, the sparrows and starlings - were completely mute and stood like ghosts, quietly listening. Even on my shoulders some pigeons and turtledoves landed, and on my head was perched a huge bird, which I wasn't able to identify since I couldn't see it, I could just sense how her whole body shook madly.

From the strength of the powerful notes and from the huge assemblage of birds and beasts, my thoughts were swallowed, and I'm not sure if what I saw was real or a dream. In any case, I think I saw the ground rise, like a huge body, breath heavily, from great excitement, rise and fall, like the chest of someone who's terribly excited, an excitement of happiness and amazement.

Suddenly, the voice of the flute stopped. For about half a minute there was silence then immediately afterwards rose a great noise all around. The trees returned and straightened up, rustling their thousands of leaves, the cats and dogs began chasing one another running and escaping down neighborhood alleys, and very quickly the place became emptied of its population and returned to what it had always been - a normal yard of a normal house.

I uprooted my legs and went to Yekutiel's house, entered his room and said hello. I didn't have the courage to ask or tell about the

birds and the trees but I said:

"That melody which I heard you playing on your flute, where's it from? Did you compose it, or did you play notes from a famous composer?"

Yekutiel smiled and said: "I didn't compose it, I just copied it from what they taught me in the dream. And after I copied it in the notebook, I tried to play."

"And who is it who taught you in the dream?" I asked.

"I don't know" Yekutiel said, "it's a voice that presents itself to me and asks me to tell others of its existence. And I do as it bids."

All of these things I explain now in order that it might be possible to understand the rest of the things which are to happen. I myself don't pretend to understand.

Chapter Four - The War

The things that I've told to you up to now are events that happened a long time ago, when we were little children. When we grew up a little and arrived at the time to serve in the army, I lost contact with Yekutiel, since he was exempt from the draft because of his impediment. My friends and I were taken to army camps, far from the city, and Yekutiel remained at his home.

One or two years passed from the time I went into the army, and then our officers announced to us that an enemy was closing in on our borders and sought to fight us. I heard many bad things about this enemy, from early childhood, and I always remembered fearing the day they would come and attack us. And now that day had come, and everyone in our division received weapons and provisions, and at nightfall we were ordered to the front at the border of our country, to face the enemy.

When I was a small boy, I knew not a few wars. I remember that one time a child from the next street came, broke into my dove-cote and took a pair of exquisitely beautiful and very expensive mail doves. He placed them in a sack and began to flee from our yard. At that very same moment I spotted him from my window. I chased him through alleys and yards until I caught him, then I began beating him and he returned my blows doubly. Finally I overcame him, took the sack from his hands, and before we parted, I added a kick on his rump so he'd remember not to touch other people's property.

From that war, and from that victory, I remember a few things. First - I remember that I felt I was right, and therefore I had the authority to fight that kid and beat him. Secondly - I remember that



he was startled; when I overcame him he cried and his face turned yellow from humiliation. And thirdly - I remember, that when I got home, I caressed the pair of doves and calmed them, and thought that in the end, maybe I should have left that boy alone. Maybe he was poor, and his heart really yearned for those doves yet his parents weren't able to buy him such an expensive present. Finally I was depressed about my victory and said to myself then, that if I'd run into that guy again, I'd scrutinize his character and in the end might bestow upon him a pair of doves as a gift. Not ones so expensive, but in any event a good and pure-bred pair.

These were approximately my memories of the war that I fought in my childhood, and in all these memories there was one more thing in common: I knew what I fought for and against whom.

But this war, which I was going to as part of my country's army, had a couple question marks. I didn't know why the enemy desired to destroy us, and I also had never met anyone from the enemy country and had not even seen their faces ever. Yet I was nonetheless prepared to fight valiantly, since if I didn't fight - they'd annihilate us. And our sages had already said: "Whoever slaps you on your face - don't turn the other cheek!"

So we went out to war.

You want to know what the war was about? I wish you didn't know. But I'll tell you a little about what happened in it.

Usually everyone from each of the fighting sides tries to grab a secure position on a high ridge in order to fire on the enemy below, while it's difficult for the army in the valley to harm the army on the mountains.



Since every army in the world is trained in ways of war, and all the officers are cunning and intelligent, both armies usually take positions on mountain tops and aren't able to touch each other. Then they descend to the valley and the plain, where they can't escape or hide, and they shoot and kill and slay each other until one of the sides despairs, because its spirit is broken, and flees the battlefield.

The next day the newspapers write who won and who lost and everyone returns home and prepares for the next war.

And every one of the dead has a father and mother, or wife and child, or brother and sister; and the world is filled with sorrow, tears, bereavement and agony without end.

Wise people in every generation and in every nation return and ask themselves how to get rid of wars - and they don't find an answer

to the question. There are those who say: "Justice is with us and we have to strike the enemy until they're destroyed." Others say: "People are inclined toward evil from their youth. There are no people who are less good and more good. There are only bad people."

Yet the event that happened in this war, about which I'm explaining, proves that everyone's a fool, and the truth is completely different. This is how it was during that war:

As morning broke our army was spread before the enemy's army (in a valley, of course, on an open flat plain quite fit for killing and carnage), and the bullets of rifles and cannons began whistling around. The bullets that our enemy fired on us wounded and killed most of my classmates, those who were with us in the days when Yekutiel was in our school. And the bullets that we fired - wounded and killed young men of the enemy too. So this is how we went on killing one another, which seemed like it would have no end.

But suddenly something very strange happened. The shots that came from the enemy lessened until they were completely silenced. And what do our eyes see? Our eyes see the enemy soldiers throwing their rifles down on the ground, holding their arms out towards us and marching towards our positions. When they got very close, we saw their eyes streaming with tears and their faces beaming. And when they came right up to our positions, they fell on our necks and said: "We've had enough brothers, no more killing and murder, we're all brothers."

The rest of the events of that same day are well known to whoever reads the papers, and I don't need to elaborate. But what's not known is this: at the time the bullets ceased from the side of the enemy, my ears heard from afar, from the side of the enemy lines,

the sound of a flute trilling in the air.

When the war was over and I returned home, I went to our neighbors, to ask how Yekutiel was, and heard from his startled and crying parents that when the war had broken out, Yekutiel had disappeared from the house and they haven't heard from him since. He had left a note on the kitchen table of his parents in which he wrote: "Don't worry about me. I'm fine and there will be peace to all my friends, and all of humanity. And someday I'll return home."



Many days have passed since then, and we haven't heard a single thing about Yekutiel. Until one day an old newspaper from the enemy country fell into my hands, a paper from the days of the last war, in which was information, that only I understood its true meaning. This is what was written in the enemy paper:

"A dangerous spy was caught on the battlefield.

"When our courageous soldiers were striking the enemy and were on the verge of winning the war, a dangerous spy from the hostile country infiltrated through; he is apparently a powerful sorcerer who broke the spirit of our soldiers and so poisoned their souls that they threw their weapons down to the ground and were captured. This sorcerer has not told us his name, yet our interrogators have found that he uses a flute through which he spreads the poison of peace to the hearts of our courageous fighters, and whoever listens to the trilling of his melody is made gentle-hearted.

"The commander of our armies commanded all the officers to plug the ears of their soldiers with wax when they go out to fight. And the spy who was captured by our forces was imprisoned behind lock and key and will no longer spread the poison of peace."

## Chapter Five - In Prison

The prison to which Yekutieli was taken wasn't a regular jail, in which thieves, murderers, drug dealers and con artists are held.

Common criminals, of the type just now listed, are entitled to be defended by the law since the laws of the state are supposed to take care of them. Common criminals are sentenced to a certain number of years in prison after which they go free. Common criminals have the right to edible food, to occasionally meet with family members, and various other rights.

But the prison to which Yekutieli was taken was for a different type of person. From the moment people like him became prisoners - they lose all their rights and their condition is more abominable than thieves and murderers.

It's difficult to explain the difference between these two types of prisoners, so I'll relate some examples from which you'll be able to conclude your own conclusions based on your own judgement.

On the first day of his arrival at the prison Yekutieli met there a man who carried his head high, walked pleasantly and was well educated. The person introduced himself and said: "My name's Dr. De Nicotine."

