

Cantor Zavel (Zebulon) Kwartin

# MY LIFE

Published by a

**Community Committee**

Philadelphia—New York

1952

Yiddish line on unnumbered page otherwise in English:

*Reprinting without permission by the author is forbidden*

*To my wife, Gitl Rokhl, my dear  
children, grand- and great-grandchildren,  
I dedicate this book about my life.*

*IMPORTANT NOTE TO THE ENGLISH READER:*

Starting with his “In Place of a Foreword,” the author uses innumerable times the term *khazones* (Yiddish/Ashkenazic), *hazanot* (Israeli/Sefardic). There is no simple English equivalent. The recent Comprehensive Dictionaries (Yiddish-English, 2002; English-Yiddish, 2016) give “cantorial art” as the semi-accurate but ungainly definition.

The term actually encompasses everything to do with the cantor’s profession, from the actual performance to the hiring as permanent or occasional prayer officiant in the synagogue or elsewhere, and more.

Accordingly, the translator has chosen to maintain the author’s usage — *khazones* plus its references to individuals, both singular and plural: *khazn*, *khazonim* — in the English text. It has the added benefit of maintaining and transmitting the author’s voice.

*Hershl Hartman*

## **In Place of a Foreword**

It is a great joy for me that, despite my serious illness, I was able to complete this book about my life and to see the book appear before the broad Jewish public.

Among my numerous friends and admirers who for many years demonstrated their deep interest and served me with advice and deeds, I must especially mention Herr [Mr.] Max Levintov [Lewintow?], of Philadelphia.

Thanks to Herr Levintov I also gained the friendship of Herr Jacob Yakimov, of Philadelphia, who, though being an engaged businessman, yet maintained warm feelings for Jewish melody and who did not skimp on any means nor efforts to see to the appearance into the light of this book that covers an epoch of almost 60 years of *khazones* among Jews.

To these two men of the people, who distinguish themselves by their fine Jewish feeling for *khazones* and music, I express in this manner my sincere thanks from the depth of my heart.

**Z. Kwartin**

New York, December, 1951

## CONTENTS

In Place of a Foreword.....	
As Soon As I'm Born, My Life is Denied.....	
My Parents' House.....	
The Sabbath Night Meals ["Ushering Out the Queen"] at My Father's House.....	
My Grandfather Holds Midnight Prayers with Singing and Guitar Playing.....	
My Years in <i>kheyder</i> .....	
My First Musical Performance As a Child.....	
I Hear the First Prayer Leaders in My <i>Shtetl</i> .....	
A Cantor and His Apprentices Come to Our <i>Shtetl</i> .....	
My Father Takes Me to Berditchev.....	
They Want to Drive Us Out of the <i>Shtetl</i> .....	
A Hasidic <i>Rebe</i> Comes to Our <i>Shtetl</i> .....	
I Become <i>Bar Mitsve</i> and Am Apprenticed As a Craftsman.....	
Many Crafts and Few Blessings.....	
I Am Taken to the Military Draft Board.....	
They Cry Out: " <i>Goden!</i> ".....	
My True Deliverance Comes From Yosl, the "Resident" Tailor.....	
I Am Up For Matchmaking and Every Match is a "Strike It Rich" Gravy Train.....	
How Jews Conducted Themselves Fifty Years Ago.....	
A Story About a Rabbi's Son Who Converted.....	
I'm Taken Around to <i>Shtetlekh</i> to See Potential Brides.....	
I Marry Kovalyevski's [Kowaliewski's] Daughter.....	
The Beginning of My Musical Career.....	
Musical Education.....	
A General Invites Me to Sing.....	
Famous Artists Assess My Voice.....	
The Baritone Vinogradov Correctly Diagnoses My Career.....	
An Uncle Who Opposes My Cantorial Career.....	
My First Visit With Cantor Pinye Minkovski in Odessa.....	

A Polemic With Cantor Pinye Minkovski in Odessa.....  
 I Come to Vienna for the First Time.....  
 Cantors in Vienna Fifty Years Ago.....  
 An Offer From the Vienna Royal Opera.....  
 My First Compositions.....  
 My First Concert in Lodz.....  
 Back To My Home-Nest, Khonorod.....  
 Days of Awe Prayers in Elizabethgrad.....  
 I'm Offered a Fortune to Abandon *Khazones*.....  
 My Father-In-Law Bitterly Derides My Urge to Become a Cantor.....  
 My Father Delivers a Flaming Speech in My Defense.....  
 Business-Trading in Partnership With *Khazones*.....  
 A Sabbath At *Reb* Moyshe Arin Viner [Moses Aaron Weiner]'s in Lodz.....  
 I Must Be Concerned With My Younger Brothers.....  
 The First Synagogue Warden Who Wants to Rule Over Me.....  
 My Apprentice-Singers Are Stolen From Me.....  
 I Become A Wholesaler And Barely Make It Out Alive.....  
 I Emerge Broke From All the Business and Return to Vienna.....  
 He Suffered For His Father's Sins.....  
 With Great Difficulty, I Am Granted an Audition at the Lemberg Orthodox Synagogue....  
 The Lemberg Rabbi Forbids My Sabbath Praying.....  
 A Competing Cantor Who Wanted to Bury Me Alive.....  
 A Wander Through Galician Cities and Find Surcease in Yaroslav.....  
 Hearty Yaroslav Jews Retain Me By Force for Passover.....  
 Back To Old, Beautiful Vienna.....  
 The First Bright Hope Lit Up For Me in Vienna....  
 I Become Chief-Cantor of the "Empress Elizabeth [Reform] Temple" in Vienna.....  
 The Celebratory Dedication of My New Temple in Vienna...  
 Business-Trading Plagues Me Again.....  
 After One Good Deal A Second Comes Along, Where I Bury All My Money.....  
 I Perform Sabbath Prayers At the Great Warsaw Synagogue on Tlomacka Street.....  
 A New Income Turns Up — I Sing Into a Gramophone.....  
 My First Meeting With the Master-Cantor Gershon Sirota.....  
 The Gramophone Carries My Name Across the Breadth of Russia....  
 A Struggle With My German Exploiters.....  
 A Beautiful and Fortunate Time in My Life.....  
 A Great Guest In My Home — Baron Ginzburg of Petersburg.....  
 A Concert In Petersburg.....  
 I Become Chief Cantor in Petersburg.....

I Sing At the Great Rabbinic Convention in Petersburg.....  
 Petersburg Doesn't Warm Me and Leave the Russian Capital.....  
 Budapest — A New Chapter in My Life.....  
 Budapest [Reform] Rabbis Start a Battle With Me.....  
 My Final Farewell To Petersburg.....  
 Budapest [Reform] Rabbis Besmirch Our Old [Orthodox] House of Study.....  
 My Eastern European [Ashkenazic] Traditions Triumph in Budapest.....  
 My Father's Arrival in Budapest and My Mother's Sudden Death.....  
 After My Mother's Death My Wife Dies, As Well.....  
 I Am Engaged For Thirty Concerts in America.....  
 The First World War Destroys My Plans About America...  
 I Am Arrested at a Hungarian Health Resort.....  
 The German General Staff Invites Me For a Concert Tour For Jews in the Occupied Territories.....  
 My Concert Among the Ruins of the Lithuanian Town Shavle [Siluva?]......  
 The Moral Destruction Following World War One....  
 I Arrive in America.....  
 My Unsuccessful Concert at the Metropolitan Opera House.....  
 My Second Concert in New York Erases the Stain of My First Failure....  
 America Becomes My Second Home.....  
 My *Khazones* Job in Brooklyn.....  
 A Rabbi Who Seeks to Circumcise the Old Jewish Year-Round and Holiday Prayer Books.....  
 The Rabbi Seeking "Reforms" in My Temple Gets a Well-Earned Punishment.....  
 I Travel Back to Europe.....  
 I Find My Intended in Vienna and Am Married at the Empress Elizabeth Temple.....  
 My Seven Happy Years in America....  
 A Discovery By a Jewish Young Man That Brings Millions.....  
 A Venture That Buries Its Investors in Gold....  
 Henry Morgenthau Joins The Venture.....  
 My First Journey to the Land of Israel.....  
 Afternoon Prayers On The Train to the Land of Israel.....  
 I Am Assigned A Mission That is Beyond My Abilities....  
 Tel Aviv Jews Storm the People's House.....  
 A Conflict With the English Police Chief in Tel Aviv and How He Apologizes....  
 I Leave the Holy Land....  
 Just One More Sight of Budapest....  
 A Concert at The Berlin Philharmonic...  
 My Unsuccessful Concert at the Warsaw Philharmonic....  
 My Second Trip to the Land of Israel....  
 The Year of 1929 — A Tragic Year For America and the Land of Israel.....  
 The Tragic Death of My Young, Learned Son.....



My Third Trip to the Land of Israel.....  
An Attempt to Found a Cantorial Seminar in the Land of Israel...  
“Kwartin Neighborhood” — Recognition of My Building Activities....  
The Arabs Destroy My Paradise.....  
Some Comments About the Future of *Khazones* Among Jews.....  
I Lived to See the State of Israel Cone Into Being.....

## As Soon As I'm Born, My Life is Denied

I have reached the age, Blessed be The Name, of seventy five years. For almost six decades I've been a *khazn* [cantor] among Jews. At the very ends of the earth, wherever Jews live and yearn for Jewish melodies, for the heartfelt, homey sound that has accompanied Jewish life for generations — that is where I have been and sung and cheered up Jewish hearts.

So one wants to take a glance backward, to relate the origins and sources of such a Jew as I. Which juices fed me and from which wells did I drink that gave me the strength to spend more than sixty years as a prayer-singer at the podium, singing and praying of the Jewish woe and pain, while simultaneously encouraging the eternal Jewish hope for revival in the eternal Jewish homeland? And I thank the Creator of the Universe for letting me live to see it.

Many of my readers will be interested to learn that I was born a “*zibile*” — prematurely. I weighed three and three-quarters of a pound; according to the concepts then, when incubators for premature infants were unknown, I was simply denied further life. It was expected that, at every passing minute, I would die.

The matter of nourishing me and sustaining my life became a terribly tragic one for my parents who had earlier lost two children, twins, also born prematurely. I was such a weak little creature that I could not digest the milk of my mother's breast, so for five months I was continually nourished by sugar-water, whitened by a few drops of milk.

One can imagine what sort of a “giant” I grew into on that food. Even at a few months old, my life was still being denied. My parents did not know where to turn. Since there were no doctors in the little *shtetl* where I was born, I was assailed by the old Jewish crones and the Gentile ones, as well, each of whom had her own “grandmother's remedy” for keeping me alive.

After smoking me in the fumes of various grasses, and after bathing me in various herb-baths, and after reciting various incantations, a new group of women appeared who insisted that my mother take me to the neighboring *shtetl* of Baslev, to the Tatar there. This Tatar had some sort of notes, written in red ink. The notes are placed into a glassful of water, and when the water turns red I should drink it and this is a certain remedy to assure a long life.

All these Tatars and sorcerers achieved only one thing: they emptied my father's pockets. I, for my part, did not grow a hair stronger through all these remedies. I did what I did: I would lie for hours on end, my head thrown back, looking beyond to our forefathers' fathers in the Other World...

