

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A LAMED-VOV-NIK

By Jacob Raphaelson

Written in 1958 at the age of 83ⁱ

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LAMED-VOV-MIK

In Hebrew, the letter "L" counts for thirty and the letter "V" counts for six. "Lamed" is the name for the letter "L" and "Vov" is the name for the letter "V".

"Lamed-vov-nik" means one of thirty-six. According to Jewish legend, there are thirty-six righteous men in every generation who live unrecognized and unknown in the world, and it is to their piety the world owes its continued existence. The term for them is "Lamedvovnik" (hidden or unknown sage or saint). A Lamedvovnik is generally a humble person, unostentatiously playing as an artisan until some untoward calamity threatening the Jewish community arouses him to his appointed duty. He then emerges from his obscurity, performs some act by which the calamity is averted, and retires into obscurity.

PART I

1. MY EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS

I was told that I was born in Yanova, Province of Kovno, State of Lithuania, country of Russia, on the 20th day of Tavath. Tavath is a lunar month at the height of winter. According to certain records and happenings in my life, I must have been born in December, 1875 or January, 1876.

My earliest recollections are that we lived in a small house on an unpaved street, which was often muddy, about a block from the main pike running through town. On the farther side of the house was a ravine crossing the street and beyond that, a synagogue.

Three incidents from those early times and that muddy street I still remember. One was that I was teaching my sister Tirza (Theresa) how to stand and walk. The second concerned my brother Mendel, who was older and bigger than I. He had night blindness for a while and I had to lead him across the ravine at night. He was cured before we moved. The third incident happened to me. It happened in the synagogue on the holy day of Rosh Hashanah in the middle of the long silent prayer of Amidah Shemonah Esray. I never told anyone about it in my long life because I was ashamed to tell it. I believe that this experience influenced my future thinking and behavior.

Shemonah Esray is a combination of eighteen prayers in one, with a special beginning and ending. You chant it silently, standing up, with your heels together and your toes apart. During the entire prayer you are not allowed to speak or answer when spoken to. You move your body to the special ritual movements. You may not move your feet until the last verse; then you move them backwards three paces while chanting "Maker of peace in His heaven, He shall make peace to us all and to all of Israel, and we say Amen."

On week days, Shemonah Esray is repeated three times daily. It takes a pious Jew about ten minutes to chant it. On Saturdays and holidays there are changes and additions, so that it takes a little longer. On Rosh Hashanah morning the Shemonah Esray is lengthened nearly tenfold and lasts about an hour.

It was the middle of this long prayer that I felt I had to let my water go. There I was, a lonely little boy about seven years old, standing in the aisle of the synagogue with the prayer book in my hands. The synagogue was packed with devout worshippers. I was in a dilemma. It was a conflict between the holy and the physical. I continued praying, hoping I'd be able to hold out to the end. But, by and by, I felt my leg getting wet, and then I noticed a pool of water beside me. I dropped my prayer book and ran out of the synagogue.

It was well that my father was away. It was good that the men and women were separated at the synagogue and also that the women worshipped in an enclosed back room upstairs. I knew that my mother could not see my predicament. It was a lesson to me that shame could emanate from over-piety and devotion.

2. MY PARENTS

I had a father and I didn't have a father. Practically speaking, I had none. He was far away. He wrote no letters. He sent no money for our support. He didn't even exist in my mind. It was mother who supported us and took care of the family. There were five children, but only four to support. Sister Chanah (Annie) lived with my maternal grandmother Chipa.

My father was a thousand miles away. He did not run away from mother and the children. On the contrary, mother ran away from him and took the children along with her. She didn't run away because he did not support her or was cruel. No! It was because she was more devoted to God than to her husband.

When I was about two years old our family moved from Yanova to Yacatherinadar, a city far away in deep Russia, near the Caucasus. Father had been engaged as a shochet (a ritual cattle killer) to the Jewish Community there. It paid well enough to make a living for the family. I was told that I was considered a smart little boy there and that I was practically engaged to a nice little rich girl of my age. Our family in Yacatherinadar consisted of father, mother and three and one-half children. The children, besides myself, were my brother Mendel and sister Bessie. Sister Tirza was not yet born. Sister Chanah did not go with us. She was left in Yanova with grandmother.

I imagine that mother did not like the town or the surroundings or other Jewish people there. It was not at all like Yanova, where nearly all the people were pious Jews, a town where all the stores were closed on Saturday, where nobody, not even a child, would ever think or dare to carry around money and buy things on the Holy Sabbath.

Yacatherinadar was just the opposite. It was a goishe (non-Jewish) town, with only a small minority of Jewish people. The stores were open on Saturday. The Jews themselves were not so very pious. It was not a very rosy place to raise pious children. But if it had not been for Bessie's act of desecrating the Sabbath, mother might have overcome her scruples just as she did later, when she came to America. It was Bessie's act of buying things on a Saturday that finally broke up the family. Mother's devotion to God was stronger than her devotion to material things. She left father and took her children a thousand miles back to Yanova. At that time I was about five years of age.

Mother had faith that God would help her find a way to support herself and her children in Yanova. For a couple of years or more she supported her family by teaching little girls to read Hebrew. Then, with the help of a relative or friend, she made connections with a dry yeast factory in Minsk. They gave her credit and sold her yeast at factory prices. She made a better living by selling dry yeast to the public than by teaching.

I was told that father stayed away from us for about seven years without sending money and without writing. He came back, I think, without advance notice. He came back with empty pockets but with high spirits. He was going to take over Mother's responsibility for rearing the children. He was going to teach them discipline, piety and Torah (religious learning). I am not sure if it happened on the first or second day of his arrival. I remember that there was a quarrel between brother Mendel and father. I do not remember the cause but I do remember my reaction. I picked up a candlestick, threw it at my father and ran out of the house.

3. YANOVA

The town of Yanova was a Jewish ghetto. It ran along the Villiya River. There were two main streets starting at the Kovno-Vilkomere pike and running parallel, with the river to the west end of the town. The first street ran from the pike to the shul court; the second ran from the pike to the goishe gash (street), where it turned right (passing through the goyishe street) and emptied into the Jewish burying ground (Beth Ulam). There it got lost in the countryside.

The shul (holy synagogue), the beth hamedrash (town synagogue), the Bod (public bath house) with the mikveh (ritual bath house) and a large public privy were all on the shul court. The shul was open only on Saturdays and holidays. The beth hamedrash was open all of the time. The Bod was busy on Fridays and before holidays. The mikveh was used mainly by women after menstruation and by holy men; also by brides on their marriage day.

The shul was always busy on the day before Yom Kippur. To go into the shul one had to go down a few steps. On those steps many pious Jews, on the day before Yom Kippur, would kneel down, accept *malkus* and pay for it. Malkus meant forty strappings for sins committed. The sextons of the shul and the beth hamedrash stood there with leather belts in their right hands and gave punishments on the behinds of the pious Jews and accepted payment for it. As far as I remember, they did not remove their pants.

Yanova also had four or five sectional synagogues in different districts of the town. The sectional synagogue was called the cloiz. There was a small Jewish sect, the Chassidim, which believed that God liked singing and religious merrymaking more than studying and arguing about Zis Torah and Talmud. This sect had a cloiz that I visited several times. I liked their singing better than our whining and arguing. But I was what I was. I had become a Talmud boy.

4. THE TWO MAIN STREETS

The first section of the first main street was a long block running from the pike to a wide cross street. On this section lived our great Uncle Welve Mordecai the candle maker. He had a large family and a large home, a big garden and a candle making shop. Across the street from him was the blacksmith who was a goy (non-Jew). Further down on the same side of the street was the home of Bobe Chipa, my grandmother. Further down and across the street there was a small store owned by a family who had a goat and sold goat's milk.

The next section was a wide block of paved street. On one side there were a few larger buildings and stores. On the other, towards the river, was a large Catholic church—an impressive building with many wide steps and spacious grounds surrounded by a high fence. It was a busy place on Sundays and holy days. There were a great many worshippers and quite a few beggars. Beyond the church were a few buildings, one of them the apothecary.

The first section of the second main street was a residential area. Then came the business block on both sides of the street. Then, to the left, was the market square. To the right, there were a few stores further down the street. Mother's Aunt Esse Gitel lived there and had a bakery shop. It was at her bakery shop that I first watched and then helped bake matzos.

The market place occupied a large space between the first and second main streets. On week days there were but a few stands there. On Sundays and special market days it was filled with stands, with wagons,

with livestock and with people. Peasants from the surrounding country would come on Sunday to church and to market. The church and the market were only about a block apart.

It was well that the Sabbath of the Jews and of the Catholics were on separate days. The Jews were not allowed to trade on their holy Saturday but could do their trading on Sunday. The peasant Catholics from the countryside were allowed to do their trading on holy Sunday. They would sell their produce in the market on Sunday, mostly to the Jews. They would spend some of the money they received from the Jews for their church, a few groven (half-penny) for the beggars, and some with the Jewish traders and craftsman. Thus, in one trip on their holy Sunday the Catholics would satisfy God, their material needs and incidentally they helped the Jews.

The Bod, on the shul court, served as the town bath house. It was a hot vapor bath house, fired from the outside. You entered the dressing room, then a small room in which there were pails to get water and short-weed brooms with which to smack yourself or better still, to get someone else to smack you. In the rear of the main room were seven or eight steep steps along the whole length of the room. These steps reached to within a few feet of the ceiling. It was hot when you sat on the lowest step. It got hotter every step upwards. Some of the men would go to the highest step, lie there and have someone smack them with the weed broom. Near the entrance to the room was an opening in the side of the wall about three or four feet above the floor. In the opening there were hot stones. If you wanted more heat you threw a bucket of water on the hot stones and a flow of hot steam would come out and spread over the room. At one part of the room there was a faucet from which you could get water to fill your bucket. If you got too hot you could sit down on the lower step and throw a bucket of cold water over your head.

I still remember being in the bath house and performing all of the routines by myself. Father was away and mother had to go to the women's section of the Bod. I do not remember ever having any assistance from my older brother Mendel. I used to go up the steps as far as I could stand the heat. I used to smack myself. I used to get my own water. I would even sometimes throw a bucket of water on the hot stones.

5. THE VILLIYA RIVER

The Villiya was a river wide and deep. The shore was sandy and the bank was composed of good clay. We used to take some of the clay and make marbles. We would roll the clay into balls and dry it in the sun. It made fairly good marbles to play with.

At the poke there was a cable ferry crossing the river. The ferry boat was large enough to accommodate many wagons and many people. It had a short mast with a wheel at the top. The cable was attached to the wheel. When we pulled on the cable the ferry would move. It was a hand powered ferry boat assisted by the flow of the water.