Yekutieli, who had a certain knowledge of languages, understood that a French person from the aristocracy stood before him. He understood this by the name and was apparently right.

"And why'd they put you in prison if I may ask?" Yekutieli said.

"Because of the invention I invented" said Dr. De Nicotine.

"I'm a physician, a specialist in respiratory diseases. And here I observed that smoking cigarettes causes lethal cancer. I therefore dedicated twenty-five years of my life to study the problem and last



year I was able to create a small pill which if one swallowed it, one would never again want to smoke a cigarette. On the day it became known to the government of the pill I had invented, police officers came to my house and arrested me."

"I can't understand it" cried Yekutiel excitedly. "The government should bestow a prize on someone like you."

"That's what I thought" smiled Dr. De Nicotine, "but now I know why they arrested me and with your permission I'll tell you. Tobacco, from which cigarettes are made, is considered a government business. From every ounce of tobacco sold in the store for five cents, the government levys a four cent tax, and thus amasses a tremendous profit, and with this money buys weapons, pays the salaries of its soldiers, and wages wars against the enemy. And if people stop smoking, the state treasury will become empty."

"All this you certainly must have pleaded before the judge" said Yekutiel. "And the judge wasn't convinced of your innocence?"

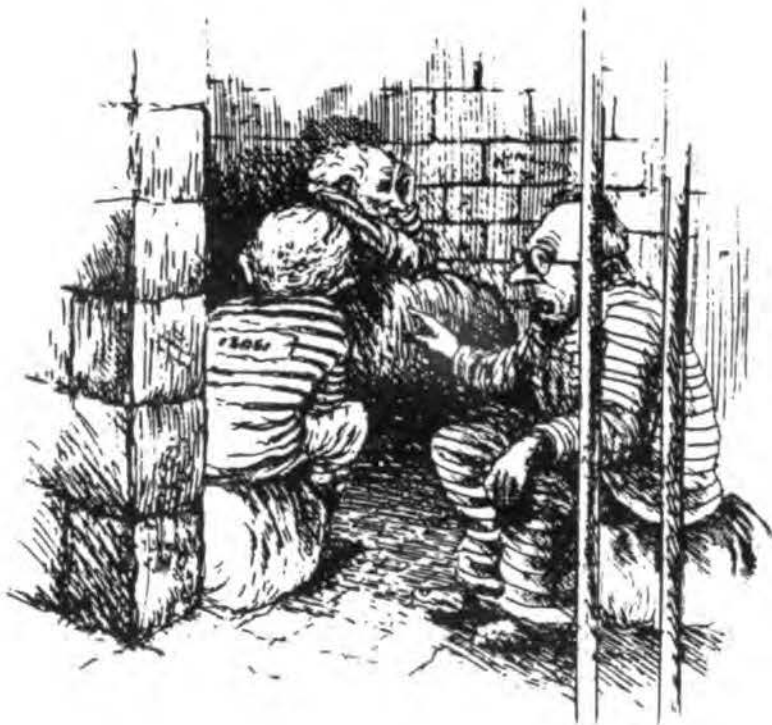
"I was never brought before a judge," said Dr. De Nicotine, "and you too, Mr. Yekutiel, were never brought before a judge. The prison in which we sit is made for people who will not be brought to trial."

"Really?" Yekutiel asked in amazement.

"Quite so" said Dr. De Nicotine. "Here, for example, do you see this old man sitting in the corner? This is my friend and companion Professor Humanitus and he's a philosopher known throughout the world. They brought him here because he wrote a book in which he proved that all people are equal, both from the point of view of their rights and their obligations. And from the day he published his book, he's been sitting here and the book was burned."

"What did they find wrong with his book?" Yekutiel requested to know. Yekutiel was new in that prison and still didn't understand many things.

"I'll tell you," said Dr. De Nicotine. "When the army goes to fight the government's wars, they explain to the soldiers that the enemy is evil, stupid, and plotting, and that one must annihilate them. On the strength of this provocation soldiers are filled with anger and go out to kill the enemy. But if they read everything in Professor Humanitus' book, they'd know and understand that everyone's equal: and if they understand that, no one would go to war. And if there were no wars in the world, it would be clear that the army and weapons are superfluous. And if they're unnecessary, then politicians are also unnecessary. Then it would be clear that the state needs just



three types of people: workers, thinkers, and artists. The workers would produce what is essential for one's needs; the thinkers would suggest explanations for the wonderful riddles of life; and the artists would enrich the soul and bring it pleasure, love, and excitement. And for all of these reasons Professor Humanitus was imprisoned in this prison."

Yekutiel listened to the words seriously, and for the first time in his life, he understood a few things that hadn't been clear to him until then. After he thought to himself a lot, he arrived at a certain conclusion. And one night, when all the prisoners were asleep and the prison guards were also dozing in the hallway, Yekutiel woke-up Dr. De Nicotine and Professor Humanitus from their sleep and retired with them to the corner of the cell and said:

"I have a plan, yet I need a flute to carry it out. And to my sorrow the guards took from me the flute I had the day they captured me on the battlefield." Yekutiel explained his plan in detail until the two honorable, learned men agreed with him. There was only one problem: how to acquire a flute or reed from which to make a flute.

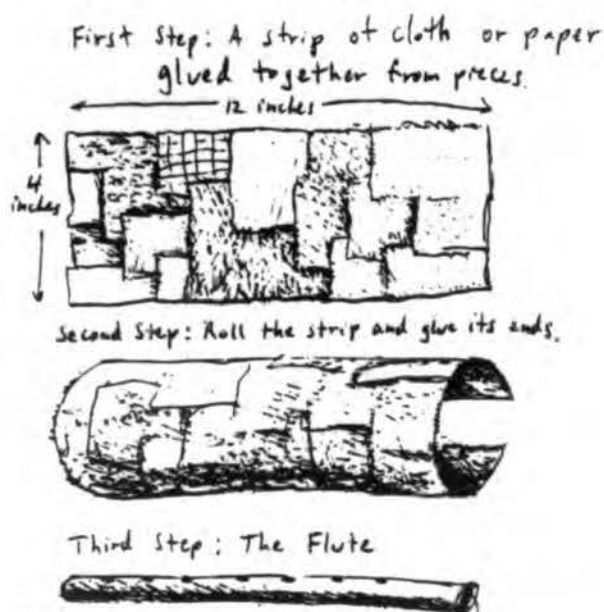
"One can make a flute not only from a reed," said Yekutiel, who in matters of flutes was a greater expert than either of the doctors. "It's possible to make a flute from any pipe, whether this pipe is made from a reed, silver or gold, iron or clay, or even paper."

"Paper?" asked the two in amazement.

"Yes really" said Yekutiel. "And not just paper, but even from strips of cloth. This is how it would be done: the paper strips, or cloth strips, would be glued together until they were one rectangular strip, about twelve inches long and four inches wide. This strip would be rolled and glued, then we'd have a pipe. In this pipe I'd

carve holes in the proper places and then the work for the flute would be completed.

In addition to the explanation, Yekutiel drew for them in the dust of the floor of the cell a plan for the work. Like this:



"And how are we to acquire paper, or cloth, and also glue?" Dr. De Nicotine wanted to know. "Since in this prison we're not allowed to write letters to our families and we don't have paper, and of course not cloth."

"Each of us has cloth" said Yekutiel, "since each of us is wearing clothes. Each one of us will then tear-off a piece of cloth from his shirt or pants and contribute it to the endeavor."

"And where will we get glue?" asked Professor Humanitus.

"If each of us gives a bread crumb from our daily portion of

food" Yekutiel said "we'll amass after a certain amount of time enough bread, which is flour, which with the help of water, we can knead, which will be like glue.

"Are you sure, Mr. Yekutiel" asked Dr. De Nicotine "that such a flute will be able to make a sound?"

"In this matter, you can rely on me" said Yekutiel. "I'll take full responsibility."

And when the decision was settled - the three got to work.