My parents' grief was indescribable. I tortured and exhausted them so that, seeing how useless was their effort to keep me alive, they simply prayed for my death. This struggle for my life every hour of every day went on for all of two years. The Burial Society folk in our *shtetl* had already downed a bit of liquor on the account of my funeral, but they were sadly off in their calculations.

It appears that Above, in the heavens, it had been decided that I, Zebulon, son of Sholem, son of Tevye *Ha'Kohen* [the High Priest], was to remain on this sinful Earth. I will someday be a good product for the gramophone companies, for the radios and concert halls and somehow simply be a great joy for my brother-Jews in a bit of the morning prayers [*shakhris*], and those on holidays [*musif*], an ordinary

afternoon-evening [*minkhe-mayriv*] prayer, a month's-end fast [*yonkiper kotn*], to say nothing of the prayers on the Days of Awe.

Life began to appear in my weak little body and my parents' eyes lit up with faith and hope that they had managed to tear me out of the hands of the Angel of Death. That doesn't mean that, from then on, all went with me as intended, as with all normal children. Whatever illness was around latched on to me. I was most badly struck by the well-known "English disease" [scurvy]. My arms and legs grew numb, my bones were weakened, lacking all life force. It was certain that, even if the disease were not to kill me, I would remain crippled for the rest of my life.

There could be no thought of my standing, walking or crawling. I lay in one place all day long, and as my mother was involved with her other children and even had to help my father in his store — my only attendant was the serving maid, who would have preferred to see me dead rather than alive.

But as it appears, even as a child I stubbornly resisted the Angel of Death. I survived that illness, as well. I began to stand up on my little legs. A beam of light shone down upon my parents' house. True, I was a pale child, lacking any drop of blood in my face, my blue veins showing through all my limbs. But there was the hope that I would live. Most importantly, I began to gain weight and each added ounce brought another helping of health to my exhausted mother.

It just happened that the material conditions of my parents greatly improved at that time, so the mood at home was doubly joyful. Both I and the little girl who was born after me, as well as my elder brother, all grew healthily. And my parents could enjoy that bit of joy to compensate for the pains they suffered on our behalf. It went so far that they began to talk about putting me into *kheyder* [elementary religious school]. But before I describe my *kheyder* years I must stay a while at my parents' house.

## My Parents' House

I was born on the third day of the [Hebrew] month of *nisan/nisan* [March-April] when we read [in the Torah] of Zebulon [Gen. 46:14], March 25, 1874, in the tiny little *shtetl* of Khonorod, or as it was called in Russian, Novoarkhangelsk, Elisavetgrad Region, Kherson Province. The *shtetl* was 25 *verst* [16.5 mis.] from Talne. I was my parents' fourth-born child. I've already mentioned that the first two children, twins, died at a very young age.

My father, *r'* [Reb, Mr.] Sholem, was the oldest son of a family of eight, six sons and two daughters. He was a strong man, both physically and spiritually. He was born in Uman, Kiev Province, and while still a child he was known for his sharp mind and unusual memory. He was the best student in the Uman Yeshiva.

When the boy was fifteen, matchmakers were already rapping on my grandfather's door. And when one matchmaker came in the name of the very wealthy and well-born *r'* Khayim Lubidiner, of the *shtetl* of Lubidin, Uman Region, my grandfather seized upon the match with both hands. *R'* Khayim Lubidiner was renowned as the owner of the large Lubidin mill, a great philanthropist whose name was known throughout the area.

My father married at seventeen and remained living on his father-in-law's hospitality. But after a year later he was told to head our "on his own," because his place was needed by another son-in-law.

My mother Pessye, *o'h*, [*oley ha'sholem*, may she rest in peace] was part of a twin and was very sickly. Her mother died shortly after she was born. Her father, as a pious and respectable Jew, immediately took another wife. It is therefore understandable that a weak child, born as a twin, and, in addition, raised by a stepmother, remained physically retarded. And her entire rearing lagged behind. These vestiges of weak physical development were evident in her children, two of whom left this world quickly, and in me, who barely made it out alive.

My father's parents had settled in the *shtetl* of Khonorod, where they opened a dry goods store. My father, too, was among those denied married-life hospitality; he came to Khonorod, as well, where he opened another store with the same product as his father, that is: manufacturing.

My mother, that pious and devoted wife, helped out in the dry goods store even during the late months [of pregnancy]. She did not want her husband to neglect in the slightest his pious religious habits. And thus is how my father behaved:

Every night he awakened at midnight to perform the prayers in memory of Jerusalem and sat, studying, until five in the morning. Then he went to open the store, where he remained until eight o'clock. Then my mother relieved him, and he went off for prayers. There was simply no end to his praying, from front to back to the middle. Finally, he returned to the store around mid-day.

But these were not the end of his responsibilities to the Lord of the Universe. It was his habit to study some pages of the Talmud and its commentaries every day, to glance through [Maimonides'] Guide For the Perplexed and other *khsidishe* [Hasidic] volumes, and what about a bit of the [Biblical/Talmudic/Rabbinic] Sayings and a chapter of Psalms? So it came about that he spent two-thirds

of the day in prayer and study. And one also had to look through a Russian and Hebrew newspaper to know what's going on in the world.

To put it briefly, he was left with very little time to be concerned with his business. But since my dear pious mother was deeply convinced that her husband stood on a firm foundation leading to the World To Come through his piety and spiritual devotion, she took the entire weight of subsistence upon herself in addition to managing the household.

It was not easy for her to stand all day and to eat her heart out with the peasants and their wives. As though out of spite, the customers wanted to deal only with my mother rather than my father. This further undermined her already weak health. She was very depressed by the death of her first two children. My father, as a Hasidic Jew, recovered more quickly from that tragedy, saying the traditional prayers. But my mother was deeply affected.

The tragedy of the two children caused my father to relent somewhat from his strictly pious observances. To begin with, he ceased arising for the midnight prayers. In general, he decided to pay more attention to the business in order to free my mother from her burdens.

At that time it just happened that a crisis struck my parents' business. It was a drought year, the grain unripened in the fields. And since the peasants and the landowners usually bought merchandise on credit until after the harvest — this year it turned out that the customers were bankrupt. No one paid their debts. My father had just happened to load up on merchandise on payments, and not only weren't there any new customers, but the old ones weren't meeting their obligations, and my father was on the brink of bankruptcy himself.

My father had never actually issued promissory notes: he obtained everything on a line of credit, but he wanted to make payments on-time — it was a matter of honor to him and he was deeply worried that he might not be able to keep his word.

When my mother saw how deeply concerned my father was, how broken he was in spirit, she decided to take a desperate step. Namely, she traveled to Uman and there pawned her pearls, her diamond brooch and diamond rings so that my father might meet his obligations.

It is difficult to describe what a difficult experience this was for her. All this costly jewelry with which she would adorn herself in synagogue on the Sabbath and holidays — all of this was now with a pawnbroker in Uman. This did not improve her health. And it was just then that she was pregnant with me; certainly, the upset and worries contributed to my coming into the world as a sick and weak child.

To complete the portrait of my birth-*shtetl* I must add that it contained some eighty Jewish families among ten thousand peasants and landowners. The Jews were mostly storekeepers and craftsmen and, as per usual, there was also no lack of money-lenders.

Life between Jews and Christians was peaceful and friendly. Other than a few professional anti-Semites as, for instance: the school teacher, the sheriff, the town clerk, the medic and some other common peasants who had managed to learn to read and write.

[*Illustration on following page: Sholem and Pesye Kwartin, the parents of Cantor Zavel Kwartin*]

## The Sabbath-Night Meals [“Ushering Out the Queen”] at My Father’s House

From my earliest childhood, I remember the notable Sabbath-night meals that were observed, almost as if by decree, at our house every Sabbath night. There would gather mostly the common folk of the *shtetl*: the small storekeepers, the grain merchants, the hide- and cattle traders (*skotintshikes*). But, at the same time, there came as well the rabbi and the ritual slaughterer and other learned men and Enlightenment advocates. My mother would prepare the true borsht and cream, bow-tie noodles and buckwheat groats with goose-fat cracklings, soured watermelon, fermented apple juice [*kvas*]. And my father made sure that there would some good ninety-six proof liquor.

And when the crowd had downed a few, there’d be a flare-up of heated debates for the sake of Heaven. The scholars exerted themselves to unload as much Torah as possible and the more common crowd listened piously. But the scholars did not always agree among themselves and sometimes the heated arguments would rise up to the skies. When my mother saw that things were going up to the high heavens, she would enter and announce that the borsht and the noodles were done and that it’s time to taste something, because the clock was close to striking midnight.

These Sabbath-night meals had another purpose, as well; not a learned one of arguing over holy texts or discussing global politics — no, a more actual one that was bound up with the daily needs of the Jews in our *shtetl*.

Every Sunday, in the neighboring *shtetl* of Tornowitse [?Tornowiec], in the Kiev Province, a market fair took place. This market fair was supposed to provide enough income for the whole week. The common folk, the *skotintshikes* and hide traders, the grain merchants and very small storekeepers came to the Sabbath-night meals not so much for the fiery Torah debates as simply to obtain interest-free loans from my father for the next day’s market fair.

Late at night, when the crowd was tired of the heated arguments and had filled their bellies well with my mother’s wonderful dishes — then my father went into the alcove, opened the large iron safe and removed a broad leather purse. He began to call everyone in singly and distributed the free loans to each as requested.

At the Sunday market fair the Jews would do their trading and earn their frugal livelihood for the week. On Sunday night they would all return and pay back the free loans with many thanks. However, it would sometimes happen that one or another tradesman had not managed to sell his wares at the fair, so he could not repay the free loan on time. My father would calm such a person, saying that he would wait until the second or third Sunday [for repayment].

I recall the following story from my very early childhood:

This was on a Sunday before Passover, on the eve of the Russian Orthodox Easter. Saturday night, before the Sunday fair, my father gave three hundred rubles to the cattle trader Shmuel Leyb the Long, who was called by that nickname because he was actually very tall. The next morning, quite early on Sunday, Shmuel Leyb returned and asked my father to give him two hundred rubles more, because he had the opportunity to buy twenty more young bulls very cheaply, for almost next to nothing.

Sunday night the *skotintshnik* returned merrily to my father. “Well, R’ Sholem,” he says to my father, “I hope that tomorrow, God willing, on Monday, I will bring my young bulls to the fair at Patareye and will earn well, with God’s help.” My father wished him much good luck.

The going price for young bulls was on average eight rubles each. On Monday, after the fair in Patareye, Shmuel Leyb again returned to my father’s house. In great anguish, he said that at the fair in Patareye he was offered only seven rubles, 25 kopeks for each. He was therefore not able to make the sale with as great a markup. He apologizes for not being able to settle the free loan, but he has sent the bulls to the Tuesday fair at Lidvinke and he hopes that he will be able to sell them there at a profit.

On Tuesday, after the Lidvinke fair, Shmuel Leyb arrived in still greater anguish. He had been offered a ruble less than in Patareye. Therefore, he had decided to send the bulls tomorrow, on Wednesday, to Puketelev. In Puketelev he was offered a ruble, 25 kopeks less than in Lidvinke. So he sent them to Ludowa on Thursday, where the calamity was even greater: the price there was lower by a ruble, 50 kopeks than in Puketelev.