Occasionally, I would take the ferry and cross the river to roam the country on the other side. I remember I used to help with the pulling of the cable. Often I jumped off the ferry before it came to a complete stop. Once, on the way back, I jumped off while the ferry was a little too far from the dock. I fell into the river. I lay in the water until someone pulled me out. I was a little afraid of the water after that. I believe that was the reason why I did not learn how to swim until later, in Slabodka, when I was 13 years old.

Many young boys and girls used to swim in the river. They would undress on the shore and run into the water. They wore no bathing suits. The boys and the girls stayed about four or five hundred feet apart. The place for the boys was down the river. Sometimes a fresh boy would swim up to where the girls were. I used to sit on the bank or on one of the rafts and watch the girls wade and swim.

Quite often there were many rafts at the shore of the river, tied to each other, one behind the other, making one long train of rafts. The train of rafts had a rudder at each end to keep it in midstream when floating. These rafts were collected and stored on the shore of the Villiya River in Yanova until they were floated down the river towards Germany to be sold. I loved to roam on these rafts. I would jump from one log to another and from one raft to another. It was on such a raft that I started on my journey towards America.

6. THE ROV

The Rov, as I remember him, was a grand old man with a white beard. He was the religious leader of the town. He was the rabbi and the judge. He could marry you or bury you. He was the one who settled most of the disputes between the Jews of the town. He could also give a divorce (gett) when necessary. He performed nearly all of his services gratis. You did not have to pay him for his services if you did not want to.

He made his living mainly from the korobka on salt. Karobka means a monopoly. The Jews used a lot of salt. Besides the use of the salt for seasoning, they used it to make their meat kosher. This was done by salting the meat before cooking and allowing it to stand for two hours. Then the salt was washed and soaked

off the meat. No Jewish store had a right to sell table or ritual salt to a Jew in Yanova, nor did a Jew have a right to buy salt from anyone but a Rov.

Our Rov did not tend to the salt business himself, nor did his wife. He had a married daughter living with him. She and her husband tended to the business. They had a nice home with a garden in the rear. They had a special room for the salt business. The Rov also had a grandson about my age. Occasionally I churned with him.

Often mother visited the Rov's family. She would play chess with the Rov's son-in-law and occasionally I watched them. I suppose that is how I learned to play chess. I remember that the grandson and a few other boys organized a Chovana Zion circle. They took me in the circle. They used to sing a song. I faintly remember that it was the Hatikva. I could not sing so I did not stay in the circle very long.

I remember that before I left Yanova the Rov got sick. Mother took me to his bedroom and he gave me a blessing. He put his hands on my head and made a silent prayer. Maybe it is because of that blessing that now, after more than 70 years after the blessing, I am well and capable of remembering and writing about this event.

7. HOLIDAY OF PURIM

Purim was not only a day of merrymaking and noise making. It was also a day for sending out presents to friends and relatives. This was the day when God saved the Jews from Haman, who had a plan prepared to destroy them. It was also a day, or rather one of the two days, when pious Jews could indulge in strong drinks to their heart's content; the other was Simchas-Torah (happiness of the Torah day), the joyous day when the Jews commemorate the Torah. On these two holy days excessive drinking was considered a virtue instead of a vice.

During the day Purim presents were delivered by children and by special deliverers who made a few rubles. The children were also often paid a few kopecs for their deliveries. This made many children happy. I suppose I made many kopecs on Purim.

Purim was also a visiting day, not singly, but in groups. Many groups of pious Jews would go directly from the synagogue on Purim mornings and visit many of their well-to-do friends and acquaintances. They would visit one place and get treated with vodka and possibly cake. They would linger a while and make

merry. Then they would go to another place and repeat the performance. Some groups would keep it up nearly all day long. Many times I followed some of the groups I knew and occasionally I would be given a drink.

Once I followed one of those Purim visiting groups and had quite a few drinks. They made me sick. I could hardly get home. When I finally got home I lay down and went to sleep. I slept a long time. When I got up I made a resolution not to take more than one drink. It is a resolution that I have managed to keep (not too strictly) all of my life. Moderation is my motto.

8. THE BLIND TAILOR

I first got acquainted with Yankel, the tailor, when we lived upstairs in the rear of Goetzel. Yankel lived about a half-block from us on the first main street, almost across the street from grandmother Chipa. There were a few boys and girls of my age living at Yankel's place. I do not remember if they were his children or those of a neighbor. Occasionally I would play with some of the children and often I would visit Yankel in his workroom.

I remember how he sat on top of a large table surrounded by cloth. He would sit on the table top with his knees upward and over them was an unfinished coat or pair of pants. His head and his back were bent towards his knees. In his hand he held the needle and thread with which he worked. That is my remembrance of Yankel when he was still a tailor.

My recollection of Yankel, later, was when he became blind. He was still a young looking man, less than fifty years old when he lost his sight. I remember trying to help him occasionally, help him find his door, help him across the street. What I remember mainly of Yankel the tailor is that when he was tailoring he never wore any spectacles.

Many times during my later years when I was doing research on vision, I wondered about Yankel the tailor. I wondered if Yankel would have become blind if he had worn a pair of convex (plus) spectacles while he was sewing. Later still, I became convinced that the tailor, the weaver and the bookman should wear convex spectacles in order to prevent their eyes from becoming weakened, diseased and blind.

Was it the memory of Yankel, the blind tailor, that influenced me in my later years to take up the hobby of giving away plus spectacles?

9. CRAFTSMANSHIP

Besides just making marbles from river bank clay, I also became able to carve wood and mold lead and zinc. On Purim holidays when Haman was hung on the very scaffold that he himself made for the Jew Mordecai, we were all supposed to make merry. Not only make merry but also to make noise. We used all sorts of draidlach (spinning tops) and made other devices for play for making noise. Many of these devices were made from wood carved by hand and from lead or zinc by molding.

I mastered the art of making "Draidlach" and other devices. To make a mold you take two flat, identical pieces of wood, carve out with a small knife, on one piece of wood, the shape of one half of the model you wish to copy. Then you carve the shape of the other half of the model on the other piece of wood. Put the model on the inside and finish carving until it fits exactly. Then make a small groove at one end of the wood pieces. Tie the two pieces of wood together. Melt some lead or zinc in a large metal spoon and pour the liquid metal into the groove. Let it cool for a few minutes. With a few finishing touches you have a good draidel.

I also made wooden molds for making chess game pieces. I remember we used to play chess with them. I also remember making a secret wooden small box with a regular grooved lid which pulled in and out. It would not open unless you turned it upside down and pulled the lid a little, as far as it would go. Then you had to turn it right side up to finish opening it. It has a piece' of metal inserted to a cavity which would drop when turned upside down.

I tinkered with clocks. I was getting quite good at it. I repaired quite a few. Once, when I tried to repair someone's clock, I found that the prong of the balance wheel looked like it was bent. I tried to straighten it. I broke it. The clock would not stay wound. I did not tell the owner that I had broken it. I told him that I could not fix it. I did not tinker with other people's clocks after that.

10 MY EDUCATION

Nearly all Jewish parents spent part of their meager income on their boy's basic religious education. The basic religious education consisted of learning to read the prayer books which were printed in the Hebrew

language. Those who could afford it gave them additional religious education. Sometimes they also gave them some secular education. A few gave some education to their girls also.

Mother had two boys. Her meager income was hardly enough to pay for the education of one. She spent it on brother Mendel, the elder. He was sent to teachers of advanced grades. He was also given some secular education. I had no teacher for secular education, reading, writing or arithmetic. My basic religious education I received from mother; my secondary religious education from a second grade Cheder (religious school). I learned to read Yiddish (Jewish) from mother and from sister Annie. I do not remember if I learned to write and figure before I went to the town of Kidan.

I had a good deal of irregular and diversified self-education. For awhile sister Annie belonged to a rental book club. For a nominal sum she would get story books in Yiddish, which she kept for a week or two. She used to loan me these books. I would read through each story book in a couple of days. Most of them were written by Dumas, in French, and translated into Yiddish by Shomer. Thus I learned a little about the rest of the world while I was quite young.

Besides my self-education in book knowledge, I experimented in many other matters. I successfully tried and solved all kinds of puzzles. I tied and untied many kinds of knots. I unraveled all kinds of woolen and cotton threads. I learned how to darn, knit and sew. I practiced running, climbing, jumping and ice skating. I did not excel in anything, but I could do each and all quite well. Each and all except for swimming and singing. Swimming, which I was afraid to try since my fall from the ferry into the river. Singing, for which I seemed to have no voice.

11. THE CHEDER

Cheder, in Hebrew, means enclosure or room. In Yiddish, it meant the religious educational schoolroom for children. It was nearly always a private one-man school at the home of the teacher. The teacher was called a melemed. The parents paid a certain sum of money to the melemed for each child for each semester. Each semester lasted about five months, from fall to spring and from spring to fall. Rather, it was from the High Holy Days in the fall to Pesach in the spring and from Pesach to the High Holy Days.

There were three or more grades of the cheder schools. Often they were intermingled. In the primary grades, the boys were taught to read only the Hebrew prayer books. In the middle or intermediate grades they were taught to read and to understand the Chumes (5 books of Moses). In the advanced grades they

were taught the Tanach (books of the Prophets). Some of the advanced-grade teachers were also able to teach writing, arithmetic and languages.

I did not go to the primary grades cheder because I had already learned from mother how to read the prayer books. I only went for a few semesters to the middle grade cheder where I was taught to read and understand the Chumes which were in Hebrew. None of the cheders I attended taught any secular education. Nearly all my knowledge then, and even now, came from observation and self-education; from searching, exploring, experimenting and reasoning; from a natural gift for analysis and synthesis and from a sense of proportion. I was a natural student.

I did not like to go to cheder. It was compulsory. I remember that I once had a fight with mother about it. I did not want to leave home for cheder. Mother tried to force me. I held on to one of the table legs. She took me away from the table and I grabbed another piece of furniture. Then I held on to the door knob. When mother forced me outside into the street my quarreling at once faded away. I would not make a public scene. I went to cheder as though nothing had happened.

12. THE YESHIVA

A Yeshiva was a kind of free religious or rabbinical college where nothing but the Talmud was taught. The Talmud is the name of a combination of 66 ancient religious books which one had to know in order to become a Rov (an ordained, orthodox rabbi). All learned Jews were supposed to study and argue about the Talmud whenever time permitted. It was being studied day and by night. The books contain mostly Jewish law, a little of ancient science, a smattering of history and many ancient tales.