Professor Humanitus contributed the silk lining of his wide-brimmed hat. All professors, or almost all professors, have wide-brimmed hats, for a reason that's unknown to us. Some say that through the help of such a hat they protect their heads, so their intelligence wouldn't dry up in the sun. Since intelligence is their instrument of work. Others say that a wide-brimmed hat makes an impression on people, and when they see the hat, they know that a professor stands before them. For otherwise, how would one, who's not educated, know he's dealing with a professor?

Dr. De Nicotine contributed a piece of thin wool from his woolen underpants that he wore. Ever since he was a famous doctor, he was careful not to catch a cold, and became accustomed not to go out without woolen shorts under his trousers.

And Yekutiel tore a long strip from the edge of his cotton robe, since his mother would make him robes longer than he needed, and there was always extra material. Why do mothers always bestow upon their children more than they need - we don't know. But it's a fact. They always tell us: Eat more. Drink more. Wear more. But that's their problem.

Afterwards, they began collecting bread crumbs.

And this was a difficult and lengthy matter, since the amount of bread they received in that prison was really miniscule. Nonetheless, they had enough bread after three months. Whoever likes calculations, could know, more or less, how much bread each inmate received daily if I tell you that at the end of three months they collected the crumbs to an amount of one ounce, after each of the three contributed a tenth of his daily portion. (Solutions should be send to "Am Oved" publishers, for the editor of the "Dan the Saver" series; and for those with the correct solutions some small nice prizes will be drawn).

The fastening of the pieces of cloth, preparation of the glue, and completion of the flute, took an additional month since they needed to do the work secretly at night. And when the work was completed, they revealed their secret to the rest of their cellmates, who were two in number. The first was one who was imprisoned because he painted the walls of his room yellow. (You need to know: the color yellow is the color of the enemy flag!) And the second was imprisoned because he stood on the balcony of his apartment on the day that the head of the army passed in the street, riding on his horse; and the poor man was imprisoned because he didn't shout for joy to the honor of the commander. The wife of this poor fellow complained to the authorities that her husband was mute and unable to speak let alone shout for joy. Yet the authorities didn't accept her claim and said he was a traitor.

When the time of the operation Yekuti'el planned finally arrived, the three stood up, Yekuti'el in the lead, blowing the flute. The same melodic trilling, that you already know the nature of its influence, did its job: smiles rose to the faces of the jailers, they opened the cell door and bowed before those who exited. Yekuti'el marched first,



playing the flute, and when he passed by the jailers, he bowed a slight bow and smiled.

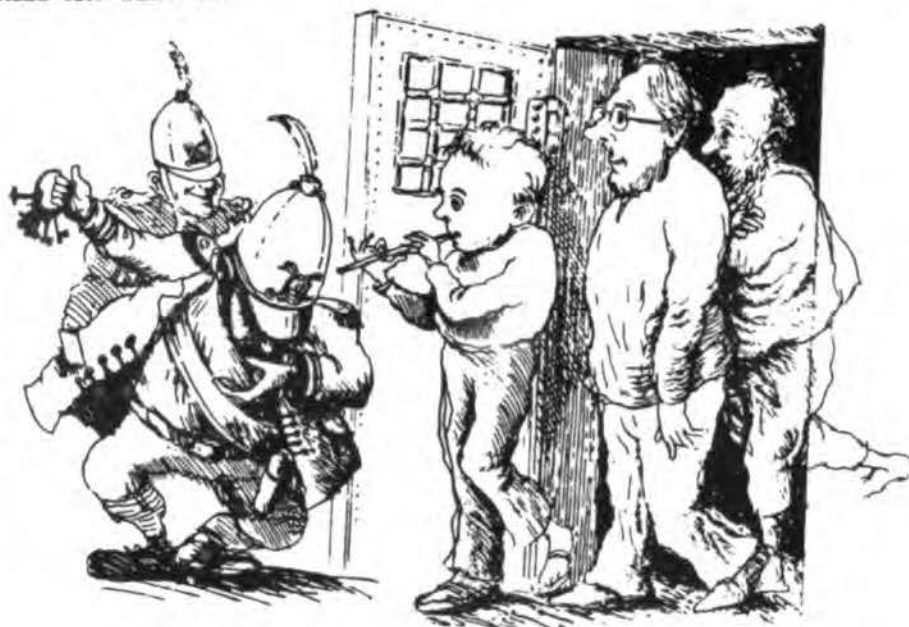
Second marched Dr. De Nicotine, and when he passed the jailer, he said: "Merci Monsieur" (which means "Thank you, sir" in the language of the French people).

Third marched Professor Humanitus, and when he passed the jailer, said: "Fugientes te salutant" (which means: "The escapees bless you" in Latin).

Fourth marched the one who had painted his room yellow, and he said: "Goodbye, and I won't see you later."

And the fifth, the mute person, who didn't shout for joy at the commander of the army, said: "

But the jailer even understood this. Whoever can understand the language of the flute music, can also understand the language of muteness and silence.



From the day that those five horrible and terrible criminals left the prison we don't know what became of them.

Rumor says that Dr. De Nicotine is now working on a pill against the common cold, which is a disease for which there is still no medicine today.

About Professor Humanitus - it's said that he's stopped writing books, but he gathers small crowds of people and speaks wisely to them. Yet for words of wisdom there isn't a great demand, and it's a wonder that he can support himself. Were he to speak nonsense, and write empty things, he'd certainly be extremely wealthy, yet that's his problem.

Regarding the one who painted his room yellow, it's said about him that he sailed to a distant island, and built for himself a yellow cabin, and he wears yellow clothes and is punctilious in being fed only yellow foods like pumpkins and mangos; yet in emergencies - he'll even eat a few carrots since its color is close to yellow.

About the mute - it's said that he returned to his wife and children and found himself a secret assignment, since in secret jobs the less you speak, the better, and since he doesn't speak at all, he's risen to the position of General Director.

And regarding Yekutiel, we really know details about him since after a certain time he returned home and fulfilled the promise he promised in his note, namely - that he'd come home someday.



## Chapter Six - Our People and Their Customs

From reading books I know that every people has national holidays and days of mourning, and that they have harvest festivals and memorial days for important events in their history. But since nothing in the world about our people or our country has ever been published in a book (except about Yekutiel's activities which will be told later on), I find myself justified in giving you some sort of idea about the customs of our people, their joyous occasions and sad ones.

The attentive reader will certainly have noticed the only fruit mentioned in this book is the plum. And that's because our country grows this fruit only and no other fruit.

From the fruit of the plum tree we make plum soup, plum pies, plum wine and plum marmelades. From the trunk of the plum tree we make furniture and build wooden houses. Most of the machines are contraptions of our country, like a weaving loom, snow sleds, musical instruments (flutes, violins and pianos) and boats which sail in our lakes (we have no outlet to the sea) are made from the plum tree. Likewise, we use the dry branches of the tree for heating and cooking.

It's no wonder, then, that our central holiday is the Plum Holiday.

For a whole month we celebrate the Plum Holiday. Most of the men drink plum wine from morning 'til dusk and all get drunk. The women don't drink in order to be able to drag their husbands home at evening time from the city squares in which people dance during the holiday. Likewise, all those people who play in our orchestras refrain from drinking in order that the rest of our people can dance. And for this reason, not even a drop of wine reached Yekutiel's lips since the day

he began thinking for himself, because he functions as the head instrumentalist who also plays his flute and is the orchestra conductor as well.

From the day Yekuti'el returned from prison in the enemy's country, he began organizing in our land a great orchestra, that was charged with playing before the people throughout the year, and he also founded a school of music, and was paid from the city treasury. He would receive for his wages three sacks of plums per year, two sacks of flour (from the different types of produce grown in our country one should especially note, except for the wheat, the sorghum seeds which we'd feed to our doves) and a tin and a half of oil (in our area is grown just safflower stalks from which we get oil for eating and lighting). It wasn't an important salary; and it's even possible to say it was a poor salary. For example: the mayor would receive a salary of fifty-five sacks of plums, a dozen sacks of flour, and six tins of safflower oil with pocket money as well.