And since bulls are living creatures, they have to be fed, which costs money, and the peasant who drove the bulls from one fair to the other doesn’t work for nothing, and in the meantime the bulls grew thinner and thirstier — the *skotintshnik* sadly had no other alternative but to bring the bulls back home to Khonorod. [Here spelled as Khanerad.]

Shmuel Leyb came to our house with tears in his eyes. ‘R’ Sholem, “ he says, ”you now that I am an honest Jew and I don’t want for you to suffer a loss, heaven forbid, because of me. But you see my disaster: I cannot pay you my debt. What should I do, R’ Sholem?”

My father suggested that he turn to the butchers in the two neighboring *shtetlekh* of Khanerad and Tornowitse, that he tell them the whole story and that whatever they decide will be done. Shmuel Leyb went off to the butchers and told them the truth, that the actual owner of the bulls is R’ Sholem Kwartin. It was his money that bought the bulls and that there was such a disaster: the prices fell day by day.

The butchers came to my father and declared that they were willing to buy the bulls, but that my father tell them their cost in good faith. My father knew that their price would be impossible to obtain and if the cattle were to be held for another week the loss on their sale would be still greater. So he told the butchers that the price per bull is six rubles and thereby he rid himself of that “business” at a loss of over one hundred fifty rubles.

I relate this episode only to characterize the relationships that ruled among Jews in the little *shtetlekh* of the old country decades ago. How much honesty, devotion and warmth each had for the other; how much heart, mercy and goodness were shown to someone who accidentally happened to be in need. And this was expressed not only in words but truly in cash and blood. Each was prepared to go into the flames for the other, If, heaven forbid, someone in the *shtetl* fell ill — every individual and everyone together helped in any way possible. The good Jewish values revealed themselves then in their full glory.

## **My Grandfather Holds Midnight Prayers with Singing and Guitar Playing**

The image of my grandfather [*zeyde*], Tevye, is etched into my memory from the earliest years of my childhood. He was an unusually pious Jew, carefully fulfilling the commandments [*mitsves/mitzvot*] who spent all day in his dry goods store to earn a living, but whose thoughts were only involved in how better and more faithfully to serve the Master of the Universe.

He sternly observed the commandment to perform one hundred blessings every day, and as he was never certain that he had actually made the hundred blessings, he would drink some liquor a few times a day in order to assure himself the extra blessing [over alcohol].

Once, when I was still quite a young lad, I was invited by my grandmother [*bobe*] and grandfather to spend a few days at their home. I was put to bed early, but I awoke in the middle of the night: I heard singing accompanied by the playing of an instrument...

I opened my eyes and saw, at the light of a small lamp, my *zeyde* sitting over a book, humming a sorrowful melody and accompanying himself, moving his fingers over the strings of an instrument that I later learned was a guitar.

These were heavenly sounds to my childish years. I was pervaded by my *zeyde's* melody. I bore deeper into my bedclothes and tried not to be exposed to my *zeyde* as a listener to his singing and playing. I lay there a long time and soaked in, perhaps for all my life, that amazing song that bore the sadness of a whole people over having been expelled from its land and over its unending suffering.

Later my *zeyde* changed books and went over to a more joyful and lively melody. This certainly would've been a little psalm. The guitar now issued happy and hopeful sounds, as though my *zeyde* wanted to console himself in that totally dark night, that the clouds over our skies would not always persist, that there would be joy on our street, as well...

I fell asleep under those happy sounds and I don't know how long my *zeyde* sat there. I do know, however, that since that night I have been plagued without end by my *zeyde's* nighttime singing — it penetrated me and hasn't let go. I remembered both the sorrowful notes of that wake-night as well as the later happier notes; both together became part of my total being and made a deep impression on my later cantorial [*khazonish*] career.

That midnight prayer at my *zeyde's* house at once had its results on me in those childish days. A strange secret desire ruled over me to sing and hum along with those melodies that I'd heard from my *zeyde*. I also strongly desired to have an instrument like the one I'd seen at my *zeyde's*, on which I might play the melodies I'd heard on that unforgettable night at his house. But how one might achieve this was beyond my ken.

When I came to the *kheyder* the next morning I saw another pupil holding a pipe. When I looked more closely, I saw that it was a "*supilke*" [shepherd's flute] with eight finger holes, self-made of wood according to the instructions of the Khonorad herd's shepherd to the young boy.

"If you could only hear," the boy says to me, "how the shepherd plays on that *supilke*! It melts over all your limbs!"



As soon as I heard that I decided at once that I would not go to *kheyder* the next day, but that I would accompany our serving girl who drives our cattle out to the herd and in that way I would become acquainted with the shepherd.

The next day I actually arose at four o'clock in the morning, took along a hunk of the *khale* [egg bread] that was left over from the Sabbath, and went off together with our cattle to the herd. When the shepherd saw that hunk of white bread his eyes lit up. I asked him to play something for me on his flute. He didn't stand on ceremony and the sounds of his flute sounded to me then as the most beautiful music in the world.

Later the shepherd showed me how to make such a flute. It required some twigs of willow branches which had to be trimmed and have holes bored in them. And this had to be done with a penknife or an iron knife consisting of a little blade and a wooden handle.

Now the question arose as to where one might obtain the six kopeks for such a penknife? For a moment I had the idea of going to my father's desk drawer in our store to take out the six kopeks. But I had to dismiss the idea at once. First of all, why would I suddenly turn into a thief? My father and the *rebe* [teacher] of the *kheyder* would see signs of the theft on my forehead... Secondly, as soon as my father saw the penknife he would ask where did I get it? And one must not tell a lie, so I would have to reveal the truth: that I had stolen the six kopeks.

So I went about in bitterness, not knowing what to do. On a market-fair day, when the storekeepers put out their wares on canvasses or straw mats at the marketplace, among all the dear things, such as: combs, locks, harmonicas, dolls, hairpins and knots of thread, I also spotted my yearned-for penknife. My heart took a leap. Here before my eyes I see the yearned-for joy and I can't get at it. While sitting in *kheyder* I no longer heard what the *rebe* taught, but kept thinking about the knife that I'd seen at the women storekeepers' market stalls. So I immediately felt the sting of the *rebe's* slap and his shout: "Stupid! Why are you sitting there like a fool?"

However, I was soon fated to have my dream become reality. My uncle Dovid, the richest of my father's brothers, soon came to Khonorod and, seeing me sitting sorrowfully, asked me what was the matter. I cried my heart out to him and at once he gave me the six kopeks and I became the owner of a penknife.

On that very same day, as soon as we were released from *kheyder*, I ran to the creek where the willows grow and cut off thick and thin twigs. I worked long and mightily until I succeeded in carving a *supilke* just as our shepherd had instructed me. On that flute I played out all the melodies that crowded my childish head. I think there was not another child in all the world who was as joyful as I was then.

## My Years in *kheyder*

Our *shtetl* had two *melamdin* [teachers of small children]: Yisroyl Google-Eyes, whose nickname came from the two bulging eyes that jutted, rabbit-like, out of his forehead; in addition, he had a cataract over one eye. The other *melamed* [teacher] was called Khayim the Blind simply because he had lost the sight of one eye. The two teachers competed with each other, though there's no need to add that both were in dire poverty as well as being very clumsy in regard to teaching and educating primary grade children.

When I reached the age of five and my health had improved quite well, my mother said to my father: "*Shloymenyu* [dear Sholem/Shloyme], it's time to enroll our Zevondl in *kheyder*."

They sent for Fayvl the tailor and Tshornomoretz the cobbler to take my measurements for my first clothes and my first little boots in which I would go to *kheyder*. I remember as though it were today my mother telling the tailor to make [the clothes] a bit longer and a bit broader because, y'know, a boy grows. Fayvl sewed me up a hooded cape of velour and cotton, lined in fur, in addition to a pair of cotton pants and a little cap of astrakhan [lambs' wool]. And the cobbler finished the little boots with long legs. Everything was long and wide, with many long years in reserve. Besides that, I also received two new undergarments, little *taleysim* [prayer shawls/*talitot*]. My father himself wove the *tsitsis* [corner tassels, *tsitsit*].

A week later there arrived the *bahelfer* [helper, teacher's aide] to take me to the *kheyder*. My mother shed hot tears, in which there were whole worlds of prayers to the Master of the Universe. First, thanks to the Creator for my becoming well and, secondly, a hearty prayer that I might grow up to be a pious Jew and a great scholar. My mother said these moving words to me: "My child, you caused us great sorrows; day and night, weeks and months we trembled over your life and when we lived to see the day on which we're sending you to *kheyder* for the first time, we thank and praise God's name and hope that we will derive great *nakhes* [prideful joy] through you."

My father, as a male and a Jew who was a *khosid* [Hasid], did not shed any tears, but raised his hands as would a *koyen* [Kohan, high priest] giving the priestly blessing, and blessed me, adding some sort of prayer. The *bahelfer* observed this deeply moving scene but he was thinking of the potful of food and other things that my mother gave him to take to the *kheyder* with me. It's understood that a *bahelfer* to a primary grade teacher in those days could not grow fat on the wages he received. He made his living mostly by what he snacked out of the pots that he took along to the *kheyder* with the children.

I must describe my teacher's *bahelfer* in a few words. This was a fellow of whom no one knew anything: who he was and from where he originated. He had a horse's face and less than horse-sense. Two buck teeth, as large as spades, protruded from his mouth. He had a yellowish face and a head of matted red hair. He wore a torn fur peasant vest and a fur cap. His nose ran constantly and he would always wipe at it with the jacket's sleeve.

This very same teacher's aide grabbed me onto his shoulders and went off to a second and a third householder to collect their children. He carried me on his shoulders as the child of a very prominent

householder; the other children followed behind. And he brought us to the *kheyder* carrying along the food-pots.

There were some twenty pupils at this teacher's, in addition to his own six children. The teacher's dwelling consisted of one large room, where there was studying, sleeping, eating, cooking, and which also housed a goat and a rooster with several hens.

The *bahelfer* brought us to the *kheyder* at five-thirty in the morning, and at six in the evening he returned to lead us back home. For twelve hours we sat in that close and not nicely-smelling air. And when, in addition, the teacher's wife lit the oven and the wind or the snow-blizzard drove the air back down through the chimney — we almost choked to death. Because our teacher's wife didn't use coal or wood to fuel the oven but a sort of turf made of cow's dung that the peasants gather during the winter in the stalls and lay out for drying during the summer; then they sell it at the market to the poor folks. It's true: that sort of turf sells cheaply and holds the heat longer, but its odor was unbearable.

In addition, my teacher, Yisroyl the *melamed*, was a terrible smoker. That is, he did not, heaven preserve us, smoke actual cigarettes; he wasn't rich enough for that. Instead, he bought a package of "*makhorke*" [shag tobacco] *koreshkes* [?], that is, the roots of tobacco leaves, wrapped them in a piece of newsprint and smoked it that way. When he drew on that sort of cigarette with his blue lips — the first draw finished half of it and one could see that he felt that the taste was heavenly.

One need not wonder, therefore, over the fact that such wonderful air over the course of twelve hours in a day led the children to emerge anemic, in stunted growth, weak and abandoned. Nevertheless, after the first semester I was able to say the prayers and to begin studying *khumeshe* [five: first five books of the Hebrew Bible, Torah]. For the second semester I transferred to the other *melamed*, Khayim the Blind.