There was a learned Jewish man who wanted to start a Yeshiva in Yanova where there was none. He needed students. Mother was unable to pay for my higher grade cheder. I knew too much for the middle grades. Mother asked the learned man to accept me as a student in his Yeshiva, for free, which he did. Thus at the age of ten, I skipped from the middle grade cheder to a Yeshiva. From the Chumes (books of Moses) to the Talmud.

I was given one of the Talmud books to study. Bove Meziah was the name. It was one of the Jewish law books. It was easy for me to grasp the intricacies of law. The Rabbi gave four or five lectures a week to the students. I did not have to study much to master them. I had plenty of time to roam around and explore. I had a legal mind. I had the gift of analysis. I could easily answer correctly when I was called upon. That

explains why, in later years, I had the nerve, twice, in law suits pending against me, to discharge my lawyers and represent myself in court. I won in both cases.

I studied in the Yanova Yeshiva for about a year, until father came back to Yanova. I became able to master the Talmud by myself. I also became able to master other books in Hebrew or in the Talmud dialect. I had a knack for self-education. Attending the Yeshiva in Yanova made it easier for me to adapt myself, later, to the Yeshivas of Vilno and Slabodka. It was because of my aptitude in Talmud that father was determined that I should become a Rov.

13. BOBE CHIPA

Bobe (Grandmother) Chipa was mother's mother. Mother's father's first name was Avrohom. I never knew what the family name was. He came from a town in Poland. He was a Dion (religious judge). He died young. I never knew him.

Bobe Chipa was "Chipa the saig-macherke" (vinegar-maker). She had a vinegar manufacturing establishment in her home. She had one son whom I never met. He went to England when he was very young. He married, settled there and was lost to the family. She also had four daughters. My mother, Chaseh, was the oldest. Leah, the next, was an old maid and lived with Bobe Chipa. Then there was Yudes whom I knew. She was married and also went to England with her husband and got lost. Chana Yentel, the youngest daughter, also lived with Bobe Chipa in the big house, while our family lived in the stibeleh.

I can still visualize Bobe Chipa. She was a good soul. She never complained or hollered at any of us children. Occasionally she would give me a piece of bread with shuck (jelly) spread on the bread. I used to watch her spread jelly on and wished she would put it on thick. It tasted so good then. Now, I seldom eat jelly.

It was Aunt Leah and Chana Yentel who made the vinegar. It was partly made of vodka (alcohol). Once, the authorities got hold of grandmother for using illegal vodka. They put her in jail in Kovno for awhile. I remember visiting her there once. I was told that on her trip to jail, a rich man in Yanova trusted her with a thousand rubles to take along and give to a business friend in Kovno.

The vinegar was made in large barrels. The barrels stood in one of the rooms. The tops of the barrels almost reached the ceiling. At the bottom of each barrel there was a spigot from where the vinegar was poured into the bottles.

I never saw the vinegar being made. I often examined the vinegar in the bottles. I used to see little things moving around in the lower part of some of the bottles, little worms in the shape of microbes. Some were quite tiny. Some were large. I used to seem them wiggle, there in the vinegar. They were so small that I believe none of the women could see them. I could see them because I was near-sighted. For many years afterwards I would examine bottles of vinegar and look for the wigglers. I must state that here in America I have found very few wigglers in vinegar.

14. THE STIBELEH

When mother brought us back from Yacatherinadar to Yanova, we changed our living quarters often. I faintly remember that we lived near the market place at Rasse Gittle's bake shop. Also, I remember the house near the ravine. At another time, we lived upstairs and in the rear of Getzil the melamed (teacher). Also that once we lived across the street from the Catholic church; that there was a vacant lot next to our place; that there were piles of lumber on that lot. I liked to climb and hide inside those lumber piles where I felt peaceful and safe. In all those places, we lived less than three years. The other four years, more or less, we lived in the stibeleh.

Stube is a house. Stibel is a small house. Stibeleh is a tiny house. But our stibeleh was not a house at all. It was a separate room in Bobe Chipa's house. The entrance door was from Bobe Chipa's bare anteroom. The stibeleh was a room about 8 by 14 feet, with a dirt floor. We would cover the floor with fresh clear sand about once a week. It had a window at the long end looking out on Bobe Chipa's garden. The privy was on one side of the garden.

The furniture consisted of a bed for my mother and my two sisters, a table by the window to eat on, a few chairs or stools to sit on, a couple of benches for brother Mendel and myself to sleep on. We also had one or two kerosene lamps. The stove door was in the anteroom where the firewood was put in. The stove protruded inside our stibeleh from two feet above the floor to about five feet above. Under the stove was the katuch, a place to keep a few chickens. On top of the stove, a small person could sleep.

Across the stove, by the door, was a bench. On top of the bench mother had her dry yeast box and the scale to weight the yeast. It was mostly on Thursdays that mother sold her yeast at retail from her home. It was in the stibeleh that father found us when he came home from far away. It was from the stibeleh that he took me away from mother.

15. SLABODKA – AWAY FROM HOME

When father came home to Yanova he did not make a better home for me. On the contrary, he took me away from home and from mother. He left mother and took me to his family in Slabodka. For about six months I lived in the business home of his father and mother whom I had never known before and who were strangers to me.

Bobe Sifra managed a big business. She was called Sifra Kudra. I never knew why they called her Kudra until many years later. There was a great Chazon (cantor) in Kovno named Kudra. I was told that he was my cousin. He was the only one of her family I ever heard of.

Chiam-Yudel, her husband, was a "she" man. He did nothing and he seemed to have no authority whatsoever. I suppose he did a few chores around the house. He was a quiet old man with an unprotected hernia. He often took me to the bath house (Bod) on Friday. Occasionally he would give me ten kopecs for spending money. I never knew or heard of any of his relatives, either. It was Bobe Sifra who attended to the business.

They owned a large inn house at the edge of town. At the far side of the house there was an enclosure with stalls to accommodate a great many horses. Inside the house was a large bar where Bobe Sifra used to sell vodka by the glass. I saw many drunks in the place. It is possible that it was because I saw those drunks that I decided to keep my resolution not to take or accept more than one intoxicating drink at one time.

At the other end of the inn house there was a detached house belonging to Bobe Sifra in which lived her daughter Rassel with her husband and their three children. Rassel's husband was a stately looking man. His family name was Ettman. He seemed to be interested in some high class business.

It was one Sunday morning that I visited Aunt Rassel in her house. There was a distinguished visitor conversing in Russian with Uncle Ettman. The visitor seemed to be a high official. What interested me most was not so much the official or the conversation but my Uncle's attire. He was sitting there with a long coat

or kimono, without pants. Later, when I came to America, I noticed the contrast. In the old country it was improper to go without a coat and proper without pants. In America you could go without a coat but you had to have your pants on.

16. THE HOLY MEN

There were three Holy men who were outstanding figures in Slabodka; Reb Hirshelch, Reb Yeizel and Reb Noteh. Reb Hirshelch was a saintly looking man. He had a small face and a black beard. He became my teacher for a short time. In later years he started a Yeshiva in Slabodka. It became nationally known. It outlasted the then present large Yeshiva in the main Slabodka synagogue. Still later the Hersheleh Yeshiva was moved to Palestine. It is called the Slabodka Yeshiva. For sentimental reasons I occasionally send them a small donation.

Rabbi Yeisel was an outsider. He lived with his in-laws on our street. He married the daughter of a well-to-do merchant in Slabodka. He has only local fame. It was told that not long after his marriage he persuaded the family to lock him up in one of the rooms in order that he might live with God instead of his wife. There he studied God's Torah in solitude with God.

He got the family to make two separate openings in the wall of the room. One opening was to bring in the flaischige (meat) meal. The other was to bring in the milchige (milk) meal. Flaischige and milchige are kept strictly separate by orthodox Jewish people. I kind of remember that I met Reb Yeisel once or twice.

Reb Noteh was the superintendent and lecturer of the Holy Slabodka Yeshiva. It was in the large town-synagogue. It was a big Yeshiva. There were about a hundred or more boys, young men and a few older ones studying there. They would visit on the benches or stand up and move the upper parts of their bodies, forward and backward, while shouting. In front of each was a standard (a high book stand) and on the standard, a book of the Talmud. Many of them were shouting so loud that you could hear them more than a block away. They were studying aloud by themselves. Each one separately. I visited the Holy town synagogue Yeshiva a few times.

I did not suspect that in a short time I would be one of the shouters under the eyes of Reb Noteh.

17. UNCLE YOSEL

Father had a brother in Slabodka. His name was Yosel. He lived on the same street as grandmother, nearer to town. He was tall, rough looking man. He owned a horse and a small tannery shop. He brought raw hides and prepared them for the leather market. I remember visiting his shop. I did not like the smell of the hides. He had a large family, children of my age and older ones. I sensed that they resented our coming to live with Bobe Sifra. I used to pass their place often but I do not remember ever having been invited into their house. It was one of his family whom I later tried to find in Brooklyn, N.Y. when I was there for the World's Fair in 1940.

Across the street from Bobe Sifra's place were a few nice looking homes. There were some young boys and girls living there. I became acquainted with some of the boys. I often visited them and played chess with the boys. Mother also had a relative in Slabodka whom I visited occasionally.

When father brought me to Slabodka I was too small and too young for the Slabodka Yeshiva. For a while father tried to teach me the Talmud himself. Soon afterwards he got Reb Hirshelch to teach me. Reb Hirshelch had a son my age or a little older, to whom he was giving private lessons in the Talmud. Father got me to join the son and Reb Hirshelch taught the two of us together.

I remember going to Reb Hirshelch's synagogue to study with his son. I also remember that his son came to our synagogue to study with me. But it seems the arrangement did not last long. Soon we left Bobe Sifra and Slabodka. One more memory I have from Slabodka: on Friday nights Grandfather would dip pieces of Chalah (white bread) in the hot soup. For years I used to copy this. I thought it was good.

I do not remember our coming back from Slabodka to Yanova and to mother. In fact, I do not remember seeing mother again until I went to visit her later in Kovno.

18. YESHIVA IN VILNO

After father's failure to get his parents to share the burden of his family, he decided on a new, similar plan. He took brother Mendel and me to Vilno where there were regular yeshivas and where he had rich relatives on his father's side. He decided to become a porus (a married man who leaves his wife to study God's Torah) and we boys were to become regular Yeshiva bochorim (Talmud students), who eat Tag (free

day board) and become Rabbis. I did not meet any of his relatives and I do not know if he received any benefits from them.