The Plum Holiday wasn't our only holiday. We also had historical holidays, of which the most pleasant was Fryingpan Holiday. This holiday lasted for three days, in memory of the three days of war that were fought seven hundred years ago against our enemy on the other side of the river. This enemy was exceedingly crafty and chose to break through our borders during our Plum Holiday, when all the men were drunk and unable to fight. Then a miracle occurred, one of our women took a fryingpan that was in her kitchen, and she called to the rest of the women to follow suit, and with the pans that were in their hands our women gave the enemy a fatal blow.

In memory of that victory we permit our women to get drunk during the three days of the Fryingpan Holiday, while the men sit at home,

darn socks, cook and wash the floors. Only Yekutiel and the men of his orchestra remain out in the city, in order to play for the women who go out to dance.

We have another holiday, which is also a very important holiday for us, which is the Day of Truth. That's the day in which it's forbidden to lie, and everyone speaks the truth, the papers print only the truth, and even the speakers at party assemblies speak the truth. During this holiday, the Holiday of Truth, people cease from criticizing the government and don't utter a single word of derision about our leaders, our laws, or statutes, since we're indeed the best of peoples,



the most wise and pleasant of any. Our leaders explain to us on the Day of Truth that there's no sweeter, nicer, or more beloved nation in the whole world that equals us. At the end of the Day of Truth, our people swear to love only ourselves and to hate all other peoples, to despise them, and to persecute them as much as we're able.

Incidentally, on the Day of Truth no one sees Yekutiel outside. They say he locks himself in his room and refuses to go out. Though Yekutiel's absence causes the National Orchestra to play on the Day of Truth in an especially terrible way, sounding all sorts of off-tune notes grating to the ear, since the soul of the orchestra - the distinguished conductor Yekutiel - refuses to leave his room. And it's too bad. But maybe he has his reason, yet he's never told me.

Thus far - regarding the national holidays. From here on out - something about our folk customs. In all proper countries, as with us, the rains fall in summer, during the cold days; and during the winter we suffer from terrible heat waves and droves of insects. It's therefore acceptable amongst us during the cold, wet summers to go outside almost completely naked so that the rains wash our bodies, and thus we save water; since during the winter water is scarce, and there's no need to bathe much since the sweat washes our bodies like a shower.

Long ago the situation with us was opposite: during the cold summers we'd wear warm clothers; yet the doctors found that one must strengthen their body; and since then almost all the diseases in our area ceased and there are almost no people with colds among us. The other diseases like cholera, tuberculosis and encephalitis, whose



danger to the body is not great, are found amongst us in abundance, but it's clear, that no one's alarmed by this. The important thing is that we've rid ourselves almost completely of the common cold.

And now, after I've brought before you a general description of our state and its people, I'll say a few words about Yekutiel's place amongst us.

When Yekutiel returned from the enemy's country, from prison, I noticed, and many others noticed too, that a change was taking place in him. He didn't grow much, and his back didn't straighten, of course; but in his face certain changes occurred. To his eyes were added a certain gentle gleam, a sort of expression of goodheartedness and forgiveness. As if he understood something, that had troubled him for a long time and now troubles him no more. Likewise I'd say that his forehead became very handsome. But after all, what's so handsome about a forehead; it's only a smooth, dull area under which is a bone and over is stretched skin. Nonetheless, his forehead expressed strength as if a strong spirit radiated forth from it. Maybe this was due to the thoughts that were hidden under that forehead. Yet about Yekutiel's thoughts during those days I didn't know a thing. I only knew of his actions; and of a few I've already told, that he was the conductor of the National Orchestra and he would cause the men to dance during the Plum Holiday and the women - during the Fryingpan Holiday. But he had another occupation, to which he devoted his strength at night, when he was alone in his room. All night long I'd see light in his room, and all night I'd hear musical notes. But these notes I heard were very short, suddenly rising and suddenly

becoming mute. And after a short silence sounds from the flute could again be heard, or the sound of a piano key rising in the dead of night then disappearing.

Once, I wasn't able to control myself and I peeked into his room, then it became clear to me that he'd blow in the flute and would write in his notebook of musical notes immediately thereafter. The meaning was that he began writing down the melodies he'd composed. And only



then did it occur to me that Yekutiel was a composer; which in a foreign language is read "Compositor". I would have never thought of it, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. Before I saw it, I had thought that he was just a plain arranger of wonderful melodies. But now it became apparent that he was a "Compositor". That is to say, a composer.

It's hard to find fault with Yekutiel or to bring complaints against him; since one like him, weak in body and defective - what would he do if he didn't occupy himself with this work which makes

no money, has no honor, and makes no sense? Yet there is much comfort in melodies, and even a type of magical power, yet no one can say that it's nice for an adult to waste one's time in fun while at the same time one could do things that would earn one - at least - six sacks of plums and two and a half tins of safflower oil a year. That was my opinion then, when I had made myself fit to be an expert oil presser in our national oil press, in the name of our King, Elimelech the Fourth. At the same oil press, pressers were not the only ones trained, but also grindingstone builders, donkey drivers who care for the donkeys that pull the grindingstone, and also cart owners who would bring the safflower kernels from the fields after the thrashing.

In the company of such people I spent most of my life, and to them I told what I saw in Yekutiel's room. I didn't intend to make a mockery of him, God forbid, but rather out of pity did I tell what I saw. But my friends at the oil press laughed when they heard my words and spread the news to the pubs and the market place thus informing everyone in the city, that the conductor of our National Orchestra busies himself with music. This news lowered his status so much in the eyes of others, and caused such mocking and scoffing from the people, that Yekutiel was forced to resign his position and give up his daily bread.

My heart also broke inside me when I saw the troubles I brought on him unwittingly, and I vowed in my heart to give him half of my salary so that he wouldn't die of hunger.

During those same days we became friends again, like we were in our childhood, and Yekutiel not only didn't get angry with me, but shared a secret with me, and revealed to me that he sends his notebooks, his books of musical notes, across the border to the country of Southern Topsyturvyland, and from there they're smuggled to distant countries where people buy things like this with money.

Why did I tell so much? - So you wouldn't be amazed or surprised of the things that happen in the coming chapters.



### Chapter Seven - History, Culture and Poetry

Before we continue on to the coming chapters, I'll bring details about the cultural life of our country. Our culture can be divided into two main branches: Plum Culture and Safflower Culture.

Plum Culture is more ancient, and Safflower Culture is newer, or 'modern', as people say today.

The old people and those set in their ways are attached to, of course, the Plum Culture; but the youth and the courageous mock this and profess the Safflower Culture.

A stranger might not understand this, so I'll act as is my manner and bring a few concrete examples from the two cultures. It's understood from the outset that I wouldn't be able to go into much detail in our short story, but I'll be satisfied with the most important details, the details upon which rest our spiritual life.

We're an ancient nation, and at the dawn of our civilization we were sustained only by the plum. Most of the year we ate fresh or dried plums, and during holidays we'd eat plums cooked in water, or plums that would float in a bowl of milk. Our learned ones claim that these three substances - the plum, water, and milk - are the bases of our culture, and therefore three historical schools are found with us. The first - the plum school; the second - the water school; and the third - the milk school; and the three of them join together to the era of the plum. This scientific division was formulated over a period of hundreds of years and in the end yielded marvelous results in the field of the humanities.

For example: when one speaks about the beauty of women (in love

poetry, for example, or tales, or just whenever) there are three ways to express the subject. The people of the plum school write in their books: "Her eyes were like a plum". The people who follow the water school write: "She had watery eyes"; and the people of the milk school, whose approach is compounded and more complicated, write: "She has beautiful eyes like plums that float in a plate of milk". In this expression you can immediately discern that it's a combination of two approaches joined together: the approach of the plum and of the milk combined. However, our researchers of literature analysed the problem and enlightened us, and through their help we know that the people from the school of milk are the most profound.

At a certain period of our history a war broke out, in which our armies succeeded in crossing the Notwithoutwater River and penetrate the fortifications of Southern Topsyturnyland. In the agricultural areas of the enemy our army discovered fields sown with safflower, and a few of the courageous commanders brought us safflower seeds as spoils of war. During about a hundred years we used to eat the safflower seeds as they were, and our people were struck with terrible diarrhea, vomiting and poisoning. But at the end of two jubilees our learned people discovered (with the help of industrial spies) the method of getting oil from the seeds, and from that same time the safflower era began.