This Jew had, *keyn eyn hore* [may no evil eye befall], nine daughters and not a single son. In the terrible poverty of the *melamed's* home his children wandered about half-naked, almost lacking shirts to cover their bodies.

Often, when I think about the horrendous condition in which our generation was raised and compare it with the current conditions of today's young people — it seems to me that our generation should have produced only idiots and [English] cripples, degenerate children, not suited for either God or upright people. But later, when I emerged into the wide world, my opinion changed. I saw that modern education in the large cities raises children to be more narrow-hearted and more egotistical than our generation was. Despite the entirely low level of Jewish education in past generations, in all its backwardness and primitivity, it nevertheless instilled in the children greater idealism, greater love for spiritual values than we see in modern schools with their large, airy halls and gymnasias. But this is merely an aside.

## My First Musical Performance As a Child

When I was seven years old those around me noticed that I was developing a little voice, not too bad an alto. When I heard our cantor, Yitskhok Mordkhe [Isaac Mordecai] the Ritual Slaughterer, praying before the pulpit, as he placed his thumb under his Adam's apple, or when I heard my uncle Leyzer [Eliezar] praying in his thick, hoarse voice at an ordinary afternoon prayer, something strangely drew me to the heartfelt nature of their praying. It entered under my seventh rib [*i.e.*, into my being] and, when I was alone I quite often tried to repeat that which they had sung.

When I was an elder *kheyder* pupil I would arise at dawn and do the prayers at home before leaving for *kheyder*. Praying, I would phantasize and improvise out loud over various bits of prayer. My father was still abed and, hearing my "compositions," he would call me over and say: "Well, Zebulon, say a bit of [prayer excerpts]: *yishtabakh* [God be praised] some *vikulam mikablim* [to all the kabbalist elders]." Another time he told me: "Well, Zebulon, a bit more coloratura," though I had not the slightest idea what that meant.

I obeyed him and felt within that things were spinning and rolling and I didn't know whether that's how things should be. But the entire matter of trilling my young little throat brought me great pleasure and when my father, in addition, provided his approval — I was joyfully in seventh heaven and I think that there was then no more joyful a boy on earth.

An occasion arose in our *shtetl* that gave me the opportunity to appear publicly and to demonstrate my childish talent before all the townsfolk's Jews as well as a number of prominent Gentiles. But the story is connected with another story, with a *pogrom* [anti-Jewish riot] in our *shtetl* that was deeply etched into my memory until the present day. And I will tell it here.

One early Sabbath morning my mother says to my father: "You know, dearest Shloyme, as long as we've lived here, I've never seen so many Gentiles going to tomorrow's market fair in Torgovitse as I've seen on this Sabbath. Somehow it seems strange to me. Usually, the Gentiles begin traveling before dawn on Sunday and now they're going on the Sabbath and in such great numbers, and mostly on empty wagons, and on those wagons many peasants are carrying musical instruments. Might it be a special Christian holiday tomorrow?"

To this my father replied: "Don't be foolish, Pesye; there will be, bless The Name, a great fair and we will earn much money, and all the Jews of the *shtetl* will earn well for their income during the week." What could my mother have said to that, except: "From your mouth to God's ears."

That same Saturday night, quite late, when the *melave malke* [farewell to the Sabbath bride] had just ended, the *shtetl*'s Jews had dispersed toward home and my parents had lain down to rest for a few hours — there's a rapping at the door. My father was the first to awaken in fright and asks: "Who's there?"

A reply came in Russian; "It is I, Yampolski, the excise tax collector. Open up, I must speak with you urgently."

Half dead and half alive, my father opened the door and before my frightened parents managed to ask anything, the exciseman laid down these words: "Listen here, *Gospodin* [Mister] Kwartin, be careful this Sunday. Something is afoot in the *shtetl*. Hurry and take the merchandise out of your store and bring it

over to my place. Gather your whole family and bring them to me, as well. I will hide and protect all of you, as far as I'm able."

In the middle of the night we ran to alert my grandmother, my uncle and aunt and whomever of our family and friends we could reach. We all came to the exciseman and took along as much as we could.

At around nine on Sunday morning we heard terrible screams coming from across the river that separated our *shtetl* from the village of Torgovitse. Jews and their wives and children, sadly, ran beaten and wounded toward our *shtetl*. They carried on their backs packages of their rescued belongings. When they came onto the bridge over the Sinyakhe River we could clearly hear their cries: "Help, Jews, they're slaughtering us! They're robbing the stores! Wild, drunken peasants are robbing and destroying everything they can get hold of!"

And then we could see the peasants carrying off on their wagons stolen manufactured goods, haberdashery, furniture, pillows from the pogromized Jewish homes and stores. This time, three times as many peasants than usual had come to the Torgovitse fair, in their many thousands, while the Jews were a total of two hundred families. It was clear that great danger threatens our *shtetl*, as well.

But a great miracle came to pass that rescued us and also stopped the robbers who were in the midst of their "labor" across the river. The miracle from the heavens came in the form of our priest, who was a good soul, among the Righteous Among the Nations. As soon as he saw the great Jewish disaster, he came out of the church at once carrying all the crucifixes and headed toward the bridge, toward Torgovitse.

He stopped the peasants carrying the stolen Jewish belongings and, in the name of Christ he called upon them to cease the crimes against and robbery of their brothers, the Jews. When the Gentiles saw the large religious procession with its crucifixes, led by the priest, they immediately removed their caps, fell to their knees and began to make the sign of the cross upon themselves. In this manner, the priest headed the procession that went throughout the entire marketplace, preaching to the Gentiles against the great crime they were committing. The *pogrom* was halted. It may be said clearly that, if not for the priest, there would have been a major massacre of Jews.

After this Bloody Sunday the Jews of both *shtetlekh* gathered and decided to do something to express thanks to the priest — this Lover of Israel. A committee of the most prominent householders was selected and it went to the priest to express thanks for his deeply humane behavior.

But the Jews felt that this was somehow not enough thanks for the great benevolence he had shown to them. So they sought an occasion in which they might better express their feelings, and that occasion was not long in coming. The most interesting aspect is that expressing gratitude to the priest for rescuing Jews from a *pogrom* is bound-up with the first public display of my singing abilities.

This was half a year after the *pogrom*. At that time the priest turned fifty-five years old. And since he had served in the priesthood for all of thirty years and was well-renowned and deeply beloved throughout the entire region — the Holy Synod [Russian Orthodox ruling body] decided to raise the priest to the rank of Bishop.

That celebration was attended by a large group of Archbishops, Bishops and special representatives of the Holy Synod in Peterburg [St. Petersburg]. And, as well, the Jews of the twin *shtetlekh*, Khonorod and

Torgovitse, decided to express their profound feelings of gratitude to the holy priest for all that he had done for them.

Again there was a special committee selected and my father was chosen to deliver the greeting-speech. Our *shtetl*'s rabbi was to present a trayful of bread and salt [traditional Slavic welcome] to the honored spiritual leaders that were to come to the celebration. He was to bless our priest with the words of the [Jewish] High Priest's blessing.

As to the musical portion [of the program], it was decided that, since I and three other boys had nice alto and soprano voices, and my elder brother Eziyel had a not-bad baritone voice, and my uncle Eliezar had a quite weak but not at all bad lyric tenor voice — my brother should travel to Tolno to bring a bass and a tenor from there. One of the two should teach and rehearse us in several compositions and solo renditions, and thereby the two small Jewish communities would be represented at the great Russian Orthodox celebration not only by speeches but by truly-Jewish heartfelt liturgical singing.

Decided and done. Three days later the bass and the tenor arrived. As we had a whole month, we began to rehearse, and actually at our house. The bass was the conductor. The first thing he began to rehearse with us was the Russian hymn "God Save the Czar." Then he rehearsed my uncle Eliezar in a *mi shebeyrakh* [May He who blesses...] for the Czar. Then, the Psalms chapter [98: 5-9] *zamru l'adonay b'khinor* [sing to The Lord with the lyre]. After that came two solos for me: *v'hageyn ba-adeynu* [evening prayer: be our shield] and *tsur yisroyl* [Ex. 15:11 rock of Israel]. At the end the entire choir was to sing "Halleluya."

Although so many decades have gone by since that moment, when I, as a young child, was to appear in public for the first time in my life, and before so distinguished a public of Bishops and Archbishops and all sorts of officials — still that day is as fresh in my memory as though it were yesterday.

The day of the great celebration arrived. My father, the rabbi and two other Jews from both *shtetlekh* put on their Sabbath clothes, as did my uncle Eliezar and the entire choir that dressed-up in the finest that they owned. When we entered the priest's house, there were already a hundred people there: priests, Bishops, Catholic monks, squires, teachers, mayors, sheriffs and all the other officials of the area.

The celebration began with a greeting by the special representative of the Holy Synod in Peterburg, who, after his speech, adorned our priest's neck with some sort of new gold crucifix. All the priestly speeches and greetings took up two hours time. Then the rabbi brought in the bread and salt on a silver tray and blessed the priest on his advancement to the rank of Bishop. Then my father gave a short speech of a few minutes length in which he expressed the love that our priest had gained among the Jewish population through his truly-humane approach to everyone regardless of their faith.

Then the musical portion arrived according to the pre-established program. First the "God Save the Czar", then uncle Eliezar's *mi shevorakh* for the Czar, after which the choir sang *zamru l'adonay b'khinor* followed by my two solos, *v'hageyn ba-adeynu* and *tsur yisroyl*. I must add that my little voice shone a bit brightly. After the final song by the whole choir, "Halleluya," the new Bishop hugged me and put three rubles into my hand. I did not know what to do and looked at my father to give me a sign by winking as to what I should do. My father told me to accept it, because refusing is an insult.

However, the Bishop told my father upon our leaving that he regrets not having known before that his son is so talented or he would have invited me that same Sunday morning to the church for prayers so that I might sing the two pieces that so pleased him.

The Bishop also presented ten rubles to the entire choir and the celebration ended with a quite widespread *lekhyim* [toast] in the true Russian manner [*?nazdrovye*]. The Jewish delegation was invited to the celebratory banquet, but the rabbi and my father explained that it was not possible under Jewish [kosher] law, and everyone bid a hearty farewell.

It goes without saying that, for month's on end, the *shtetl* lived off the great event at the priest's house, because our song numbers were truly the radiance of the whole celebration. For myself, personally, I can firmly say that it was a turning point in my life. Certainly it pointed to my life-path as a cantor among Jews, although this was in no way a rose-strewn path, as some might suppose. That Sunday, at the priest's house, my entire future was marked with a stamp; the thought began to gnaw at my young mind that this is my path and this is my life and so it will be.

## I Hear the First Prayer Leaders in My *Shtetl*

Sabbath in a Jewish *shtetl* some seventy years ago began on Friday, right after mid-day. Jews ran in haste to the ritual steam bath, where, at a temperature of 90 degrees, they were well-swept and well-beaten on the top [hottest] bench. I had a grandfather, R' Tuvye Soybel [?Sobell], who did not trust the adherence to ritual law of the local steam bath. In the greatest frosts of winter he would go to the frozen river, hack out a hole in the ice and dunk himself ritually three times in the icy-frozen water in honor of the Holy Sabbath.