Father found a side street sectional synagogue where he slept and where he was supposed to study the Talmud. I never knew where or how he got his board and expenses. In the beginning, brother Mendel and I also slept in the synagogue. I faintly recollect that I slept in the woman's section of the synagogue, which was upstairs. Mendel and I got our free eating days mostly from the members of the butcher's synagogue, where we were to study.

There was a large yeshiva in the butcher's synagogue. It was composed of three grades with only two teachers. Reb Icheleh had the first and third classes and Reb Yeshua, the middle class. Mendel did not stay long with father in Vilno. He was soon gone and I was left with father.

I had fairly good board in the butchers' homes in Vilno. Only I was very bashful. I did not feel comfortable eating those charitable meals in a stranger's home. I did not have the courage to speak a word to any of the housewives or to their children. If the wife or servant forgot to give me a knife, a fork or even a spoon to eat with, I was too bashful to ask for one. I used to sit there and wait until they would notice that I was not eating. Naturally, I never became acquainted with any of my butcher benefactors.

19. STRAPPINGS

Father used to pick on me and punish me for all kinds of infractions. At first he used to wake me up in the morning and tell me of some wrong I had done the day before and strap me for it. Then I began to get up earlier and go away before he got up. Then he began to hide my clothing after I went to sleep, if he believed that I deserved to be punished. After that I took my small belongings and went to sleep in the butcher's synagogue where there were many other students sleeping. Thus, I became a full fledged homeless, but independent, yeshiva bochur.

I remember that sometimes afterwards my teacher complained to my father that I did not attend classes regularly. Father came to the Yeshiva and gave me a public strapping. I took it meekly, but I resented it greatly. From then on I had a grudge against father. I believe that I kept the grudge within me for many years. It was in later years that I mellowed or forgot about it.

I remember that once, again, I met with his displeasure. He was after me. I ran away and roamed about on this main city streets. I remember seeing someone who looked like father coming towards me from the opposite direction. I was not sure that it was father until he was quite close. I ducked to the side and hid myself. Luckily he did not notice me. However, I sensed that my eyes were somewhat near-sighted.

I did not have much trouble with father afterwards. He seemed to have resigned himself to the loss of his authority and discipline. Now I was free and independent. I roamed and explored the city. I visited the special butcher market and all other markets. I visited the parks and all other public places. I visited the big hill which had a high tower and climbed to the top of the tower. I even visited and passed through the "Ostobrom" (a collection of Catholic churches) where one had to remove his hat while passing through. Taking off the hat was an irreligious act for a pious Jew.

20. MY SKIN DISEASE

Besides having trouble with father in Vilno, I contracted a physical ailment to worry me . . . a skin disease on my hands. It was a disease which was prevalent among the poor Talmud boys who slept in the synagogues. Blisters, cysts or boil began to form and grow between the fingers and on the palms of my hands. I would notice them while they were quite small. Then they would grow larger. Some of them would become twice as large as peas. At certain times they would become quite painful.

There was no necessity to see a doctor about it since many of the boys had the same trouble. There were a few remedies that were used, the main one being a sulphur salve. I used some of the remedies. They may have helped a little, but there seemed to be no cure. Sometimes it would get much better and then again it would get much worse. I had the disease for nearly two years, about one year in Vilno and for nearly a year afterwards in Slabodka. I was completely cured in Slabodka by going swimming in the river. For a time I went swimming two or three times a day, nearly every day.

The irony about my skin trouble is that while in the old country I was cured of a skin disease on my hands by bathing in the river in Slabodka. Later, here in America, I contracted a skin disease on my feet from swimming

in the Ohio river. Here, also, there are many others who have a similar disease. Here they seem to call this foot disease "athlete's feet." But I believe that I got it from the stagnant slime and slush in the narrow path

to and inside the dressing room. But, here also, like in the old country, there seems to be no sure cure for the disease.

21. VILNO-KRASNODAR, ON THE WAY

I lived in Vilno, with father near me, for two full semesters, one year. Then father took me back home to Yanova and mother. I remember an incident on the way which I have never forgotten. About half way, there was a large transfer railroad station, Krasnodar, where we had to get off and change trains. We had to wait for a while until our train came to take us to Yanova. There were lots of people in the station with lots of bundles and baggage at their sides. We also had some bundles at our sides. We stood there waiting for our train. Then we heard a train whistle and heard a train coming in.

There was an official at the station door, letting people in and out. When father heard the whistle and heard the train coming, he ran to the door and tried to get to the train. The official put his hands out to stop him. Father stooped down and tried to get under. The official again put his hands down and stopped him. Father then tried to get over and the official again stopped him. There was a tussle for a minute or more until it dawned upon father that it might not be his train. There and then I realized that father was not the kind of man to lean or depend upon. Sometimes after the incident we boarded our train to Yanova.

I do not remember arriving in Yanova. I do not remember meeting mother or the rest of the family. I do not remember if mother still lived in the stibeleh. All I remember is that father, by himself, went to England, and I, by myself, went to Slabodka. Father went to England because there was nothing suitable for him to do in Yanova. He went, also, because of his disappointment with the children and also because mother had a brother and sister in England who seemed to be doing well there.

I went to Slabodka because I did not want to lean on mother. Also, because I knew that free food was being furnished to the Talmud students. I also may have hoped that grandmother and grandfather might be of some help to me.

22. BREAD AND SOUP

When I came to Slabodka, I made my home on one of the benches in the high Town-Synagogue (Beth Hamedrath) which housed the yeshiva. Nearly all the benches had containers under the seats where one could keep his belongings. After I was settled I went to see grandmother Sifra, father's mother. She gave me a cold reception. I did not try to impose myself on her. I went away from her with the decision to disown her. I went to see grandfather in his synagogue. I do not remember if he did or did not give me the ten kopecs as he used to do. I decided to ignore him, also. I did not go to see Aunt Rassel or Uncle Yosel, father's sister and brother.

I decided to live and study there as a stranger, as a poor, unknown yeshiva-bochur (Talmud student boy). I did not want anyone to know that I had rich grandparents in town. I lived in Slabodka for a whole year after that and I never mentioned a word about father's family living there. From later timing of events, I believe that grandfather Chaim-Yudel died before I left Slabodka but I didn't know or hear about it.

Mother had a relative in Slabodka. I went to see the family. I told them that I would like to have a place, for awhile, to eat on the Sabbath day. They told me that I could come for the Sabbath meals.

There were three pious Jewish women who were helping the poorer Yeshiva boys. They did it by collecting bread, in sacks, from people of Slabodka and Kovno. They went from house to house to make the collections. I went to see them and they promised to furnish me enough bread to exist on.

For additional food I went, with the rest of the poor ones, to partake of the kettle noon meal. There was a house across the street from the synagogue which belonged to the synagogue. It was composed of two large rooms downstairs and one larger room upstairs. One of the downstairs rooms was the kitchen or kettle room. The other was used partly as a dining room and also as a lecture room. The kettle was a large copper vessel in which soup was cooked five days a week, noon time, and given free to the poorer ones of the Yeshiva. There were bowls and spoons which each one had to get for himself and then go to the kettle for his soup. I joined the crowd every day and most of the time I got my soup. Thus, I survived in Slabodka for the first semester.

23. UP IN THE SKY

The dining or lecture room had two or more long tables and benches. On those tables the poorer ones ate the kettle soup and on those benches sat the Talmud boys who came to digest Reb Noteh's discourses. I believe that the attendance was voluntary. I believe it was about three times a week that Reb Noteh gave his

lectures there. I believe that the lectures were given to selective students. I remember that I attended these lectures a few times. I faintly remember Reb Noteh with his reddish beard, sitting in the middle of the largest table. On each side of him were seated a few of the older and holier of the Talmud boys and right next to him was the saint of the Yeshiva.

After being there for awhile I picked up enough nerve to see Reb Noteh. I did not tell him anything about my father's family in Slabodka. I told him that I was from Yanova and that I came to study. He looked me over and did not say a word. He did not approve nor disapprove. I was too small and too young for either approval or disapproval. I was just tolerated. I imagine that he kept an eye on me. But for that first semester I was an exemplary Holy Talmud student boy.

I remember that I decided to become a real pious Holy Talmud boy and for about six months I was really up in the sky. I tried and succeeded to follow in the footsteps of the saint. I did not speak a word unless it was spoken for God. I did not eat anything unless it was to sustain me to study Torah. I did not make a move unless it was a movement for God. I spent all of my time studying God's Torah with fervor.

I studied in daytime by the poor light from the windows. By night I studied by poor candle light. Each student had to have separate candles to study by, in order to see sufficiently. We were given candles by the sexton. I managed to get all the candles I needed.

24. INTENSIVE STUDY

For a while I tried to study by day and by night. I tried to study as long as possible and to sleep as little as possible. However, I used to fall asleep and sometimes I would sleep longer than I thought was necessary. I then devised a plan to keep me from sleeping too long. I put my two fore-fingers of my right hand on the burning candle, about one inch below the burning flame. I went to sleep with my head on the standard and my fingers on the burning candle. When the candle burned down by my fingers and they began to get hot, I would wake up and resume my interrupted study.

For a few nights I did well with my Holy and hazardous contraption. Then, one night I slept a little heavier and did not awaken the instant my fingers got hot. I woke up when my fingers were burned. That was the end of my excessive night studies. I realized again that I was becoming over pious and that God did not approve of it. Henceforth, I kept up studying intensely but with more moderation.

25. THE SHOUTING ROOM

The one large room upstairs was the shouting room. It had a rear entrance. It was a large room but not quite large enough to accommodate all the shouters on Saturday evenings. Then the room was filled to capacity. It was mainly on Saturday evenings that I went there to please God and Reb Noteh. To add my feeble voice to the intense roaring of the shouting clan.

The shouting started daily, before sundown and was kept up during the twilight and for a while into the darkness. During the week days the shouting was not so very intense nor was it attended so well. It could be heard only about half a block away. On Saturday evenings the shouting lasted much longer, was well attended and very intense. It could be heard for two or three blocks away.

It was not just shouting, not just hollering, crying and whining. It was combined with intense movements of the body, with clapping of the hands, with violent shaking of the head, with stomping of the feet, with swinging of the arms and snapping of the fingers. On Saturday evenings it was kept up for nearly two hours into the darkness. It was in the darkness that the shouters became more intense.

It was not aimless shouting. It was done to emphasize certain passages of certain holy books which the shouters had learned well enough to repeat in the darkness while shouting. There were three or four small books from which the shouters took those passages. I read and studied all these books. There was nothing in the books about which to get excited. They were just books concerning morals, the soul, the spirit and the relationship of man to God.