Those same hundred years during which we chewed safflower seeds our historians call "The Ignorant Period" yet another school exists amongst us who call that period "Diarrhea Days", and to this day there's a difference of opinion about this. Contrary to this, all agree not to mix the two periods, so we're very scrupulous not to eat safflower oil mixed in water, since the water belongs to the period of the plum.



Whoever's caught eating safflower in water - is excommunicated for seven years.

The safflower period brought us to the era of frying; since frying is only possible in oil, and before there was oil, we were satisfied just with cooking. From this is a further distinction which is the current view among our learned people - the clear distinction between the generation of cooking and the generation of frying. Our young authors, poets and painters are called "Fryers", while the older artists and learned people call themselves the "Cookers". This matter has brought us difficult periods of cultural wars, which got to the point that even the royal family was divided into two branches: The King, Elimelech the Fourth is an avowed Cooker, and so is his wife the Queen. But one of his children is a known Fryer, and rumor says that at night, at the balls that are held in the palace, he drinks, with his friends, mixed drinks of safflower and water. There's no proof to the truth of this rumor, but the very fact that such rumors circulate among us proves to where we've arrived and how far it's possible to degenerate, if we cast off all yokes and free all restraints.

My father, of blessed memory, told me that in his youth the argument still existed, whether it was permitted to mix safflower oil with plum wine. A lot of ink was spilled over this argument, and there were periods in which entire families were destroyed because of differences of opinions on the subject. One of my aunts from my mother's side left her husband and two small children because she was staunch and aggressive in her opinion that one shouldn't mix safflower and wine. After a while the fury calmed down and the argument subsided somehow, when a learned person suggested a compromise: one shouldn't mix plum

wine in safflower oil - that scholar decreed - yet it was permissible to mix wine with water since both the wine and the water belong to the period of the plum. Since then we drink wine mixed in water and no one has raised any objection whatsoever.

This period of debate was immortalized in our literature in a few books and poems. I'll satisfy myself with just one example, that stands-out, from the pen of one of the great poets of that time, none other than the poet Doggerel DePlummy; and these are the words of the poem:



Awaken, O Muse of song, blazing doggerel wrath  
 To shatter hearts, explode consciences  
 Over my peoples' misfortune and woe  
 Sweeping toward their grave every man and woman  
 While they drink their wine mixed with oil  
 And no one rises up to sound the alarm!  
 A voice calls from above:  
 Not oil, just water!

During the very same period a lot of responding poems were written about Doggerel DePlummy's poem. I'll cite the most famous of them, from the pen of Saffron Spikenard, one of the great poets of the Fryers, from the generation of the Safflower, one of the moderns; and here are the words of his poem:

Gallowing safflowers from oceans smuggling  
 Weighing  
     Beighing  
         Strutting in Streamings  
 Really stalking, yet also stalked  
 Tutaling  
 Tanteling.  
 Doggedly contemptuous  
 Dullingback dulbacks  
 Plums to plummet  
 Toot-tooting  
 Forward!



Apparently, the poem is simple and understandable even to a five year old, and there's no need for explanation. But on the other hand, it's an acerbic, polemical poem, and it's easy to imagine what kind of impression this poem made. Since then right up to the present, many volumes have been written about that age-old argument between Doggerel DePlummy and Saffron Spikenard, and the essence of the argument rested, of course, precisely on the unclear parts of the Fryer's poem. All the researchers noticed the blatant fact, that the first three lines of Saffron Spikenard's poem excel in that the letter 't' is not used at all. Contrarily, the letter 't' already appears in the fourth line, and disappears again in the ninth and last line. Regarding the last line, a few editions have been found, and among them manuscripts, in which is clearly written "Toward" and not

"Forward"; therefore it's not clear if one can suppose that the letter 't' is completely absent from the last line. Yet there's no disagreement about it's disappearance from the ninth line, therefore the researchers concentrated on decoding the words "Dullingback dulbacks".

Logic concedes that there's some kind of clue to the name of Doggerel DePlummy; yet such an explanation would make all of the research unnecessary. Therefore scholars violently rejected that supposition and went far afield to the recesses of our history, and indeed revealed some very interesting details. It became clear that during the period of the plum there were many poets who called the plum lovingly - "ptum". First - because they loved the plum; Secondly - because the letters 't' and 'l' look alike (in handwriting) having nothing more than a small line differentiating them (in the letter 't'). And others say: the letter 'l' is nothing more than a shortened form of the letter 't', when one ignores the line (in the letter 'l').

And if the suppositions of the first are correct, this means that Saffron Spikenard didn't write "Dullingback dulbacks" but rather "Duttingback dutbacks"; and if that's the case, this means that the letter 't' also appears in the ninth line, and there's no problem or puzzle that needs decoding; the whole poem is as clear and understandable as the alphabet.

This outlook was the one adopted in the end by the researchers, and since, there haven't been any problems.

Thus far as regards poetic research.

Now, the only thing left is to cite a few sayings, a concise, choice list from the sea of our literature, so the reader will be able to see alone the nature of our culture and the main currents of thought throughout our generations.

So here's a choice collection (according to the alphabet):

1. A sack full of rocks is heavier than an empty sack.
2. Borders of Topsyturvyland are the borders of the world.
3. Cook in your house and fry outside.
4. Dumbness is no boon; yet it's also no great handicap.
5. Especially if you're cold - try to warm up.
6. Feh to whomever was not a fryer in youth, and woe to whomever  
is not a cooker in old age.
7. Getting on? - Great!
8. Having washed your face - means you were dirty.
9. Instead of cooking - fry!
10. Just one day a year speak the truth.
11. Kitchens full of pans insure safe borders.
12. Learned ones - beware!
13. Mouths were created to eat. If you speak much, you'll go hungry.
14. Not all that is fatty is safflower oil.
15. One who dances spoils one's soles.
16. People are all alike. Plums differ from one another.
17. Quiet people don't speak much.
18. Right away - think plums!
19. Something good you did? - Rest for two days!
20. Twins look alike only if they were born of the same mother.
21. Undulating units - unify.
22. Vlums, plums and ptums - are all the same.
23. Without plums, there's no culture.
24. Xylophones falling from on high, can be dangerous to the eye.



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25. You tried it? - Don't try it again.

26. Zer are zose who pay cash, and zer are zose who charge it!

And to conclude our overview of Northern Topsyturvyland's culture, allow me to end with an ancient fold saying: "Happy is the one who looks like us, and Woe to one who was born outside our country" (from the words of our King, Elimelech the Fourth, at the opening address he gave in honor of the new year).

And one more saying, afterwhich we'll return to our story: "Three frying pans full of boiling oil are better than one empty one" (from the words of the head of our army, as were spoken to the courageous women during the days of the great manoeuvres).

And now we're permitted to return to our story.



Chapter Eight - An Emissary from a Distant Country

Our Country - like all other countries in the world - is besieged by enemies; no one is permitted entry or exit. Only on the southern side can be found a country, Southern Topsyturvyland, in which a few gangs of smugglers operate, and they sometimes bring to us at night, really risking their lives, merchandise and goods that can't be found here, and they take back with them plums and safflower seeds. With the help of these people. Yekutiel would smuggle his books of musical notes, which would then be mailed to distant lands, the same ones in which you live dear readers.

Yekutiel explained to me why he endangered himself so much, and why he sends his melodies abroad. This is what he told me:

"When my soul came down to the world, to enter a body of a newborn baby, a great and powerful wind rose, a strong wind that could crush mountains and scatter rocks, which blew my soul from the place it was supposed to go. Thus my soul entered into the body of the baby my mother bore in this city. But the truth of the matter is I was supposed to have been born at the center of the world, the place around which the world turns, and from which branch out all the branches of knowledge, beauty, and music. Due to that same sudden wind, dizzying wind, I was blown from my place; and my whole life I long to return to my place. But when I set my mind to find the center of the world, I discovered that the world was round - and that every place is the center of the world. At the same time it became clear to me that I'd never find my place, since it doesn't exist, because it can be found everywhere. I send, then, my music to the world since the music has a special nature: it speaks only to one whom it's

written for, and strong is its desire to find its place. And when I find where it went, I'll go after it, and maybe then I'll arrive at my first place."