We youngsters were also dragged to the ritual bath. The heat and the hot steam that permeated every limb was impossible to endure, but, as you can see, it was endured. Upon returning home from the bath we had to peruse that week's Biblical chapter *shnayim mikra ve'ekhad targum* [Gemara: "Twice Scripture and once in translation"]. Then we had to recite the Song of Songs, actually with its melody, followed by the prayer *hodu l'adonay ki tuv* [Ps. 136: Give thanks to Adonay who is good], and finally some *reboynu shel oylem* [Master of the Universe.] When my dear mother saw that the bath and the praying had exhausted me and that my heart was aching — she handed me a little dish of peas so that I would not, heaven preserve us, overeat before the Sabbath feast.

Toward evening my mother gave me a plate with a large hunk of fish with some sour pickles and a few sour watermelon [pieces] to bring to Zisl-the-teacher's-wife, the wife of my teacher, Khayim the Blind, so that they, too, might know the joys of the Sabbath.

Dressed up and well-coifed, we went off to *shul* [synagogue] for the Welcoming of the Sabbath. Our *shtetl* was too small to have a permanent cantor. Therefore, there many young men who "cantored" or who trilled in the manner of small *shtetlekh*. I remember four of these prayer leaders from my earliest childhood, and as strange as it may sound — these first singers whom I heard as a child had the deepest and strongest influence on my entire musical career. They penetrated deeply into my spirit and it may be boldly said that their hearty Jewish prayers accompanied me throughout my life, on all the global boulevards and at all the major pulpits where I was destined to appear in later years.

These were the four prayer leaders: Benye, a son of Yitskhok-Mordkhe [Isaac Mordecai] the ritual slaughterer; Arn [Aaron] Hodes; his brother-in-law, Khayim Hersh Hodes; and, finally — my uncle Eliezar. Benye the slaughterer's son, who was actually apprenticed to his father, was a very fine young man, but he had no voice at all, may such not befall you. He had some sort of an almost-voice that sounded like the howls of a locust. But he knew the order of prayers very well.

Arn Hodes was a wonderfully handsome young man, and he did actually have a fine voice and his praying was somewhat "modern." This was the result of his frequent travels for auctions to Kiev, Odessa and other large cities where he had the occasion to hear leading cantors. But improvising, that is, an original tone in his singing, something of his own — wasn't there. His praying at the pulpit always drew admiration, because the Jews wanted to catch something of the modern *khazones* that he'd snacked on in the big cities.

His brother-in-law, Khayim Hersh, was a Jew whose face looked as though he'd just emerged from a steam bath. When he sang out — his voice fairly tore at one's eardrums. But he was a very warm prayer



leader. His lungs, it appears, were very strong, because he did not tire of standing at the pulpit all day, sounding off.

My uncle Eliezar was the heartiest prayer leader of them all. He was a thin little Jew with a sparse little beard in which you might count all of six hairs. He was one of the ‘society of coughers,’ and it was said in the *shtetl* that he had all of half a lung. But he had a nice, lyrical tenor voice and, at forty, his voice still sounded like that of a boy-alto when it begins to change, that is, when it goes from a childish voice to a man’s.

In prayer he would greatly strain his voice, but he was an outstanding prayer-leader, as well as an improviser.

This was the source from which, in my earliest childhood, I drew the old-traditional form of prayer. These four Jews warmed my childish fantasy and pointed out my life’s path.

When the Welcoming of Sabbath arrived on Friday evening, every one of these dilettante cantors had his own followers, his patriots in *shul*, who insisted that their chosen one should sing *lekhu neranena* [Ps.95: Come, let us sing joyously]. Often there would be bargaining and arguing over should pray at the pulpit. Each of the prayer leaders pretended to be implored, saying that the whole issue was of no matter to him. [*Yiddish saying*: “it doesn’t affect my left earlock;” more prevalent: “...my left sole.”] But, in truth, each of them yearned mightily that he be allowed to reach the wooden stand, lest he, may we be spared, feel ill and have his Sabbath traduced.

A solution was finally reached and he who received the honor of welcoming the Sabbath Queen considered it his responsibility to show all his knowledge, and there began a trilling that lasted late into the night. More than one congregant had to clench his bowels and suffer bellyaches because all through Friday he had barely, barely eaten.

Even upon returning home, they didn’t allow themselves to taste the royal dainties that the mothers had prepared. There began a recital in the style of one or another *khsidish* [Hasidic] rabbi. My father, deep in thought, began pacing through our five large rooms, back and forth. Suddenly he stood still in exstasy and called all the children to him. He placed the boys on one side of him and our only sister on the other, and raising his hands like a High Priest, he blessed us: the boys with *y’simkhe elohim ki’yefrayim v’khi menashe* [May God make you like Ephraim and like Mennasseh] and our sister with *ki’sore, rivke, rokhl v’leye* [as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah].

Then began the *sholem aleykhem* [peace be unto you] greetings and, afterwards, father took hold of a bit of the Zohar [mystical book of the Kabbalah] with difficult words of which we couldn’t begin to understand the meaning. Until *kidish* [kiddush, wine blessing] was said and we could finally taste my mother’s fish — there was much more to be recited and a great deal of children’s patience to be shown.

My father was actually a *khsid* of the Kantekaziv *rebe* [Hasidic rabbi], R’ Arn Yoyel [Aaron Joel], but when Friday night arrived he would make toasts in the style of many other good Jews. In that manner he downed a glassful before the fish in the style of his own *rebe*; following [the one from] Talna he drank while eating the fish and, again after the fish, à la the one from Rakhmistrivke. He also did not shame the Sadigurer style that required drinking before the soup, and the Husyatiner — before the meat.

After so many fine drinks, understandably his fantasy warmed up and at the singing of *kol mekadash* [one who duly keeps *shabes*] my father still managed to follow the tired old melody with which we, his

assistants, might accompany him. But when he came to *menukhe v'simkhe* [contentment and happiness] he went off into very high mystical spheres. He began to fantasize and improvise so that we, the youngsters, could no longer accompany him. We had to follow his composing by listening in order not to shame him and left him all alone in his singing.

The same was repeated at *ya ribon olam* [Jehovah, sovereign of the universe] and at *tsur mishelo akhalnu* [God, our rock]. My father was a master at discovering a brand-new melody for every bit of prayer-song, and those hearty Jewish melodies of my father's improvisations on Friday nights were the second source from which, while yet in early childhood, I drew excitement and enthusiasm for Jewish singing, for the Jewish style of prayer, that accompanied me all through life.

I must add something else about those Friday nights. It grew late at night. The wonderful dishes of my mother left each of us a little full and tired. It is no wonder, therefore, that after so much prayer and so much eating and singing we fell into a sweet little sleep. My father was, however, not pleased with this and he let out that shout: "Ivans, [*i.e.*, Gentiles], what's up with you? Is today the Sabbath, or not?"

I was the most prominent target of this shout of my father, and not seldom was there heard a loud slap on my cheeks. Why me, and why not my other brothers? — You will soon hear. My little voice, no matter how young I was then, had already begun to distinguish itself with its strength and beauty. My father knew this quite well. And as we sat there at the beautiful table, our singing rang out across the *shtetl*. Outside our windows, scores of people would begin to gather, Jews and Christians from both *shtetlekh*, who listened to the Sabbath concert. My father drew great prideful joy from that, and when we fell silent out of tiredness — he felt that we were sinning against the audience outside the windows...

## A Cantor and His Apprentices Come to Our *Shtetl*

I was a child of eight when the first real *khazn* and a proper choir of assistants appeared in our *shtetl*. I remember as though it were today the entrance into my father's store of a young man with a goat-like little beard, who introduced himself as the bass of Getsl the *khazn* from Balte. That *khazn* and his choir had led the prayers last Sabbath in Talne, and as the *khazn* has a brother living here in Khanerad [*sic*], he wants to come down here to lead the Sabbath prayers.

I do not know what my father and the other householders of the *shtetl* thought of this offer. I only know that my child's soul leapt up. I was feverish in joy over finally being able to hear a real *khazn*, encircled by an entire choir of little aides and their varied little voices. Ay, I swooned to hear them, and the sooner, the better.

There was a small matter: a dwelling-place for the *khazn* and his assistants where they might stay during their presence in our *shtetl*. So the *khazn*'s brother, who just happened to be the bath-attendant in Khanerad, had sent the young bass to my father. First, he knew that we had, may no evil eye befall, a very fine dwelling with many rooms, and there'd be sufficient place for everyone; and secondly, who else is such a lover of Jewish song and of a *khazn*, as Sholem Kwartin?

And the bath-attendant was not wrong. My father agreed immediately. The next morning, the *khazn* and his ten aides arrived and came straight to us. One can easily imagine how I, the little squirrel, began to putter around the band that spread out in our house as though they were in their father's vineyard.

I want to establish here that in my eighth to ninth year my alto voice was exceedingly fine. In my later career of over fifty years as a Jewish cantor, when I traveled across half the world and heard no end of choirs, and could hear children's voices by the thousands in the choirs I led in such cities as Ekaterinoslav, Peterburg, Vienna, Budapest and New York — I never encountered a child's little alto voice that might recall mine in that cited childhood period.

I remember the evening when the *khazn* Getsl of Balte and his gang of assistants held the first rehearsal of his choir in our house. I was totally aflame in excitement. I did not hear what was said to me. I devoured the notes, both those on- and off-key, that soared in our house and the alleyways of our *shtetl*. It seemed to me then that there was no greater joy in the world than to be a *khazn*'s assistant. Ay, if fortune were to come my way and I might become such an assistant — who might then compare with me?

After the choir rehearsal, my father suggested to Getsl the *khazn* that he hear my voice. To which the *khazn* replied: "Well, then, sonny-boy, show me what you've got."

One thing I wasn't then was shy. I stood up and sang *tsur yisroyl* by *khazn* Leybele Khirik, or Shapiro from Uman. I'd been taught that by Arn Hodes, one of the four amateur masters of prayer in our *shtetl*.

The *khazn* and his whole band fixated attention upon me. They were somehow confused over this little fellow putting out such "*ivri*" [Hebrew, *i.e.*, prayer-knowledge] and with such sound and resonance. My father and mother, understandably, stood aside and melted in prideful joy. Now their child was not singing for some Gentiles gathered outside the window, but for a real *khazn* from the broad outside world. Should that *khazn* give his approval — that would really have weight and meaning, as it comes from a great *meyvn* [expert], not from the local Khanerad cripples.

I still remember what mother said to father: “Shloymenyu, you will see how our seventh-month child will repay us with great prideful joy for the suffering we bore on his behalf.”

Something occurred to *khazn* Getsl and he says to me: “Well, sing something else, little boy.” I sang *v’hageyn ba’adeynu*, by Avrom Shoykhet, the Talne *khazn*, that my uncle Eliezar had taught me. That solo was sung by the alto Tevele in Getsl the *khazn*’s choir. The alto Tevele was known as the best singer in the whole region, and musicians knew him well.