26. BAR MITZVAH

It was about the middle of the first semester in Slabodka that I became Bar Mitzvah. All Jewish boys became Bar Mitzvah at the age of thirteen. It means the legal-religious change from a male child to a man. It means the change from a young boy to a young man. It means the change of responsibility for God's commandments from the parents to the boy, himself. It means a bond between the Jewish boy and the Jewish God. As a rule, there is some sort of ceremony and witnesses to the bond. Mine was without ceremony or witnesses. I seriously promised myself to keep all God's Taryag (613) commands.

The Taryag commands are only part of the bond. They are the "thou shalt do" commands. There are, also, nearly as many "thou shalt not do" commands. I had to accept them all, without exception or deviation. Nevertheless, this is not as difficult as it seems, since very few Jews, including myself, know what those commands are. They are chronicled in certain books but very few Jews read these books. It is only the Rov, the Dian (religious judge) and a few of the learned, pious Jews who are supposed to know about all of those commands.

In America, in the 1950 decade, great stress is laid on the ceremony and witnesses of the Bar Mitzvah, but little attention is given to the "thou shalt do" and the "thou shalt not do" commands. The ceremony is performed usually at the synagogue on a Sabbath. The Bar Mitzvah boy is called to the altar. There, he repeats a portion of the regular Sabbath reading of the Torah. Often he recites learned religious speech. In most cases an entertainment is given in his honor on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath. Presents are given to the boy, whisky, wine and refreshments are served and everybody is happy. I suppose it includes God, Himself.

27. SAINT AND SINNER

Soon after I made my bond with God, Satan came to plague me. Just about the time I got my religious urge, I also got my sexual urge. I had not societal contacts with any females, especially with young girls my age. I must have become sexually unbalanced. Perhaps I developed, sexually, too soon. I used to wake up at night and break the Lord's commands. I knew it was a sin. I knew that God slew men for that particular sin, but I seemed to be helpless. Satan had me in his grip and God was either unable or unwilling to help me. Thus I was a saint in the daytime and a sinner at night.

I slept on one of the benches. I had no mattress and no pillow but I did have an overcoat. It was getting cold. I remember that I developed a method by which I made special use of the overcoat. I used part of the overcoat in place of a mattress, part as a cover and the two sleeves for a pillow. I remember that later in the winter I got a place on a bench near the stove where it was warm.

My skin disease, also, did not get any better during my saintly days. It even seemed to be getting worse. It seemed that God did not want to accept me as one of His Saints. Nevertheless, I did not waver. For a few months longer I kept up my saintly practices. I do not remember which outlasted, the saintliness or the sinning. I do remember that soon after I quit being a saint, I also quit being a sinner.

28. A VISIT TO YANOVA

I kept up my piety and intensive study of the Talmud for the full term of the first semester and for a short time in the second semester. For the Pesach (Easter) holiday I went to Yanova, my home town. I remember very little of Yanova at that time. I faintly remember that brother Mendel was working as an apprentice in a furniture shop. I remember nothing about my mother and my sisters. I faintly remember being told that father was in England.

I do remember one incident. I was temporarily studying the Talmud in Aunt Mindle's cloise. There was another boy there also doing similar studying. We became casual acquaintances. He was a relative of Aunt Mindle. He was soon to go to some outside Yeshiva. I told him about the holiness in Slabodka and persuaded him to go there. I believe that he did go to Slabodka after I left. I was successful in getting God a convert just before I quit Him myself.

After the holidays I returned to Slabodka. It seemed that both God and Satan had other work to do and left me alone. I changed my mode of studying from quality and intensity to quantity and superficiality. Instead of studying one book of the Talmud intensely, I began to study, lightly, different books of the Talmud, as well as other books. There was quite a library of holy religious books in the synagogue. I tried to read and digest as many as I could.

There were other boys, also, who studied lightly like myself. I seemed to be able to get acquainted with them. There were also some new boys who seemed to be of a different type. One of them was Paiskeh from Kidan. I became acquainted with him. It seemed that he was not at all religious. I never understood what brought him to Slabodka. I never asked him, not even later in the Kidan. Maybe Satan sent Paiskeh to Slabodka to take me away from God.

29. SWIMMING

One of my new acquaintances took me to the river at the edge of town where there was a secluded place suitable to go bathing and swimming. Of course it was in the nude. Knowing the story in the Bible where a general was cured of a skin disease by bathing in the river Jordan, which was not only a Holy river but also a

fast flowing river, I believed it possible that the Slabodka river (Villiya), which was also somewhat of a fast flowing river, would be beneficial to my skin disease.

I went bathing in the river quite often, sometimes with friends and sometimes alone. I would not swim but I went in deep enough so that I could keep my hands in the water all the time. Then I decided to learn how to swim, which I had to do by myself, since there was no one to teach me. I was quite successful, for I could swim a little distance before I left Slabodka. I went bathing late in the summer and early in the fall when the water in the river was already quite cold. I went all by myself, since no one went swimming this late in the season. I was entirely cured of my skin disease by the time I left Slabodka.

I learned how to swim by a method which I developed myself. I picked a place in the river where the depth was just a little more than the length of my arms. I lay down in the water with the palms or fingers of my hands touching the bottom and my head just out of the water. I stretched out and let my feet go up to the top of the water. In that position I began to train my feet. I trained them to make the swimming motions and movements like the swimmers do. Then I began, gradually, to release my hands and try hand movements. In the beginning I would release my hands only for a few seconds. Gradually I learned the hand motions and could swim a little. Then I practiced coordinating the hand and feet movements. Thus I learned how to swim.

30. BEGGING

One day one of my new acquaintances asked me if I would cooperate in helping another of his friends get a pair of shoes, which he needed badly. I asked to see the boy and his shoes. I saw the boy and he really did need a new pair. The only way for us to get money was to beg for it from the well-to-do people across the river in Kovno.

The technique of this sort of begging was as follows: two boys would go together, one as the speaker or explainer, the other as the acceptor of the money. The money was not for himself, but for someone less fortunate. The acceptor would have a handkerchief wrapped around his hand in which the money would be accepted. So here I learned how to be a beggar, but not for myself, which took away the sting from the task. I accepted the task.

The next morning we two set out for Kovno. My friend tied a handkerchief around the palm of my left hand and I was ready to accept money. We went from door to door in a better class Jewish neighborhood.

He contacted the house-woman and told them the story of the poor Talmud boy who needed shoes badly. Many of them gave me money. It seemed that we had good luck, for in that one day we collected enough money to buy a pair of shoes for our friend. I do not remember if there was any money left for us, personally.

Soon afterwards my new friend told me how I could earn some money for myself. It was Holy work. It was to fill in as a mourner, to make up a quorum for prayers after death. A mourner cannot leave his home for ten days. However, he must say Kadish (prayers) three times a day, in a quorum of ten. He must have ten Jewish men for the Kadish. The Jewish people of Kovno who could afford to do so would often pay Talmud students of Slabodka to fill in, in the Kadish quorum. The Kadish time lasted seven days after death and also one day each year thereafter, on Yorzeit, the date of death.

31. THE TEA ROOM

Now I began to have a little money, besides my free bread and soup. Not only did I have a little money, I also began to have a little leisure. It was pleasure not directly combined with sin. There was a house only a few doors down, across the street from the synagogue, where one of the rooms was used to sell some sort of eatables to the Talmud students. The specialties were tea with a lump of sugar and liver with liver soup gravy. Now, I used to go in there two or three times a week. I used to get a glass of tea and a kopek's (half cent) worth of liver and soup gravy. It was used tea leaves that were given color and taste with burnt sugar.

The place was run by an elderly woman and her young daughter. The daughter was real pretty. I often went in there for tea and would line up to get served by the young girl and to watch her serve others. I also made friends in the place. But it did not last long.

Once, when I got there, I was told that my brother Mendel had been there and had gotten some tea and liver on my credit. I did not say anything to them, then. I did not know what made him come to Slabodka. I do not remember whether I met him there at that time. The next time I went to the tea room I was told that Mendel had eaten up nearly a ruble (half a dollar) of my credit. That was the end of it. I told them that I would pay it but that I wanted no more credit. It took all the rest of my time in Slabodka to pay off that debt.

I would buy no more tea and liver with gravy for myself.

32. A ROOM OF MY OWN

Paiskeh, from Kidan, did not sleep in the synagogue. He had a room a few blocks away. I do not remember whether he had the room by himself or shared it. I used to go to his place and play chess with him and some of his friends. Paiskeh was going to leave Slabodka and go back to Kidan before the semester was out. He asked me if I would take over his room, which I did. It cost very little and I managed to pay for it. I remember that I had already quit taking bread from the bread woman. I do not remember if I had quit going after my bowl of soup.

I was not an elite but a phony Talmud student. I would go to study only for a few hours a day. I would even miss some days. I spent most of my time trying to earn a little money, going swimming and playing chess and sometimes even cards.

I used to play chess in the evening and quite often even in the daytime. Towards the end of the semester, as I was starting a chess game, I was told that my father was looking for me at the Yeshiva. I told my friends to watch for me and give me a warning if they saw him coming. I told them that I didn't want father to find me playing chess, instead of studying at the Yeshiva. Not long afterwards I was given the warning. I looked out and saw father. I do not remember if I hid or ran out. I do remember that he did not find me. I also remember that soon afterwards, I was bargaining with a covered wagon driver to take me to Poinivez.

33. POINIVEZ-KIDAN

It was in the fall of 1889, that I left Slabodka for Poinivez. I left Slabodka without finding out what made brother Mendel come to Slabodka and eat up my credit. I did not find out what made father come back from England and hunt for me. I was glad to be able to get away. I remember bargaining with the driver of a covered wagon for a place on the uncovered rear and extension of the wagon, which was used for extra baggage. From a small sum he gave me a place for myself and my small bundle.

I picked Poinivez because it was a large town and it had no regular, organized yeshiva. I figured that there should be enough pious Jews there to support a single Talmud student. I had no relatives or friends there. I was entirely a stranger. I made my home in the town synagogue of Poinivez, but I could find no

support. The sexton of the synagogue was not friendly. I decided to leave and go on to Kidan, which was not far away.

I remembered Paiskeh, from Kidan, and I also knew that mother had a relation there. I had better luck in Kidan, which also had no regular, organized yeshiva. Again I made my home in the town synagogue. My mother's relative promised the Sabbath meals and the sexton was friendly. I got eating days for every day in the week and I also managed to have a few kopecs in my pocket. I studied in a moderate way and lost all my desire for intensity.

There was a library of religious books in the synagogue. I read or studied nearly all the books that interested me, both Talmud and other books. I lived there a full semester.