I didn't understand what Yekutiel said to me, yet I felt that he spoke from the depth of his heart, and he felt great pain from the longings he recalled.

Then a thing happened in our place.

One morning, three days after the Plum Holiday, we saw a stranger standing in our city plaza, his dress different from ours, and his face different from ours. We at first thought maybe he was a spy from neighboring lands. But he didn't look like any of our many enemies, and his face bespoke friendship and comfort. Therefore, he was immediately imprisoned in the regional prison, and the city judges came to investigate, in order to bring the truth to light.

It was difficult to speak to him since he was stupid and didn't know our language; and it was even more difficult to understand what he said, since he spoke in a foreign language.

He knew how to say just one word in our language, which was "Yekutiel". So it occurred to the investigators to bring our Yekutiel to the prison in order to meet the strange man.

And from the first moment Yekutiel entered the prisoner's cell, we saw something we didn't expect at all: the stranger whipped out a flute from his pocket and sounded a few notes. Yekutiel immediately whipped out his flute and answered with his own trilling notes. Thus this strange matter continued for about half an hour, until the patience of the investigators ran out, and they commanded Yekutiel to explain.

"This honorable gentleman," said Yekutiel to the investigators, is the head of the Academy of Arts at the center of the world, and he says that my melodies arrived at the Academy and they want me to come to the center of the world and be the chief artist."

"And what did you respond to him?" the investigators requested to know.

"I told him," answered Yekutiel, "that if I left here, I'd never miss the center of the world; and without such longings, I wouldn't be able to compose melodies, therefore I must stay in my homeland, that is, my place of dispersion."

"And what'd he tell you?" the investigators pressed-on.



"The honorable gentleman said he was sorry about that, but he understood me," Yekutiel answered, "and he suggested that I continue sending my melodies to the center of the world, so the whole world could listen to them. And as compensation for this, he offers me ten gold dinars for every page of musical notes."

"Tell him to show the gold." the investigators said. Yekutiel rang out a few notes on his flute and the stranger put his hand in his pocket and took out a hundred golden dinars.

The chief investigator grabbed the gold from the stranger and told Yekutiel:

"The gold is confiscated for the State Treasury, since the State bestowed upon you an education and made you conductor of the National Orchestra... but for the gold you receive, which we confiscate from you, we'll agree to reinstate you as conductor of our National Orchestra, and add to your wages five sacks of plums, two sacks of flour, and a tin of safflower oil."

"I agree," said Yekutiel, "but I'll have to explain to the honorable gentleman from the center of the world to know if he also agrees."

So Yekutiel trilled-out some notes on his flute and the stranger responded with a few notes until Yekutiel said: "It's settled. He agrees."

And immediately after these things the investigators released the stranger from his imprisonment and he walked with Yekutiel arm in arm to the house in which Yekutiel lived. I also returned to my house and heard the rest of that day the trilling of flutes rising from Yekutiel's room. One played thusly, and the other answered thusly, until my eardrum almost split from so much music. It's clear



that I didn't understand a bit of what the two were saying to one another, even though I usually enjoy music. It seems to me that they play what we call "modern music"; and I don't understand a bit of that; it's doubtful if you understand.

At midnight the voices of the flutes stopped, and afterwards I saw Yekutiel accompany the stranger to our southern border where they took the stranger back to the center of the world.

From that day on Yekutiel sends his melodies abroad and receives a shipment of gold every month via the smugglers, and the investigators confiscate the money to the State Treasury. Some of the opposition newspapers wrote that the government cooperates with the underworld. So then the government arrested the editor of the newspaper and threw him in jail.

So the abundant stream doesn't cease, and so our government could be sure of coming deposits from abroad for Yekutiel's melodies - they undertook special measures.

The first wise thing was to place guards around Yekutiel so he wouldn't run away. Secondly, they installed in his house a heater for the summer and cold air conditioner for the winter, so he'd be able to create a lot of tunes, and in comfort.

Thirdly, they raised his wages by an additional sack of plums so he wouldn't tell the world that our country starves its artists.

One day I met Yekutiel at the gate of his yard and said to him: "Between ourselves, you're able to escape from here, if you just play on your flute, like you played when you were in the prison of the enemy."

And Yekuti'el responded to this, as was his manner, in a vague and unintelligible way and said to me: "When one escapes, one escapes to go home. But to where should one escape who is at home? Have you ever seen one escape from oneself?"

## Chapter Nine - Days of Abundance and National Difficulties

After a few years our country collected huge quantities of gold, which became known to neighboring countries, who were our enemies. Apparently they learned this from the smugglers of Southern Topsyturnyland. At first the enemy tried sending parties of infiltrators to break into the State Treasury and rob the gold. But since we had an abundance of gold, we bought modern weapons from abroad, and built strong fortifications and also made special electronic arrangements, and buried the gold in holes of stone and iron deep in the earth. Of course, we brought in experts from abroad who organized our army on a new basis: every boy and girl from six on up would study from now on to handle weapons to defend the homeland's gold. In schools the hours of study were shortened; some hours were taken from the study of agriculture, history, and poetry in order to dedicate more time to the study of war.

On the other hand, since we had a lot of gold, we increased the portion of plum wine each citizen received throughout the year and especially during the Plum Holiday. And to be more secure, every woman received three frying pans, in case the enemy attacks during the Plum Holiday. In one of the pans the women would cook their meals, and in the other two they'd boil safflower oil so if the enemy attacked suddenly, they'd pour boiling oil on them.

A special committee of volunteers from amongst the citizens would pass from house to house to see if the women were scrupulously keeping two pans of boiling oil in the kitchen at all times in eternal preparedness. If they caught a woman who didn't boil oil

in her frying pans, they'd cut back on the allotments of plums and flour that her husband would get as wages. This often caused problems in the peace and quiet of many households, and the husbands would beat their wives if they didn't boil oil. That's how the government achieved its goals: to have the people themselves alert to the problems of security and to be vigilant.



When our enemies saw they couldn't overcome us by force, they began plotting and scheming against us to rob us of our treasure some other way. In the country of Arch-Districtland which surrounds us on the north and east, they established a special Brain Trust to come up with ideas until they find a way to steal our treasure. They built special structures on mountain tops, and the whole Noddingdwarf Mountains were populated with spies, who looked down at us through telescopes and spied upon us. One day the government council of Arch-Districtland arrived at a general agreement on a satanic plan, of which these are its details: instead of vainly trying to rob our golden treasure, they are about to train a special unit of commandos to sneak in to our country at night and kidnap Yekutiel. Once they had Yekutiel, they'd receive the golden dinars from the center of the earth in exchange for the melodies he'd write. In order to safeguard the secrecy of the mission, they gave it a special name - "Operation Chicken". Why "Operation Chicken"? Because the head of their Brain Trust, who came up with the kidnapping idea, said at their government meeting: "Instead of pursuing the golden eggs, it's better to kidnap the chicken that lays these eggs."

These words of a great wise person of Arch-Districtland made an enormous impression on the state; the Arch-Districtland papers published the slogan in huge headlines, and school children were ordered to learn the details by heart and to be tested on them in the matriculation exams.

To our great fortune we became aware of the secret "Operation Chicken" at an early time from the spies we planted in the dry river beds that descend from the Noddingdwarf Mountains; and our government took countermeasures in time.

First of all - they prepared a special structure, in which Yekutiel was hidden. This structure was underground and was camouflaged by a grove of ordinary plum trees above, and we also built a road above the structure. In the house in which Yekutiel had lived his whole life, the house next to mine, they put a manikin in Yekutiel's image made of plum wood so the enemy spies would think Yekutiel still lived in his house.

And we did another thing: we announced in our papers, on radio and T.V., that Yekutiel had died. Then we announced about a national mourning and set the day of the funeral, and our King, Elimelech the Fourth, appeared on television and wept bitterly, even though he was a happy King, but one can't weep happily, since there's no such thing as this.