After the *v’hageyn ba’adeynu*, Getsl the *khazn* went over to my father and congratulated him greatly over the fact that the One Above had gifted him a child who distinguishes himself with a little voice unlike any he’d heard before. “Years later,” Getsl said, “you will recall the words I say to you now. You must see to it, R’ Sholem,” Getsl continued, “not to lose the joy that God has given you, and you need to know what is to be done with your child.”

Getsl the *khazn* admonished my father for a long time and in the end he said: “D’you know what, R’ Sholem, give me the boy for two years and I guarantee you that the world will resonate with him in one year’s time. As to his learning Torah, you may depend on me. I will guard him as my own child and he will not lack bird’s milk [ambrosia, all the best] with me.”

My father was a Jew who was not pleased by others’ giving him advice, especially about such an important matter as raising his own child. He was used to having others come to him for advice. So he wasn’t much impressed by this wandering *khazn* having the nerve to make this proposal to him, but he did not show it. He politely thanked Getsl for his readiness to make a “*mentsh*” of his child, but he sharply underlined that he would himself, in one way or another, assure his boy’s future. He could not allow a child of his, not yet nine years old, to wander around the world, to go through hard times, to eat at strangers’ tables and to not get a properly pious Jewish education.

Still, he did not reject him outright, to his face. He found an appropriate excuse: in two or three weeks there would be coming to Khonorod the [Hasidic] Kantakaviz *rebe*, R’ Arn Yoyl, of whom my father was a devoted follower. The *rebe* would come once a year to visit his *khsidim* [followers] in the nearby *shtetls* to learn how they were doing and to collect offerings, as well. So that when the *rebe* would arrive, may The Name grant it, my father would consult with him and would then decide what to do.

I wish to add that it was characteristic for that time that the honorarium for the *khazn* and his choir consisted of the leading householders of the town making [money] pledges upon being called up to read the Torah. Since many householders of the neighboring *shtetl* of Torgovitse would also come to hear the *khazn*, the week’s reading was divided into separate verses and everyone called to read a verse pledged according to his means, often beyond his means.

I remember clearly the Sabbath on which Getsl the *khazn* from Balte led prayers in our *shul* [synagogue]. Prayers went on until two o’clock past noon. Every participant considered it his duty to express his opinion of the *khazn*. Jews smacked their lips over how sweet the prayers were and the whole *shtetl* was agog. That’s not a small thing — a real *khazn* visiting on the Sabbath.

After prayers, each of the better-off householders invited one of the assistants to his Sabbath meal. The *khazn* himself was my father’s guest. After the meal, when the older folks lay down to grab a nap, the youngsters filled up the marketplace, where they grabbed a stroll, and all attention was concentrated on

the assistants. The tenors mixed with the basses here and all of them were encircled by our local “throaters” who wanted to show that they’re not asleep.

Saturday night, at the usual *melave malke* [farewell to the Sabbath bride] at our house, the *khazn* and his assistants were present, of course. They did not wait to be asked but presented one composition after another, and each song was downed with a tasty toast [*lekhayim*]. The house was surrounded by people from both *shtetlekh* as well as the Gentiles, led by the mayor and the church deacon, standing at the windows. In honor of the “officialdom,” the *khazn* sang “God Save the Czar” and the mayor and the clergyman were also provided with a Jewish *lekhayim*, which they did not oppose at all.

At the end of the *melave malke*, the *khazn*, the assistants and all the Jews gathered there insisted that I should improvise something. I sang *v’kulam mekubalim* [and to you, Kabbalah masters] and *yishtabakh* [God be praised] and again one heard the same good wishes and predictions that there was a great *khazn* growing here. Getsl considered it necessary to again [try to] convince my father to hand over his sonny boy, but again his words were of no avail.

The next day, Sunday, the *shtetl*’s beadle came to us, took along the *khazn* and the two went off among the stores and houses to collect the pledges that Jews had made yesterday in the *shul*. On Monday, Getsl and his crew departed our *shtetl*.

The departure of the *khazn* and his assistants left an open wound in my child’s heart. During the day I would wander about dully and at night my child’s fantasies wandered about far-off places along with Getsl the *khazn* and his helpers. Together with them I wandered through *shtetlekh*, singing in the choir, and felt with all my senses people’s appreciation for me, sated by my little voice, and I feel good.

All this was only in my dreams. In reality I continued going to the *kheyder*, but my head was no longer into what the *rebe* was teaching. I continually recalled the stories that Getsl the *khazn* would tell about the great *khazonim*: Yerukham-The-Short, Nisi from Belz, Betsalel from Odessa and others, and I wandered about as though in a chicken-lottery.

I remember that at that time I grew very weak, stopped eating. My mother took this much to heart and in her moving voice asked me: “Zebul’nyu, is something hurting you?” How does one tell one’s mother that nothing is hurting me, that I’m being tortured only by the yearning for the small-town *khazn* Getsl and his gang of assistants that had appeared as a whirlwind over our tiny, calm little *shtetl* and awoke in me hidden desires to wander together with them and to sing and sing, without actually knowing the purpose?

## My Father Takes Me to Berditchev

The words that Getsl the *khazn* from Balta had tossed out, that I, the little boy, would in time grow up to be who-knows-what, and that all of Russia would someday resound with my name — those words did not pass without some influence on my father. Something of that was left in his consciousness.

It was on a Sunday, the day of the great market in Khonodor. It was right after the harvest, when the peasants had gathered the grain from the fields. This year just happened to bring a large yield and the peasants had earned much money through the sale of the grain. So they filled the stores of the *shtetl*, buying all sorts of merchandise in preparation for winter.

The storekeepers profited hand over fist. There was abundant revenue on this market day. Late in the evening, after supper, we began to count that day's receipts. I, the younger one, was entrusted with counting the copper coins; my elder brother tallied the silver money, and my father himself collected and counted the banknotes. I remember as though it were today that the income came to 394 rubles — the largest take in one day since our business had existed.

Everyone was in a good mood, understandably. "Well, Shloyme'nyu," my mother says, "thank God for this. But, because of the sales in the last few weeks, many of our articles are sold out. And since we can't get all we need in Uman, it is my opinion that it would be well if you were to travel to Berditchev to get the necessary merchandise."

My father agreed and it was decided that he would travel to Berditchev the following week. The next morning, Monday, before I left for the *kheyder*, my father calls me to him and says: "If you'll be a good child and study enthusiastically — I will take you along to Berditchev next week, if The Name wills it."

A stream of joy flowed through my young little body, though I didn't quite understand why I'm so excited by the news that I'll be traveling with my father to that large Jewish city. I loudly assured my father that I would study with the greatest diligence.

A week later, on Monday, we traveled by coach to Uman and from there to Berditchev. I was confused upon falling into this tempestuous Jewish city. So many Jews on the noisy streets, all of them chasing and rushing somewhere, though no one could tell me where to and why they were rushing. The streetcar with its half-dead little horse that could barely drag the loaded coach, overstuffed with Jews and Jewesses, made an enormous impression on me. That streetcar I found years later, marvelously depicted by our unforgettable [author], Sholem Aleichem.

My father took me along to all the wholesale businesses where he made his purchases. For me all this was new, so full of wonder. But the greatest experience awaited me when, upon completing his business dealings, my father says to me: "Well, my child, now we will go to visit the famous *khazn* Yerukham-the-Short so that he may audition your little voice."

As small as I was, I already knew that this Yerukham was the highest embodiment of Jewish song and prayers. I could barely then imagine anything greater or more lovely, and upon hearing that it was before this Jew that I was to stand and sing — I was assaulted by joy and fear together. I wanted very much to hear what this greatest *khazn* in my eyes might say about my little voice, and contrariwise I was truly

afraid lest he say that he is not pleased and that I am an accursed cripple and it's better for me to return to the *kheyder*.

When we entered Yerukham's house it was after noon. Yerukham was still wearing his *talis un tfiln* [prayer shawl and phylacteries] as he ended his prayers. After exchanging greetings [*sholem aleykhems*], he asks my father where a Jew might come from, and what might a Jew want. My father lays out the whole story, that Getsl the *khazn* of Balta had come to our *shtetl* with his choir, and had auditioned the little alto voice of his little boy and was so pleased that he asked to take me along as an assistant in his choir. My father had not responded to Getsl but had decided to take the child to Berdichev to him, R' Yerukham, so that he might be so good as to audition me and to give his opinion on what should be done.

Yerukham-the-Short stared at me from behind his thick spectacles and said to me: "Well, little boy, sing some bit of what pleases you most." I sang my two most beloved pieces, *v'hageyn ba'adeynu* and *tsur yisroyl*. Yerukham was very short, but suddenly his body seemed to stretch up tall. He regarded me with large, astonished eyes.

Then he turned to my father: "The Balta *khazn* was not wrong. The little boy has a rare alto voice with unusual sweetness."

Upon hearing such words my father wanted to show off his little son even more and he said to R' Yerukham: "Tell him to say [do] a bit of his own, in his own style." Again I did not wait to be entreated and "said" for all I was worth. First *לבבכם תקשו על*, then *yishtabakh*, *והאופנים* *mi shebeyrakh* and *רצון יהי* from the blessings on *rosheshone* [Rosh Hashana, new year]. I recall that I was on fire with inner excitement, did not spare my little voice and trilled mightily.

Meanwhile R' Yerukham removed his *talis un tfiln*, ordered whiskey and cookies to be brought, toasted my father and said to him: "Well, what can I say to you, R' Sholem? I am an old man, have auditioned many talented children in my life, but I have never encountered a young child with so profound an understanding of the meaning of prayer. I think that he possesses something that isn't found among accomplished *khazonim*. He is rich in style, his improvisation is extraordinary. And so strong a coloratura, in addition. Tell me, R' Sholem, who taught him and which *khazonim* has he heard?"

My father then told him that the only "conservatory" that I had so far completed were the songs I'd sung around his Sabbath table. My "professors" were the home-grown dilettante praying masters in Khonorod who can't really sing but who know how to draw the essence out of our *shtetl* Jews by their hearty praying and their sweet style of praying. Specifically, my father mentioned his brother and my uncle, Eliezar, who was an expert at plucking Jewish heartstrings.

R' Yerukham then said a few harsh words to my father to the effect that it would be a sin before both the Lord of the Universe and people if he were not to permit the development of such talent with which God had endowed his son. He believes that the Balte *khazn*, Getsl, had pronounced the correct evaluation of me and that he, himself, can endorse what Getsl had proposed. That is, that my father should leave me with him and that he would take care of me as he would his own child. In addition to knowledge of music and song he would teach me Torah and everything that a pious Jewish child should know.

I wouldn't have to travel around from town to town and from village to village because he, R' Yerukham, no longer does so. Instead, I will have the opportunity to hear him praying every Sabbath, and when my little voice changes, that is, matures, and my new tenor voice will be so fine, as fine as my

little alto voice is now — then, he hopes, this will be the best voice that has ever been heard and I might grow into the best *khazn* the Jews have ever had.

R' Yerukham emphasized that he doesn't want any payment, may we be spared; he wants to have the joy of knowing that, in the future, people will say of me that I was a student of R' Yerukham.

We father was totally confused upon hearing this. But he did not undertake to make a decision on such an important matter without first hearing the opinion of my mother. And so it remained: he will return home and will inform R' Yerukham of the family's decision.