34. A TURN IN THE CYCLE

At the end of the first semester in Kidan, I decided to visit Yanova to find out what became of mother and the family. In Yanova I was told that mother had moved to Kovno. I went to Kovno and found mother in a small room in the rear of a grocery store. Father was not there. I do not remember meeting anyone else of the family. Mother was running the grocery store. She was depressed. She would hardly speak to me. I remember that I stayed over night.

The next morning I left mother and went back to Kidan. I did not just go away, I ran away. Until then, it was just father from whom I ran away. Now it was also from mother. I went back to Kidan to become a permanent, homeless Talmud student. It was not a matter of choice, but compulsory. I knew of no other way of making a living. It seemed to be a complete break with the family. But the angels in heaven had already decided otherwise.

In less than a year afterwards, I found out that father, mother, brother Mendel and two of my sisters had left the country and were in America. A complete change took place in my thinking and ambitions. Before, my ambition was to run away from my family. Now, my ambition was to try to go back to my family.

However, another unforeseen change took place soon afterwards. Until now I had no chance for a secular education. Soon after I was given that chance right there in Kidan.

35. DESTINY'S PANORAMA

What happened to my family from the fall of 1889 to the fall of 1900 while I was in Kidan? What made them decide to go to America? Where did they get the money for the trip? How come that mother, who once would not live in a godless town, should now consent to go to America, which was then considered, by pious Jews, to be a godless country? It was a matter that none of the family liked to talk about. These were questions I never asked until the year 1954.

Most of the happenings were self evident. Father came to look for me in Slabodka in the early fall of 1889. He went to America about two years before I did. I came to America at the end of the summer of 1892. He must have gone to America in the summer of 1890. That leaves one year, the year I was in Kidan, for the panorama to take place.

When I was in Yanova and Kovno, before I came to America, I heard rumors about the Gett (religious divorce). That Grandfather had died and that grandmother Sifra had left for Palestine were known facts. Mother's grocery store in Kovno I had seen for myself. Sister Anna told me about father getting beaten up by his brother Yosel, which pleased me. The balance of the story I got from my sister Anna when she visited us in 1954. She told me about the 600 rubles (about \$300.00) for Bessie, about the young widow and about the smad (conversion to Christianity).

I was in Kidan when the happenings took place. I had the gift of analysis when I was a little boy. I still have the gift to this day. I picked up each part and fit it in its proper place. I took up known facts, the rumors and what sister Anna told me and put them together. It became a real panorama picture. A tragedy-comedy.

36. THE TRAGEDY-COMEDY - PART I

When father came to look for me in Slabodka, I ran away. I ran away because I was afraid that he would punish me for playing chess instead of studying the Talmud. I was unaware of the changes that were taking place, changes that were to affect me and all of my family. Perhaps it was better that I ran away. For, had I stayed, events might not have turned out as well as they did.

It is possible that father came for me, not to punish me, but to bring me the good news. Grandfather had died and father had become heir to a rich estate. I do not know whether he came before or after the funeral. He was also in possession of some ready cash. Grandfather had liked my sister Bessie, who was a real pretty girl. He left her his savings, amounting to 600 rubles (\$300.00). It was money with which to get married. Father took possession of the money.

Father wished to take over the Inn and the Court and become a Lord of the Manor, to which he was entitled. According to Jewish law, he was entitled to a double share since he was the elder son and the first born. His younger brother Yosel had a house and a business of his own. His sister Rassel was waiting for her husband to send her tickets to South Africa; her husband was doing well there and was sending her plenty of money to live on. But he, father, had no home and no business.

Father had a good case in the Jewish law and God would be on his side. But Uncle Yosel had a better chance in the goishe (non-Jewish) court, which was the law of the land. Yosel's surname was Melamed, which was also Grandfather's family name. Father's surname was Raphaelowich, the name of Grandfather's uncle in Vilna. He was recorded into the family of Raphaelowich in order to evade a children's military service draft. Under Tzar Nicholas the First, they drafted a percentage of small Jewish children for forty years of military service.

Father did not have the nerve to get mother to move in on Grandmother Sifra. Maybe mother refused to do so. Maybe mother did not want to or was unfitted to become an innkeeper and sell vodka. So father had a plan. He got mother to move away from Yanova to Kovno to be near his estate. He got mother to give away her yeast business to her sister Leah, who had recently married. With the six hundred rubles from sister Bessie he started a grocery store for mother and sister Bessie.

37. THE TRAGEDY-COMEDY - PART 2

Uncle Yosel also had a plan. He married off his oldest daughter to a tough young man and moved them in on grandmother. In a short time they took over the business of the Inn and pushed Grandmother into a corner. Grandmother now had nothing but money and she was afraid that they might even take that away. She decided to go to Palestine for the last few years of her life and to die there. It was good reasoning, for Palestine was far away, but nearer to heaven. Besides, she would be safe with her money.

Uncle Yosel and father did not object to her taking her money and going to Palestine. On the contrary, they helped her get away. Yosel believed that without Grandmother's presence he was strong enough to handle father. Father believed that with the help of God he would, somehow, handle Yosel. Grandmother went to Palestine but there were rumors that she was unable to keep her money. Her new friends or relations managed to take her money away from her. It was rumored that in two or three years she died of starvation.

Aunt Rassel's husband was doing well in South Africa. He wanted his children to have a secular education. So Aunt Rassel moved to Kovno where there was a secular school. Mother did not do well in Kovno. She was losing money in her grocery store. She sold but little. Some of the goods were getting spoiled and some were being eaten up by the family. There was no money to replace the stock. Mother consented to give up the store and move into the house of Aunt Rassel, which was next door to the Inn. Sisters Bessie and Anna also moved into the same house. It was a nice home.

Now father lived next door to his estate but was unable to get any benefit from it. He was afraid of his young roughneck nephew-in-law. He began to quarrel with his brother Yosel. The quarrels became more intense. Mother could hardly stand it. She mixed in and Yosel beat her up. After the beating, mother again left father. This time she took only sister Tirza with her and went back to Yanova. Soon after, sister Anna also left. She went to live with a dressmaker woman in Kovno. There was left only sister Bessie, who could not leave because her dowry of 600 rubles was tied up with father.

38. THE TRAGEDY-COMEDY - PART 3

Now father had another plan. He was acquainted with a strong young widow. He would give mother a gett (divorce) and marry the widow. She was not afraid of Yosel and his son-in-law. She would move into the Manor after she married him. I am not sure if father divorced mother or not. It was rumored that he did but that he remarried her.

Uncle Yosel also had another plan. With his right hand he began to beat up father and with his left hand he began to make terms. He offered father a thousand rubles if he would go away to America. But father did not listen. He still believed that God would help him gain what rightly belonged to him. It was sister Bessie who foiled his plan. It was sister Bessie who, having once broken up the family in Yacatharinadar, now saved the family.

Sister Bessie threatened that if father did not take the money, get together with mother and go to America, she would smad herself. Smad meant that she would become a convert to the Christian religion. She would go to a priest and have him make a Christian of her. Now there was no choice for father. If Bessie left the Jewish God, father would lose his support and God might even turn against him. By himself, father could not conquer his brother Yosel. He went to Yanova and prevailed upon mother to return to Slabodka in order to prepare to go to America with him and the family.

For more than one reason, they did not take the entire family along. They had to run and steal over the border. It was more difficult, more dangerous and more expensive with a large family. I was left behind because I was away and also because father wanted me to keep up my Talmud study and become a Rov.

They left sister Anna because she was learning to be a dressmaker and also because she was the delicate one of the family and would be a drag in crossing the border.

Father also wanted to have some money left when he got to America. He took brother Mendel along because he had a trade (cabinet-maker) and would be able to help in America. He took sister Bessie along to keep her from smad and also because she was a dressmaker and would be of help. He took sister Tirza along because she was too young to be left behind.

Thus it was that my parents went to America and I did not know about it until some time afterwards.

39. KIDAN

It was in the year 1890 at the age of fourteen that I got my secular education. It was in Kidan that I became a revolutionary and also a good swimmer. The town had a lake nearby and I went swimming often during the summer. I was an independent religious student and got my Teg days (eating days) mainly from the members of the synagogue. As there was not regular Yeshiva in town, it was not difficult to find support for one or two religious scholars.

For the first semester, or most of it, I was settled in the large synagogue where there were a few others studying. Later I moved to a side street synagogue. It was called the Shuster's (shoemaker's) cloiz (synagogue). There I was all by myself and could do as I pleased for six days a week. On Saturdays the members would come in to pray and for other religious matters. Then I had to make believe that I was studying the Talmud.

But I was not alone in the synagogue. There were three local boys, older than I, who also used the synagogue as a place of study. However, they were not studying the Talmud. They were preparing themselves for entry into a college or university. They had books with them, Russian and German books, books on arithmetic, algebra and geometry. They also had Russian and German grammar books. They gave me the opportunity to use their books and they even helped me a little with them. I didn't need much help. In about six months I had become an expert in arithmetic and algebra problems (simple algebra). I learned geometry and also Russian and German grammar. But that was not all.

One Saturday afternoon one of the young men took me to the cellar of an unfinished house. There he introduced me to a scholarly looking young man who wore a student's cap. Four or five other young men were there also. They were a studying circle. The young man with the cap was the leader. He made no charge. He taught us anything we wished to learn but mainly geography and the social sciences, primarily about labor. There were some geography books and also a good sized world globe, which made it easier to study that subject. Sometimes they sang songs in Yiddish and Russian, which he had taught us. They were strange songs, revolutionary songs.

40. VILKOMERE

In the year 1891 I left Kidan and went to Vilkomere, which was a larger town. It now had a secular education. But I didn't have the nerve to try to make use of it. I looked for a side street cloiz (synagogue) and found one inside a large tenement court. It was called the Doctor's Cloiz at that time. I made my home there. It was there that I developed a plan whereby I taught myself how to be more thrifty.

I knew Russian and German Grammar. I wanted to know about Hebrew grammar. There was a new Hebrew grammar book by Steinberg which I wished to possess. It cost one ruble and ten kopecs. My weekly income was as follows: three days of each week I had places to eat; for three days I was given ten kopecs a day instead of meals; and on one day I had nothing. I had to make three days' stipend last for four days. In order to buy my book, I decided to live on five kopecs a day for the four days, which would leave me with a savings of ten kopecs a week. In 12 weeks I saved a ruble and ten kopecs and bought the book.

My budget was as follows: During the twelve weeks I lived on bread and herring for four days each week. I brought a pound of bread for two and a half kopecs and a herring for two and a half kopecs. In the

morning I ate a piece of bread with mainly the skin of the herring. At noon I ate a piece of bread with the meat of the herring. In the evening I ate a piece of bread with the bone and what was left of the herring.