And after all these preparations, our government was quiet and greatl... calmed. It was calmed, and it wasn't calmed. Since some unexpected difficulties cropped-up; that is, regarding Yekutiel.

When they put him deep underground - with all the comforts, of course, including a bathroom, shower, and transistor radio - Yekutiel announced that he wasn't able to compose music unless he was able to see from his window plum trees, and the rising and setting sun. In addition to this - he said - it was difficult for him to create if he doesn't hear birds singing.

The authorities tried to pressure him. And when the pressure didn't work, they tried threats. Finally, they threatened to execute him for betraying his homeland during war time. Yet, luckily a wise person in the justice department existed who informed the government: "If you kill Yekutiel, from where will you get gold?"





A vote was taken, and the majority voted in favor of the decision to let him remain alive. Then a decision was adopted to furnish him with a window, plum trees, the rising and setting sun, and birds.

You'll ask: how is this all done deep underground?

The answer came from the ranks of our Academy of Art. They sent expert artists underground to paint a window on the blank walls; in the window they painted plum trees; and from the right side they painted a rising sun; and on the left - a setting one. About the chirping of birds - they brought a record from the television studio which played nice electronic chirps.

Despite all this, Yekutiel claimed that he wasn't able to compose melodies under such conditions. "It's not natural," he said to the authorities.

Until in the end he stopped composing melodies.

When he stopped composing melodies, the flow of gold to our country stopped. When the flow of gold stopped, our enemies stopped plotting schemes against us; when the enemies stopped devising plots against us, we again didn't need experts from abroad to train our army. The experts were expelled and the children returned to studying arithmetic and geography.

After a year or two they were reminded that it was possible to take Yekutiel from the pit and he was permitted to return to his house.

One day when I went to visit him, Yekutiel took me by the hand and walked me to the innermost room, locked the door behind us and revealed to me, that he was preparing to leave our country and to go into exile at the center of the world; the roots of his soul are there - even though he didn't know where this place was. Then

he revealed to me his innermost secret, that he didn't think the center of the world existed anywhere.

"Where are you going then?" I asked him.

"Everywhere and nowhere," said Yekutiel in riddles as he was wont to do.

"When you leave our city," I told him "which way will you turn? North, south, east or west?"

"I think," said Yekutiel "that I'll go after the voice."

"And this voice," I asked, "where is it now?"

"Within me," said Yekutiel.

And Yekutiel really disappeared from amongst us and I didn't see him for many years. Yet a long time later he returned to us, by then I was a very old man. This will be told later.

Where he went and where he tarried all those years - will never be known to me. Are there among you, readers, one who can solve the riddle for me?

Chapter Ten - The Voice and the Longings

Some years after Yekutiël left us the State Treasury began emptying and the government again regulated the amount of plum wine each citizen received. Likewise we were forced to return working hard in our fields, orchards and oil presses.

Since we didn't have any gold our enemies had to invent other pretexts and reasons for attacking us. One time a war broke out, since a locust plague hit us and destroyed our crops. And the enemy's crazy about locust, which is a delicacy in their areas. Therefore, they came and killed us in order to gather locusts; locusts and maggots filled their sacks. After the enemy left, our women fried what remained of the locust in the boiling oil of their pans which sustained us until our fields and orchards began sprouting wheat, plums, and safflower seeds.

Another time the enemy fell upon us because they learned that in our scientific dictionary there was a mistake, and instead of writing the name of their country as "Arch-Districtland" our printers accidentally printed "Starched-Trickland" and they were offended.

But even from this we managed to live, somehow, and returned to our daily work. Then a few journalists rose among us, prophets and philosophers, who wrote articles and gave lectures about the great mistake the government made in handling Yekutiël.

There were those who said we should have kept him underground until he got used to the conditions and returned to writing tunes; and there were those who said that he should have been held in his first house with the whole nation standing around him as a wall so

as to protect him from the kidnappers.

There was even a third group of thinkers and humanists that said we should have divided the gold we received from the center of the world among our enemies thereby ridding them of all their threats and troubles.

When our King, Elimelech the Fourth, was asked his opinion on the subject, he removed the crown from his head in order to scratch his forehead and after he returned the crown to its place, said: "If you had asked me when I was young I wouldn't have been able to give you an answer because I was inexperienced. Now that I'm old and sick, I can't give you an answer because my mind is weak."

And as usual, the King's opinion prevailed with a majority, and it was decided to act according to his advice. A committee of military people, farmers, workers, and intellectuals was established; and when the committee would finish preparing its report, it would be placed in the National Archives to be safeguarded forever as law.

From the abundance of time occupied in the affair about Yekutiel everyone spoke his name and in schools they taught the history of his life. His melodies couldn't be played since the musical notes had been sold abroad for gold; but details and miniscule facts were collected by the ambitious from people who knew him personally and also from people who had heard of him. And when the time came to celebrate fifty years since his birth, a special collection was printed in the National Printing House in which Yekutiel's life history was summed-up.

I even saw a copy with my own eyes, and from it I learned that Yekutiel was from his youth a tall muscular lad happy to go to battle. He used to go out at the head of our armies to strike the enemy, and



when he returned from enemy lands he'd bring with him a great amount of gold booty. Until one day all our enemies plotted against him and got together to destroy him completely. That's how twenty-five enemy countries attacked our country, one took Yekutieli, who struck them many blows and felled hundreds and thousands of their fighters before he was captured and taken in chains beyond Noddingdwarl Mountains. Since then all trace of him has disappeared.

I have reason to doubt the trustworthiness of these things, but I don't dare meddle in a dispute with the great leaders of our nation, and I return to my story. Since, after all, I'm just a worker in the national oil press who presses safflower seeds for oil, and I don't presume to know more than what our great leaders tell us. And when I return to my story, I'm not saying that I'm right. Every reader



will decide the matter alone, according to one's understanding and ability.

So I worked in the national oil press quietly doing my job and thinking about Yekutiel. I think my workmates also thought about him from time to time, but I don't know what they thought. I thought that it was too bad he left us. And not because of the gold, but rather because of the melodies. I got so used to the trillings of the flute that came out of his house, until I really felt the absence of those sounds. In the days when I used to listen to the melodies, I didn't understand how sweet they were and how much they nourished my soul. Now my soul was empty.

And then one day when we were sitting eating our lunch during our lunch break (Between 12:00 in the afternoon until 12:30) it seemed to me that I heard the sound of a melody carried in the air from afar. I listened astutely and knew that they were Yekutiel's notes. In the evening when I returned home and sat on the porch to rest from the day's work, this sound returned to me and was floating in space, almost inaudible, yet there was no doubt in my mind that this was Yekutiel's sound.

I didn't reveal this to anyone, since I feared that the government would hear about it and order the army to find him and imprison him in jail. In those days I didn't know at all that I wasn't the only one who heard Yekutiel's music. After some days I heard people whispering in the oil press, in the tavern and in the market places, and it finally became clear to me that all of his acquaintances, friends - and indeed everyone in our entire country - heard the sound, but didn't dare speak about it for the same reason that I also passed over the matter in silence. People wanted the sound to continue to be

heard, without having the government know about it.

We weren't able to know then that the government also heard the music but hoped that the citizens didn't hear it, the government was thereby exempted from taking action.

Until our King, Elimelech the Fourth, came and leaked the news. Once, when he awoke from his afternoon nap (he would sleep four times a day - in the morning, afternoon, evening, and at night) he said: "Capture him! Capture him! I hear him!"

Then the government was forced to act yet nothing came of it.

It quickly became clear - from the newspapers - that the sound travelled throughout the entire world, and not just our country. This means that it was impossible that Yekutiel could be found throughout the whole world at the same time (according to the principle which states that a body can't be found in more than one place at a time).

Slowly I began to understand what was happening. I imagine this is the solution to the riddle: from his hidden hiding place Yekutiel was now sending notes of his melodies throughout the whole world, and anyone who wanted to, played them. Thus the world was filled with his music, and the echoes, and the echoes of the echoes, and the rest of the melodies reached us as well. It's even possible that in Yekutiel's music were special longings for the place in which the music maker was born, so they flowed, came and continued right up to the neighborhood in which I lived and in which Yekutiel used to play in the garden of his house in his childhood.