But this was no more than an easy excuse. My parents had suffered too much with me as a child to allow them now to decide to forsake me in a strange place at the mercy of God, to eat at strangers' tables. The matter of career and the future of their child played a very small role then; the main thing was to study Torah and good Jewish values and to be raised under the direct supervision of my father.

Thus, the only result of the journey with my father to Berditchev was that I was turned over to a new *melamed*...



## They Want to Drive Us Out of the *Shtetl*

I was barely ten years old when I was turned over to the new *rebe*, Alter the *melamed*. There were only six children studying with this *rebe* and, in general, he was quite different from all the previous ones. This R' Alter was a bit clandestinely involved in modernity: secretly, he'd glance into a book of the *haskole* [Haskalah, Enlightenment]. He taught us *Tanakh* [complete Bible] with explanatory commentaries and also permitted himself to express his own interpretations of certain Biblical events.

At that time I would sit in the *kheyder* until quite late at night. Every boy had to bring a tallow candle and we sat, studying, as long as the candle burned. The bitterest [aspect] was walking home on winter nights. We had to pass by the old, empty barracks that had been standing since the time of the Russian-Turkish War [1877-78]. It was told in the *shtetl* that ghosts and devils live in those barracks. How our boyish hearts did tremble when, in pitch darkness, slogging through endless mud puddles, after sitting in the *kheyder* all day, we had to, in the dead of night, pass those barracks that filled us with fear and dread.

At that time there was issued the famous *ukaz* [proclamation] of the Czarist government that Jews should be driven out of all the [peasant] villages and inns. That raised the hard question: is the town of Khonorod a *posada*, meaning a *shtetl*, or simply a common village, in which Jews had no right of residence. As it appeared, the municipal authorities were preparing to adjudicate the issue not in favor of the Jews. The option in the *shtetl* was to take up one's pack, seize the wandering stick in hand and, in old age, to seek a new place of refuge.

Khonorod's Jews, however, decided not to surrender so easily. The leading householders were called to a consultation and it was decided to send a delegation of three householders, led by the rabbi, to the governor in Kherson, to protest the decree.

My father was to compose the text of the petition to the governor. But a scribe [in Russian]? Where does one find a scribe? It goes without saying that the *shtetl* Jews then were not great experts in the Russian language. Understandably, without lengthy thought, they called upon Moyshe-the-Writer. But here I must spend some words about this Moyshe-the-Writer.

On a bright clear day, a dressed-up young man strolled into our store. It was immediately clear that he was from foreign parts. He wore the pretty little boots with legs that had pleats like a harmonica [? accordion] and the pleats were called *dudkes* [?bagpipes]. On his head he wore a broad cap with a shiny visor, and he was dressed in a Russian blouse that buttoned at the side which, in our *shtetl* speech, was called a "*komovorotke*."

He introduced himself to my father as Moyshe-the Writer. "Well, good," my father says, "but what is a Jew looking for?" So he put forward the story that he was a discharged soldier who had been a clerk at military headquarters and that there he had developed an attractive "*potsherk*," meaning handwriting. So he had now heard that in our neighboring *shtetl* Torgovitse there's need for a clerk at the Meshtshanska City Hall; he's asking my father to support him, to say a good word so that he may get the job. In the process he pulled out a load of papers that were to confirm that he is a marvelous writer. One piece of evidence also said that before Moyshe became a soldier for *Fonye* [Yiddish derogatory nickname for the Czar and his minions], he was a teacher of Russian in the *shtetl* of Olvinski.

Well, my father ran across the bridge and Moyshe became the clerk-writer of the Meshtshanske City Hall in Torgovitse. But this might not have been worth the telling were it not for the sad fact that this same Moyshe later had on his conscience the fate of almost all the Jewish boys in our *shtetl*.

Since he had shown proof that he was a teacher of Russian and Yiddish, he was soon invited to teach the children of Khonorod a bit of Russian. Other than that, all who were illiterate — not a small number among us — would run to Moyshe to write a letter or an address.

It turned out that Moyshe actually did have a fine calligraphic handwriting that decorated each letter, but as for grammar, he was, may it not befall you, a great ignoramus. He barely knew Yiddish, as well. He was especially weak in spelling Hebrew-origin words...But until the *shtetl* Jews caught on to what a “great writer” Moyshe is — much time passed. In the meantime he raised a generation of cripples both in Russian and Yiddish. There actually was in my *shtetl* a two-grade “public school,” but no honorable Khonorod Jew would have the gall to send his child there. What would a Jewish child be doing in a Gentile school?

I must declare the truth that, until my marriage, Moyshe-the-Writer’s “university” was my only source of secular knowledge — oh and woe to such knowledge...When I later emerged into the wide world I then first recognized how much I lacked and how much I must catch up on all that Moyshe-the-Writer had ruined with his calligraphy.

Now, when the text of the petition to the Kherson governor not to drive the Jews out of Khonorod had to be put together wisely and carefully — the only “expert” in Russian was, again, Moyshe-the-Writer. But this time they did not depend on him alone. My father invited the teacher of the town public school to correct the errors in Moyshe’s writing. After the teacher, the petition was also shown to the pharmacist and the tax collector and only when all these genuine Russkis had given their agreement that it was well-written —then the delegation of the honorable Jews rode off in a [hopefully] fortunate hour to the capital.

Upon arriving in Kherson, the delegation immediately sought out the official city Rabbi to have him work out an audience with the governor. Finally they reached the governor. My father was the spokesman of the delegation and it was he who had to reply to all the questions the governor asked.

After the return of the delegation, the Jews realized that they could not rely on the governor alone; they needed to involve the Lord of the Universe in the matter. So the rabbi declared a fast-day. The Jews closed their shops, gathered in the *shul* and recited Psalms all day long.

Six weeks later the rabbi and my father were called to the chief of police who gave them the good news that the decree had been withdrawn and that Khonorod remains a town in the Pale of Settlement in which Jews may continue to reside. The joy in the *shtetl* was beyond belief. There were actually established two parties of Jews: one held that it was the well-written petition that had done the job; the other argued that thanks were due only to the heated reading of the chapters of Psalms and the tears that were shed thereby when the rabbi declared the fast-day.

But both sides participated in the celebratory meal that was held in our house in honor of this fortunate conclusion. My mother was, this time, unable to do it all herself and she hired a special serving maid who baked and cooked all the best. And when the *shtetl* Jews were quite tipsy, it was decided to also

invite the mayor and the *uriyadnik* [?] and the “sotskis” [?] to come and make a toast with the Jews, though no one considered them to be great lovers of Israel.

## **A Hasidic *Rebe* Comes to Our *Shtetl***

On a fine winter’s day, my father received a letter from his [Hasidic] *rebe*, R’ Arn Yoel [Aaron Joel] of Kantekazive, saying that he was in the *shtetl* of Revutsk and that from there he would, with the aid of the One Above, come over to Khonorod for his annual visit.

I was personally especially interested in the *rebe*’s arrival. After returning from Berditchev, where Yerukham-the-Short demanded of my father that he leave me under his control and education — a family council was held in our home, and as a final conclusion could not be reached — it remained that the view of the *rebe* would prevail. Well, so now we waited impatiently upon the *rebe* to ordain my future.

When the *shtetl* Jews heard that the *rebe* was coming they became extreme in their preparations. First there began a dispute over which home among his followers the *rebe* would occupy. But, finally, it was agreed that for the days in which the *rebe* would be among us, the *rebe* would judiciously divide his time among his most prominent followers. Then the question arose about traveling to meet the *rebe*. And, the last: providing for the *rebe*’s table, so that it might not lack even bird’s milk [*i.e.*, the rarest of delicacies].

My father and uncle Yishaye [Isaiah] did not wait for the other *khsidim* [followers]; they rented a phaeton and drove off to Revutsk to welcome their *rebe*. Other, somewhat less devoted *khsidim*, rented coaches and rode out just a few *verst* [.6 mis. ea.] to meet the *rebe*. The more common folk walked to the highway to greet the *rebe* before his entrance into town.

And on the day that the *rebe* entered the *shtetl*, every living soul was out on the street. Jews unharnessed the horses from the *rebe*’s coach and used their own hands to drag the coach to the hostel where the *rebe* was to stay.

With that special *khsidish* fervor, they began to prepare for the Sabbath with the *rebe* as guest. Now we prayed in the *rebe*’s *minyán* [prayer group of ten]. The Sabbath Welcome and the *rebe*’s movements went on for very long, so that my father ran home very quickly, said the wine-blessing, ate very little and went right off to the *rebe*’s table.

The observance at the table dragged on well into the night. Folks shoved and poked each other to get a bit of the leftovers [*sharayim*] of the *rebe*’s fish. When my father, among the first, was given his portion of fish by the *rebe* — he quickly divided it among us children so that we, too, might enjoy the *rebe*’s tribute and might become accustomed to piety and *khsidish* practices.

The same was repeated on the day of the Sabbath. The table [event] did not end. Between one delicacy and the next, the *rebe* preached Torah. We were hardly through the midday meal before preparations began for the *shaleshudes* [pre-evening third ritual meal]. There was beer then at the table. They drank *lekheyim* [to life] to the *rebe* and among other blessings, they silently wished that [Czar] Alexander III might suffer a defeat speedily, in our days.

After the *mayriv* [evening] prayer and after the worship of the moon, the *rebe* did the *havdole* [separation between holy Sabbath and ordinary week]. Then the *khsidim* sang “לך ויתן”, the “ס’ חירץ אל” the “*elyahu ha’novi’s*” [Elijah the prophet’s songs] and so it went on until far into the night, when the

*melave malke* [leave-taking of the Sabbath queen] began. Then the *khsidish* fervor became enflamed in all its strength. Things were lively and joyful. The crowd went into the *khsidish* circle-dance, and though the celebration with the *rebe* had gone on for over twenty-four hours, no one felt tired at all. And when the crowd had grown quite tipsy, they placed their arms on their shoulders and went off on a dance in honor of the *rebe* — then what happened, happened. But first I must make a short introduction.

The *khsidim* of the old-time Russian *rebes*, if such are still living, will recall that in the eighties of the past [19th] century the Czarist government issued a decree that forbade good-hearted Jews to travel among the *shtetlekh* to collect money [for charities]. The government's official excuse for the decree was that behind the *rebes* were hidden socialists and anarchists who were actually collecting money to overthrow the Czar. What did Jews do? When a *rebe* was to come to a *shtetl*, they would first "make an arrangement" with the local officialdom, especially with the police superintendent, or with the constable, and when the *rebe* arrived, the former would shut his eyes and all would be well.

In Khonorod, the superintendent was, may it not occur to you, incorruptible, an evil Gentile who would not take a bribe. And perhaps he feared a few of those little Jews who had the weakness of informing upon each other. So he thought: "If one Jew informs on another, he might certainly go and inform [on me] to the regional superintendent."

However the matter may have been — on that historic Sabbath night, when the *khsidim* were dancing around their *rebe* and had forgotten where in the world they are — the door opens and the superintendent and the constable enter, accompanied by the "*sotskis*" [deputized peasants] and the "*desyatnikes*" [the latter's bosses] and they address the *rebe* who is sitting at the head, wearing his *shtrayml* [fur decorated hat], in rough language in the familiar tense: "Whatcha doin' here? Who gave ya the okay to come here? Dontcha know that it's against the law?"