41. A MINIATURE REVOLUTION

In Vilkomere I had the experience of becoming involved in a small scale revolution. I knew a young man there who claimed to be a revolutionary. One day he told me that there was going to be trouble the next morning with the authorities at a certain place on the outskirts of town on the main pike going to Yanova. At that place there were unfinished buildings with piles of brick. There were also a few piles of stone. That was where the clash with the authorities was to take place. I knew exactly where the place was so I decided to witness it.

It was all on account of the grain and the higher price of bread. There had been a wheat crop failure in Germany, so the Germans were willing to pay higher prices for wheat. Vilkomere was surrounded by wheat country and was within wagon hauling distance of shipping points to Germany. Wheat was being hauled to Germany and the price of bread went up in Vilkomere. For some time small gangs had been intercepting these wheat wagons, especially at night. They would cut the sacks and scatter the grain as the wagons passed through Vilkomere. The grain men complained to the government authorities. They were told to send no more individual wagons but to gather all the wagons together and haul the grain at one time. The government was going to give them a convoy. A date had been set for the convoy to pass the town and it was this date that my friend had given me.

The next morning I found that the streets were blocked off and the stores closed. There were lots of people on this sidewalk watching but no one was allowed to cross the street. The streets were covered with town and village police. Of course I could not reach the trouble spot by going through the streets but I was determined to get there anyway. I went down an alley, climbed fences and trespassed through back yards, but I got there.

I arrived about a half hour before the convoy reached the spot. There was quite a mob there. I would judge about a thousand people. What impressed me was that most of them did not seem to be town people. Very few looked like the Jews of Vilkomere. Most of them seemed to be country people and peasants.

They were standing on the highway, ten to fifteen men abreast. I do not remember if there were any women among them. They were mostly on the highway but there was also an overflow on the sides. Many

of the men had little piles of bricks and rock next to them. It was a solid mass blocking the highway. Nothing could pass through unless the people were first scattered. I picked a suitable place in the woods where I could see what was happening and still be in comparative safety.

What I could not understand, at the time, was why people who raised wheat should object to getting a high price for wheat. I did not understand that it was the landowners who owned the wheat and who therefore received the high prices when they sold the wheat. The peasants and farmers who raised the wheat not only did not receive any profit but had to even buy their bread, now at higher prices.

42. A TEMPORARY VICTORY

There came about ten or twelve cavalry officers on horses, with swords at their sides. They were riding fine horses. Behind them were the wheat wagons with the country police walking along side. Nearer and nearer the convoy came but the mob did not scatter. On the contrary, they solidified in a solid mass, forming a solid human barricade on the road. When the horsemen came near enough, the mob began throwing rocks and bricks at them. The horsemen did not retaliate, they simply turned and fled back towards town. The convoy also turned and fled with them. Then, the first skirmish was a completely bloodless victory for the revolutionaries and the mob.

When I returned to town, everything seemed to be quiet. A day or so later I again met my revolutionary friend. He told me that there had been many people arrested in town and in the surrounding communities. Also, that they were looking for many more who had run away, and that he, himself, was afraid that they might be looking for him.

About a week after the incident, just as if nothing had happened, there was another grain convoy passing through town. This convoy had many more grain wagons than before but with no horsemen to protect it. There were only a few town and country police officers scattered along the way. The convoy went on through town quietly and without interference.

Afterwards, I was looking for my revolutionary friend to find out who and how many were arrested and what was done to them. I never saw him again.

Thus I learned, early in my revolutionary career, that the result of a revolutionary victory may turn out to be harmful instead of beneficial.

43. A COMRADE AND FRIEND

A short time after the Vilkomere revolution, another young man came to study and live in the Doctor's Cloiz. He was a little older than I. He, also, was a phony student. He, too, wished to go to America. However, while my chances to go to America were real, because most of my family was already there, his chances were slim. We became good friends and loafed together a good deal. I knew that he was not religious and he knew the same about me. Neither of us knew, however, how far away from religion the other was. We never spoke about religion.

One Saturday afternoon we took a walk to the Revolution Woods at the edge of town. He excused himself and went deep into the woods by himself. I waited for quite a while, then went to look for him. I found him smoking a cigarette. This was a great sin on the Sabbath. When he realized that I had caught him smoking on the Sabbath he did a strange thing. He knelt on his knees and raised his right hand towards heaven and defied God.

He said, "If there is a God let Him strike me dead now." Of course, nothing happened to him just then. He was satisfied but I was stunned by his action.

I realized how stupid and foolish his act was. That if there was an almighty God, He surely would not take up the challenge of every puny creature. I realized how vain and irreligious a person can become. I interpreted his challenge not as an act of sound reasoning, but an act of vanity. He didn't need to be afraid of my knowing that he smoked on the Sabbath. I didn't smoke on the Sabbath because I did not smoke at all. I didn't care what others did.

A few weeks afterwards he decided that he must go to America. He had no funds and his folks were poor and could not help him. He told me that there was some sort of mill near his town. He was going to work there and save enough money to go to America.

44. MY FAILURE AS A TEACHER

In the fall of 1891 I met a yesuvnik – a Jew who lived in a not-Jewish farming village – who was looking for a yeshiva-bochur to go to his home and teach his children. He agreed to give me a room and board and a little money besides. I do not remember the amount. I told him that I was willing to take the job. He gave me directions to go to the village.

A few days later I wrapped up my belongings into a bundle and early in the morning started to walk to the village. It was a cold day and it was a long way. I passed many forests and many small villages. In the forest it was lonesome; in the villages it was fearsome. The village houses or huts were spread along the road. Each house had a plot of land and a dog. Some seemed to have more than one dog. Nearly all the dogs barked savagely. Many of them ran after me. I found a large stick to protect myself. With the stick in my hand and faith in my eyes I managed to keep the dogs from getting too close.

Late in the afternoon I reached my village. I inquired and was told that the Jewish Inn was at the end of the town. I arrived there before supper. I was introduced to the family and there I stayed as a teacher.

I had three children to teach and had had no experience. I was able to teach them how to read the prayer book and how to read Hebrew. But I was unable to teach them the important thing, how to chant and sing it. After a few weeks I suspected that I would not be able to hold the job for the full semester.

45. YANOVA – ON THE WAY

I decided to go to Kovno where my sister Anna was living, in order to have better connections with my parents and get to America. On my way to Kovno I stopped in Yanova to see my Aunt Leah, who had just gotten married, and to sponge on Mother's family for awhile. I did not stay long.

Aunt Leah's husband, my new uncle, was a religious fanatic. He did not have to make a living. Aunt Leah made it for him. Bobe Chipa, my grandmother, had died and left her the vinegar business. She also had Mother's yeast business. Her husband spent most of his time studying God's Torah but he also found time to do special work for God. His specialty was to go to wedding dances and break them up if he found that the boys were dancing with the girls. It was alright for the boys to dance with boys, or for the girls to dance with girls, but for boys to dance with girls was against the will of God.

I had a Sabbath evening meal with Aunt Leah and Yankel, her husband. I nearly choked. I thought he sensed that he had a Satan at his table. I had another Sabbath evening meal with Yosel Lanes. His wife was

mother's cousin. They had seven or eight children, and they all sang the Smiruth (Sabbath songs) at the meal. It was a pleasure to hear it. I believe it was the remembrance of that Sabbath singing that tied me to religion in later life.

I also remember having a couple of meals with Uncle Welve Mordecai, the candle maker, and also with Aunt Mindle and her married daughter. It was Aunt Mindle and here immediate family and her husband's family that later came to America and settled in Atlanta, Georgia. It was one of her sons who arranged for the raft on which I started for America. It was one of the boys of her husband's family whom I, at one time, had converted to the Slabodka holiness. Now I felt guilty when I met him again in Yanova. He had become truly a holy man. I tried to "dis-convert" him but I believe that I failed.

46. KOVNO

In Kovno I found that after Grandma Sifra died, my Aunt Rassel had moved to Kovno with her three children. Her husband had gone to South Africa and he sent her plenty to live on. I went to see her and she allowed me to sleep in her house for a while. When I stayed longer than she expected she began to grumble. I challenged her to put me out. She accepted the challenge. She picked me up with my scenick (straw mattress) and threw me out of her house. I have never challenged anyone since.

My folks in America sent my sister Anna a ship ticket to go from Hamburg to New York. They also sent her 16 rubles (about \$8.00) with which to go from Kovno to Hamburg. But the 16 rubles were not enough money for her to get to Hamburg. The ticket was good for only three months. We were afraid that the ticket would become void. I told her that I would manage to get to America with 16 rubles and the ticket. She agreed to let me have the rubles and to send the ticket back and ask father to change it to my name. It took quite a while. After two or three months I received my ticket.

For awhile I had been staying with Nochem, the small one, and his wife Riva, the tall one. That was where my sister lived. My sister helped Riva in her dressmaking business. They lived in upstairs rooms. Downstairs there lived a widow woman and her young daughter named Fagetake.

They made a living making cigarettes. Fagetake was a real pretty girl. I loved to look at her and listen to her talk. I found that I could love a pretty girl but I was very much in doubt that I could get a pretty girl to love me.

I could no longer claim to be a full fledged Talmud student but I did find a sympathetic sexton of a small synagogue who allowed me to sleep there until I got my ship ticket.

47. THE FIRE IN SLABODKA

I was strolling on the Kovno-Slabodka high bridge when I saw smoke and fire coming out of a house near the Holy places where I once used to sleep and study. I started to run to the place. It was not far. When I got there, there were already five or six houses burning. The students that were nearby were already beginning to carry out the Sofer-Toreth (scrolls) and other high books. As I was not needed there, I went to the other end of the fire. There, people were carrying out furniture and other things from the burning houses and from those nearby. I joined them in their work. There was no fire department in Slabodka. I do not remember seeing anyone trying to put the fire out. We carried the furniture out of the houses and put it in the middle of the street.

The wind shifted away from the upper end of the synagogue square towards the residences. We were trying to help but the fire was gaining on us. It came fast and overtook us. I remember jumping out of a house window with a piece of furniture. The burning roof fell in as soon as I was out. I was already tired. It was quite a few hours since the fire had started. There were forty or fifty houses burning by that time.

The fire department from Kovno was already there. They stopped us from rescuing any more furniture. They made us help them with their water pumps. It took about twelve men to swing each pump. I was tired and didn't want to be forced to do pump work. I ran away from the fire about ten blocks, to where I could take a rest at the home of a relation of my mother. After I got there I became inquisitive as to what had become of the furniture I had carried out of the houses. Later, I went back to the place of the fire and found it all roped off. Nobody was allowed to get through. I walked up and down until I found a place where I could have a view of the street where we had left the furniture. I saw that the fire had burned down the houses on each side of the street and the furniture was burning in the middle of the street.