Whatever the truth may be, we'll never know it completely. And if I now tell you something else, I do it in complete secrecy in the hope that our authorities won't know.



The smugglers of Southern Tpsyturvyland sometimes bring us newspapers from abroad, daily and weekly newspapers and also different professional journals. A little while ago I had an extra pitcher of safflower oil which I gave to one of the smugglers for the journal of "The International Organization of Geography and Discovery of Lands". When I read in that same journal, I found an article, which I'll reproduce here in its entirety:

"Doctor Megalomania Discovers an Unknown Island in the Southern Sea.

"When Doctor Christopher Megalomania returned from his last voyage in the Southern Sea he brought on the deck of his ship fruit, minerals and animals that we had never known existed. Many years will pass before the scientists are able to decipher all the hidden secrets that the great researcher brought back with him from his journey, which lasted

three years. But the most amazing of his finds from this journey are the photographs and data he brought back with him from the island he discovered along the 32nd latitude. For the time being he won't reveal the longitude so travellers and tourists won't flock to that island and disturb the tranquility of its three inhabitants who are engaged in very interesting research.

"Instead of trying to explain what we heard from Doctor Megalomania, it's better that we allow him to speak. These are his words: 'After a difficult, stormy night, the night between the 23rd and the 24th of December, a quiet morning shined for us, as often happens in these areas. I ordered the first class seaman to climb to the top of the main mast and to relate what he saw.

"'Land!' yelled the first class seaman 'Land!'

"'And indeed after five hours our ship anchored in a quiet gulf with clear water and palm trees planted along the length of its shore. I checked the maps I had and didn't find a reference to any continent, land mass, island, or peninsula. Which meant that we had arrived at a place which had been unknown to the civilized world up until now.

"'We looked through our binoculars and weren't able to discover signs of life on that island; yet when we descended into our dinghy and got to the shore, our first surprise awaited us. A most strange flock came out from between the tree stumps and marched towards us. At first, our souls almost left us since we clearly saw before us lions, tigers, and panthers. We were sure that our end had arrived; but at the same time my eyes were able to discern something really strange. Not only lions, tigers, and panthers were there marching toward us peacefully and gayly, but also sheep, cows, goats, dogs

and cats. And when the flock came even closer to our startled group, we also saw hundreds of snakes slithering in the middle of the flock - vipers, pythons, cobras, and anacondas. Afterwards, I also saw wolves in the flock.

"And as we stood there with our bones trembling from fear and the flock coming closer to us, an amazing thing happened: the lions licked the palms of our hands, the tigers stood on their hind legs resting their front paws on our shoulders and licked our faces with their tongues. And one snake, awful and terrible in appearance, slithered right up to me, lifted the upper portion of its body in front of my face and began tapping its tongue against the lenses of my glasses. In great panic I removed my glasses and threw them past the snake. Then the snake slithered around my glasses, and with agile and pleasing movements put them on its head. I suggest then, that when the learned zoologists come to classify this type of snake and give it a name, that they call it the spectacles-snake in memory of that first



encounter. But this is just incidentally. After we were convinced that we were in no danger from these animals, after we saw that the lions live peacefully with the goats, and the wolf lives with the lamb, and the tiger lies beside the kid, I understood that we were in a place beyond the world known to us, and perhaps we were in a world of the future, as is written in the ancient books of the Jews if I'm not mistaken.

"We then left the amazing flock and began marching into the island. Then at the distant edge of the flock we saw a small boy amongst those animals. But when he came closer to us, it became clear that he wasn't a boy, but a grown man, small with a bent back and a large head. He looked like some handicapped people in our places but was different from them in the look of wisdom that radiated from his face and in the happiness with which he came to greet us.

"Are you the shepherd of this flock?' I asked him.

"I'm just filling in, since the shepherd's busy writing today,' he said.

"And what's he writing?' I asked.

"He's listing in his book the observations he's made about our animals,' the little man answered. 'And when he finishes his book, he'll send it to the center of the world so that all people will be able to live together in peace like the tigers and kids, and the wolves and lambs learned to do.'

"Can you bring us to the place where you live?' I asked.

"Certainly,' the small man said, 'please follow me.'

"And after half an hour we stood in a clearing of the forest in which was a wide cabin made of palm branches and mud; and in the cabin were three sections. The small man explained to me: 'We're three here,



one of my friends trained the animals, he's the one about whom I've already spoken. And my other friend is an expert physician who's now finishing his research on the ultimate medicine against the common cold. And I, your faithful servant, write melodies. And I'm happy to tell you that our animals like my melodies, and my learned friend says that he was greatly helped by my melodies in training the animals. And I'm proud of this. Since for a long time I've given up trying to train people.'

"We tarried on that island just for three days, since after three days a favorable wind blew for us and we were forced to return to the ship and set sail. But next year we'll return to the island for a second time and continue to research it and its inhabitants. Meanwhile we include in this, our first report, some black-and-white and color photographs."

This was as far as the report went in the journal where Doctor Megalomania ended speaking.

And when I looked at the pictures and saw what I saw my heart stopped beating.

Chapter Eleven - The End of Things and a New Beginning (?)

Months passed and also years and the people of our area began forgetting Yekutieli; just I and a few other elderly people my age, who were his classmates in school or his neighbors, remembered him and spoke of him occasionally, when we sat on the bench in the hot winter evenings, dozing in the warm fading light and reminiscing.

Our power to recollect weakens and wanes, and I'm sure that we often spoke nonsense, completely ungrounded in reality or truth. And when we were about seventy and eighty there were already amongst us venerable old people who couldn't even remember his name and used to say: "That same strange man, what was his name, who used to play on the flute, until he disappeared...."

One day, I can't remember if it was a freezing day in the middle of the summer or a blisteringly hot day at the end of winter - my granddaughter said to me:

"Grandpa, someone's here to see you...he's standing at the entrance to the house."

"Let him in my dear" I told her, "that he should enter and come in," I told her.

It was difficult for me to rise from my easy chair. I was old, my back was bent over, one shoulder was higher than the other, my head bent over my chest as happens to all old people my age, and as surely happened to me and all my friends. Therefore, I asked my granddaughter to let the person into the house to come into my room.

Then I saw before me Yekutieli.

It was as if he was our age, and now we all looked alike: bent backs, as I said, uneven shoulders and smaller than before. But the

person standing before me was different than us nonetheless, in one clear way: he wasn't old. Yekutiel was the same lad I had known when he still lived in our city.

He was very glad to see me. And I don't need to say that I, too, was very happy to see him. But I didn't hear very well what he said to me since my hearing was bad. Yekutiel continued to speak and I knew that I didn't know what he was talking about.

He caressed my white hair, said endearing things to me and promised to return to visit me, after he organized his old house, the house beside mine.

From then on I saw him from time to time, but we didn't talk much since Yekutiel sensed, apparently, that I didn't hear very well what he said to me.



Despite this I saw - during the many days in which I sat in my easy chair beside the window of my room and gazed into Yekutiel's garden - I saw that many young people came to his house and he'd walk in the garden and converse with them. In time his house became kind of a school, and the number of students grew from week to week.

I don't know what he teaches his students. I don't know what the authorities think of him. I don't even know if the authorities know Yekutiel returned to his home; but my heart tells me that while I draw near to the gates of another world, a world perhaps better than ours, that I'm sure Yekutiel shows his students a new world. And maybe he even teaches them how to improve the world I'm soon to leave; the world in which I lived, and in which you, dear readers, will do things until a ripe old age.

This is the end of the tale of Yekutiel the miracle worker - a tale which is still unfolding.

I forgot the main point: during the last decade the smugglers brought to us some stalks of new fruit trees. I know that some of them are called apple, pear, orange and other names I already can't remember. And a few days ago I tasted one of these fruits which was very pleasant to my palate. Then a strange thought occurred to me: other people in other lands, enemy lands, would eat these fruits their whole lives, and we hadn't known nor could we imagine that. It's possible that melodies also, and thoughts and ideas of our enemies - made some sort of sense, and we didn't know.

How strange. And maybe even too bad.