There were my good intentions and my hard altruistic work gone up in fire and smoke. It was a sight and a lesson I never forgot. One cannot be sure that his good deed will always do good.

Soon after I came to realize that a disaster to many may become a blessing to a few. The fire disaster of Slabodka turned out to be a blessing to me. God burned up Slabodka to make it easier for me to go to America.

48. THE PASSPORT

Soon after the fire in Slabodka, we got word from America that our parents had transferred my sister's ship ticket to me. I began to make preparations for the trip. I believed that it would be cheaper and easier to go by passport instead of by stealing over the border. I was still too young for army service. I had an idea that the fire in Slabodka would help me get a passport.

My father went under the name of Raphaelowich. But the family name, which my father's parents and his brother Yosel used, was Melamed. I went to the passport official in Slabodka. I told him that I was Yankel Melamed of Slabodka, a grandson of Chiam Yudel who had lately died and of Grandma Sifra who had gone to Palestine. I also told him that I was a nephew of Yosel Melamed and that my parents had left after the fire. I wanted to get work somewhere and needed a passport. For one ruble I got a passport under the name of Yankel Melamed of Slabodka.

49. THE RAFT

When I was in Yanova I learned that one of my great Aunt Midle's married sons, David Solsky, lived in a small town in Poland not far from Kovno and that he was dealing in logs which were floated to Germany in rafts. I got the idea that it would be cheaper and easier to cross the border into Germany by claiming to be a raft worker. I went to David and he was in favor of my idea. He told me that he would get me a place on a raft and it would not cost me anything. In a few days he introduced me to the raft men and made a date for me to start. He made lunches for me to take along.

There I was, floating towards America!

I was accustomed to a raft. In Yanova I used to roam around on the rafts when I could not swim. Now I was a good swimmer. There was nothing to fear but the goyim. They might take my money, kill me and throw me in the river. However, like my mother, I had more faith than fear. Nevertheless, I took precautions. I hid my money and my ticket in the twigs of the hut on the raft.

We had to stop the raft to have the border passage papers cleared at Yurberig, the town before the German border. I also had to get my passport cleared. I went to the official's office and showed him my passport. He asked me how I could be a raft worker when my hands were so soft. I told him that I had just become a raft worker; that our house and everything we had, had been burned in the fire at Slabodka; that I had hired myself out on a raft in order to make a few rubles. The story sounded true, so he stamped my passport for a ruble.

On the way back I was in a dilemma. Being nearsighted, I was unable to find my raft. There were many rafts and they all looked alike to me. I walked up and down the river. I had a passport, but no money and no ticket. They were hidden on the raft hut. I could not see the huts on the rafts plain enough to tell which one was mine. I kept hunting for quite a few hours. At last I found the raft and was again ready to float towards America.

About a mile or two before crossing the border, the raft-men told me to take one of the raft rudders and steer the raft. It was a hard job for a small boy and I soon tired. I nearly passed out. Just before crossing the border an official from a boat came on the raft. He looked at my passport and passed me. In a few minutes we floated past the border of Russia into Germany.

50. GERMANY

The raft stopped at Tilsit, the first town in Germany. There, the head raft man asked me for a ruble and I gave it to him. Then I was a free man. I had thirteen rubles and a ship ticket to America in my possession. It cost me only three rubles to cross the border and get into Germany. I changed my rubles into marks which gave me about 26 marks (two marks for each ruble). I had barely enough money to get to Hamburg. In going to Hamburg we had to change trains at Koenigsburg.

Getting off the train at Koenigsburg, we immigrants were accosted by a man at the station who told us that we could get to Hamburg cheaper if we went part way on a boat by way of Leubeck. A few of us agreed. He took us to the place where we brought our tickets and then took us to the boat. The boat was not leaving for a few hours.

There was, amongst us, a Jewish woman with three children, the oldest about ten years of age. I asked the mother if she would let me take the girl with me to see the town. She consented and off we went. Again I lost my way and did not know how to get back to the boat. I made inquiries, but few people could

understand me. At last I was given directions and found it. I was a little late. The boat was being held up for us and the mother was worried. I was beginning to believe that it might be my nearsighted eyes that were getting me in such troubles. But I really didn't know. I wasn't sure.

The boat ticket was about six marks cheaper than the train, so I had money to bring to America. I splurged myself in the Koenigsburg market. I brought a small bottle of whiskey, which, I was told, was good for sea sickness. I bought a few goodies. Altogether I spent about one half mark. But I had money left. Money to bring to America, so I thought, but it was not to be.

51. IMMIGRATION CAMP – HAMBURG

The boat from Koenigsburg took us first on a river, then on the Baltic Sea to Leubeck. From Leubeck to Hamburg, which was a short distance, we traveled by train. When we came to Hamburg, we immigrants were informed that we had to go to an inspection place first, before we could go anywhere else. We were taken by another train to a place all fenced in and with an iron gate. We all went inside the gate. It was a large place with a lot of small buildings in a kind of circle. There were lots of people there. All the buildings were nearly filled, mostly with Jewish immigrants from Russia and other eastern countries. I was there for a few hours before our group was called for examination. While I was waiting I went around the place and saw all there was to see. The people were being fed and there were benches and tables to sleep on. I was told that those who had tickets were being allowed to leave right away, but that those who had no ship tickets had to stay there until their cases were disposed of. I found out later, in America, that it was a kind of immigration camp. It had been built for health purposes. There was a cholera plague somewhere in the east, which was moving west towards Germany. The German government had built this camp as a precaution against the immigrants bringing in the plague.

It was at the beginning of the plague that I was there, so that they were not so strict with their rules. The plague lasted for about three or four years and later on the regulations on immigrants became more strict. I was there for two or three hours. I believe I had lunch there. Then our group was called. I had my ship ticket and was let go out of the gate. I was given instructions as to where to go.

At the ticket office I was told that they had a place where I could stay overnight and that they would arrange for my passage the next day. On the next day, which was on a Thursday, they looked over my ticket

and told me that my ship would not come in for a whole week. The ship would be ready to leave a week from Friday, so I would have to wait there.

52. HAMBURG TICKET OFFICE

I lingered around the place for awhile; then I noticed a woman sitting there crying. I inquired what was the matter with her. I was told that she owed the company money for lodging. They charged a mark for each night's lodging and the woman claimed that she didn't have enough money to pay for it. I figured out the time that I would have to wait for the ship and counted the money I had. It was plain that I would be crying and weeping the next week. I decided to leave and go back to the immigration camp where I would get room and board free. I paid my night's lodging and checked out.

The camp was on an island and there was a small boat at a certain place where they ferried you over for the price of five pfennigs. I paid my five pfennigs and got to the island. I climbed over the fence and again I was one of the immigrants. I found a place where it was not overcrowded and found a table that was not being used. There, on that table I made my home.

I got my meals with the rest of the immigrants and slept on the table. It was not a bad place to be. I was used to such a life. Of course, I did not belong there, but neither did I belong to the synagogues where I used to live. On Friday, early in the morning, I climbed over the fence and went to the small boat, paid my fare and again went to the ticket office.

When I showed the man my ticket he told me that my ship had already left. It had left the day before, on Thursday. But they would let me exchange the ticket for another ticket by way of Rotterdam. However, I would again have to wait another week. I was supposed to come back the next Thursday and he would take care of me. I left my ticket with him and he gave me a receipt. Now, all I could do was again go back to the immigration camp.

53. A GOOD SAMARITAN

I lingered for awhile and then I talked with a young man who was older and taller than I. He told me that he also had to wait another week. He had no money to pay for the lodging and didn't know where to go. I told him about the immigration camp where we could get free board and lodging. I volunteered to take him there and to give him half of my table to sleep on.

I took him to the camp; we climbed over the fence and lived there like kings, waiting for our ship. On about the third night, about the middle of the night, I felt someone touching me. I felt for my pocketbook, where I kept my money, and it was gone. There was nothing I could do. I could not make a commotion about it because I did not belong there. I could do nothing by myself because my new friend was bigger and stronger than I. I simply buttoned my coat and went to sleep again. When morning came I found that my friend was gone and I was left penniless.

No, I was not completely penniless, he took only the marks. He left me a few pfennigs. I had enough to pay for the ferry to get to the ticket office and make sure about my ticket. I had been told to get there on Thursday morning and that they had a prepaid ticket for me from Hamburg to New York by way of Rotterdam, Holland, which included everything, transportation, lodging and meals.

When I got there on Thursday they gave me the train ticket, lodging ticket and ship ticket from Rotterdam to New York. Off I went to Rotterdam, Holland.

54. ROTTERDAM, HOLLAND

What attracted me most, in Rotterdam, were the wooden shoes, worn by a great many people. Clump, clump, you could hear while they walked on the street. I would have been tempted to buy a pair off those shoes for curiosity's sake, if I had any money left. (All I had on me was a German pfennig with a value of one fourth American cent.)

I was undecided as to what to do with that pfennig. I could and should have brought a postal card to send to Uncle Meilach, my great uncle in New York. I had his address and he was to meet me at the boat. My parents, at that time, were living in Fall River, Mass., which I knew was not New York. But I didn't want to land in America without any money in my possession. I decided to take a chance on Uncle Meilach. Again I had faith that either Uncle Meilach would find me or I would find him. I kept the pfennig. I sent no word to my great uncle but I came to America with money in my pocket – one pfennig.

55. THE FOURTEEN-DAY VOYAGE

For the first few days the wind, the water and the waves were comparatively calm. I roamed all over the ship...from the captain's station, where he stood by the wheel which guided the large ship by the touch of his hand, down to the furnace, where blackened and almost naked men were feeding coal into the furnaces. I found out that the best place on the ship, in the event of wind or storm, was in the center or middle of the ship. At both ends the boat would rock up and down and I would feel a little sickly.

The meals were comparatively good. Not being religious, I had no scruples about eating the non-kosher food. It was the butter that played a trick on me. The butter was there in large chunks, to take as much as one wanted. At first I was modest and bashful and took just a little bit of butter. On the third or fourth day I picked up enough nerve and spread my bread thick with butter...real thick..and ate it. It was salty butter, maybe artificial butter, because it was a little more salty than regular butter. Even before I finished I felt nauseated. I couldn't eat any butter for the rest of the trip.

ⁱTyped by Otis Brown, 239 original pages = 96 mss pages April 25, 2006. Nancy's alterations were made on September 12, 2006 and again in September 2009