It is very hard to describe the tumult and hubbub that arose. The *rebe* turned white as a sheet. Everyone's eyes turned toward my father, who was in close contact with the local Gentile officials. But nothing could be done with the incorruptible one and the order was given: "Arrest him!"

The *rebe* was arrested and quickly taken to the police station. The wicked superintendent wanted to ship the *rebe* the next morning by coach to Elisavetgrad. That means he would be sent under police escort from one rural district to another and that in each one he would be held at the police station. Not to mention the profanation of The Name, how might the *rebe* have managed to survive wandering about for weeks en route?

With great difficulty it was arranged, under the personal guaranty of several householders, that they themselves would deliver the *rebe* to Elisavetgrad and that two policemen would go along for security.

The next morning they rented a phaeton with two good horses, seated the *rebe* inside, accompanied by my father and another well-off householder, Mendl Tsimerman [Zimmerman]. Two policemen were seated on each side of the phaeton — and that was the sad conclusion of the *rebe's* visit to our *shtetl*. There could be nothing about hearing the *rebe's* opinion regarding Yerukham-the-Short. No one could even give that a thought.

## I Become *Bar Mitsve* and Am Apprenticed As a Craftsman

My dream of becoming a wandering assistant to a *khazn* had to be put far aside. Since my father's *rebe* had been arrested and my father endured great misery in getting him freed in Elisavetgrad — he could no longer think about asking the *rebe*'s opinion about his boy's assistantship. I had no other option than to return to the *kheyder*.

I was between ten and eleven years old when I was put into the *kheyder* of Monish, son of Israel-the-Tall. Since he would be my last *rebe*, I consider it my duty to devote several words to him. Monish was a short, thin little Jew with a dark-brown, glossy face. A very thin little beard framed his face, and there were chunks missing from his mustache, as though he had bitten them off.

He was a great scholar and a pious Jew, but he wasn't fanatical. To the contrary, he had already subscribed to the *Ha'meylits* ["The Advocate," secular Hebrew-Russian newspaper; first to publish pages in Yiddish] and even glanced at the Russian "*Birzhyeva Vyodomosti*" [(Stock) Market News] to learn what was going on in the world about politics. He was an excellent teacher and I learned quite a lot from him, but simultaneously I cannot forget the bad things that I saw in that *rebe*'s house.

Just as Monish was small, his wife, Bathsheba, was as tall as the Jewish exile was long. It cannot be said that this couple lived in the ideal peaceful home. They argued and quite often loud blows were struck...His teaching could not provide a full income, so Bathsheba dealt in a bit of hay and oats in a small store. But *rebe* Monish did not lift a finger to help his wife, who struggled with the store and with the houseful of little children. When he had a free hour, he would spread out, reading the newspapers. His wife came in and berated him with heavy curses. We, the young folk, had to hear all this. For years, I recalled the comic scene of the short *rebe* and the tall *rebetsin* [wife] as they carry on before our very eyes.

In addition, Monish was an angry Jew; he did not beat us children, but he pinched us, tearing out bits of flesh, or pulled on our ears. Every one of us was covered by scars over our bodies. It was with this *rebe* that I had to suffer for two and a half years. When my becoming *bar mitsve* [mitzvah] approached, I told my father with complete determination that I would no longer go to the *kheyder*. My father barely got me to agree to go for two more months, and then only for a few hours in the evenings, so that he [Monish] might teach me the rules of binding phylacteries. The rest of the days I helped out my father in the store.

For my *bar mitsve* I was given a pair of phylacteries, an inheritance from my grandfather. These were unusually heavy phylacteries, written on some sort of special parchment, but they took my head off.

I remember as though it were yesterday my chanting of the *haftoyre* [Haf"torah, section of the Prophets] at my *bar mitsve*. I chanted in rhythm and my voice sounded quite pretty, even though it had started changing from alto to tenor. My wonder was quite great when the Jews in the *shul* refused to let me leave the podium, but that I had to chant *musif* [supplementary Sabbath prayer]. This was my first *musif*-chanting before the Ark. I do not know how well it went; I only know that the Khonorod Jews were in seventh heaven and all the blessings were given to my father: that his child will become a great *khazn* and that he would live to enjoy great joyful pride in me.

The *bar mitsve* jubilations took place in our house and the question arose: What will I do now? I am now a boy in my fourteenth year, my father had already invoked the blessing *borekh shepotrani* [about having been freed from ritual responsibility for his son] and it is more than high time to think about a practical purpose. There could be no talk about continuing at a *kheyder*. My old childish dream of becoming a cantor's assistant was growing somewhat old: my voice, as said, had begun to change. Even from a professional musical standpoint, about which, it's understood, I had not the slightest awareness, one must wait until the age of seventeen-eighteen. Why should I deny it here: my heart was dejected.

A serious disagreement arose in our home over what should be done with me. My mother was completely in favor of having her child continue to study Torah and that I should become a very learned man, as was the case with her parents and earlier ancestors. My father had a more practical outlook and it was his opinion that, for a few hours a day, I should continue helping him at the dry goods store, and during the other hours, I should learn a craft. And he had decided on what that craft would be: bookbinding. During the evenings, I would continue studying [Torah].

As my father decided, so it came to pass. It is of interest to review my father's reasons for having me learn a craft. Though we were descended from generations of learned men and traders and there wasn't a craftsman to be found in our family, even at a cash reward, my father nevertheless sensed the spirit of a new time. He said that it was good for a young man to have a craft in hand. And secondly — the military draft. I was a healthy and strong fellow without any basis for exemption that might give me a chance to be free of the draft board. So that, in case, heaven preserve us, it might turn out that I'd be serving *Fonye*, I should know a bit of a craft that might come in handy.

But bookbinding in our *shtetl* in those years was not much of a craft. It could not provide for a person's living. After half a year of apprenticeship, I had mastered the craft, but my master himself didn't have any work. So my father came up with another idea: we had a distant relative in the neighboring *shtetl* of Bogopol who was a locksmith-mechanic. My father took me to him and said: "Locksmithing is a better craft than bookbinding; learn it and you'll be a *mentsh* [decent person]."

The Bogopol relative turned out to be an excellent craftsman, not a bungler as was expected at that time. In addition, he was an intelligent person and took to fulfilling the mission my father had given him. But he added that if a boy came to him to learn the craft, he had to be a [fully fledged] apprentice, that is, he must do whatever he's told or he'll never learn anything.

Well, well, he did not spare me any work. I had to dress the children in the house and lead them off to the *kheyder*. I had to go to the market to do the shopping for his wife and — actually sweep the house, as well. But all this was a plaything compared with what awaited me later. Autumn arrived with its rains and deep stretches of mud. Every day I had to go get and bring back on my shoulders a sackful of coal to heat the warming stove in the workshop. I still feel today the weight of those sacks on my young shoulders. The muds of Bogopol are no ordinary muds following a rain. Quite often, I would extricate my foot from such a mud puddle and my boot would remain stuck...

So I dragged those sacks and that was how I was supposedly learning the locksmith's craft. By a miracle, I had two uncles in that *shtetl*, one on my mother's side, the other on my father's. I was a guest at the homes of my uncles on every Sabbath and was able to drive the locksmithing out of my head for a while. My going to my uncles had a secret purpose. Both of them had attractive daughters; especially

charming was the daughter of uncle Yoyne [Jonah], my mother's brother. The color of hair tended toward red, her face was of white alabaster, and her appearance overall was aristocratic, not that of a small *shtetl*.

But I had to be strenuously on guard against, heaven preserve us, speaking out a word to my pretty cousin; that would have not been "good behavior" in the ultra-pious home of my uncle Yoyne. So I would sit and talk about all sorts of things with her brother while, from afar, casting hidden glances at that picture-pretty girl.

Once I truly messed up. I had the gall to want to say "*gut shabes*" [good Sabbath] to my girl-cousin, reaching out my hand to her. Just at that moment my uncle happened to enter the house; he raised a terrible scandal. He screamed that I was befouling his house with "Gentile customs" and that I had to leave his house immediately.

It is not possible to describe my pain and shame. I suffered still more when I imagined what my cousin would catch from her excessively pious father. But it was that incident that ended my locksmith career in Bogopol. Both of my *shtetl* uncles wrote a letter to my father, demanding that he take me home at once because I cause them only disgrace and shame. A week later I was back home and the same question then remained: What is to be my goal?

## Many Crafts and Few Blessings

The only *toyre* [*i.e.*, lessons] I received from the locksmith in Bogopol was that I learned how to repair a simple lock. One could not base a career on this. So again my parents faced the question: What is to be done with such a grown boy as I?

After long discussions in the family it was decided that, since my uncle Eliezar's (the fine prayer-leader's) involvement in commerce, may you be spared, was highly unsuccessful, my father would provide several hundred rubles and we would form a partnership in the grain business. The business consisted of our traveling around to the [village] markets, buying as much as possible of the peasants' wheat, rye and barley.

My uncle was the expert and I, as the strong young fellow, dragged the sacks of grain into the large bin that my father had provided in his courtyard. The trade consisted of keeping the grain "for speculation" until late winter and spring, when prices were usually higher than right after harvest.

The floor of the grain bin was well covered in concrete so that mice and rats might not ruin our fortunes. My uncle Eliezar was the clerk who carefully recorded how many *puds* [40 Russian pounds ea.] of grain had been stored of each sort, and, in the meantime, he withdrew four rubles a week to cover expenses.

All winter long we dreamed of the huge profits that awaited us in spring. But when spring arrived and Khonorod's stream flowed freely, so, too, our dreams of huge profits flowed away. Khonorod's mice turned out to be more skillful than we had anticipated. When we denied them entrée to the grain via the floor, they crawled in through cracks in the wall and lived a good life on our account. In addition, much grain was dragged out through the holes they burrowed in the walls.

Each day we noticed how the tops of the grain stores were developing hollows and holes. Each hollow and hole produced a hole in our hearts. When the warmer days approached, we had to take out the grain for airing so that it would not turn damp and moldy. This brought on another new chapter. We had to spread large tarps and carry out all the grain in quantities. At night my uncle and I had to sleep near the grain so that the hogs might not get at it. At morning we hired Gentiles to throw shovelfuls of grain into the air.

After several days of hard labor we covered up all the holes, spread mouse poison, and finally the grain was back in the bin. But all of these restorative measures were of little help. When the grain buyers began to come to us in the spring about buying the grain, they came up with all sorts of excuses for not meeting the price we asked. We saw that this was a devil's game, so we ended it. And the bottom line was that after a year of travail, when I had been exhausted dragging the heavy sacks, the result was: twenty-nine rubles of total profit for both partners.

So grain trading turned out to be no bright future. And at sixteen, I stood helpless, not knowing what might then be done. My father then came up with a new project. Since, in working at his dry goods store for some time I had become almost a specialist in manufacturing, it might be well if I were to go "for myself" and to open my own dry goods store. My father noticed that I was drawn to independence and I was not happy being his helper.



For many years, a cousin of mine had worked at my father's store: Velvl, who was then twenty-one years old. My father didn't want this fellow to remain a servant forever, so he decided to give us several hundred rubles to go into partnership in a dry goods business. And that is actually what happened. The next day we traveled to Uman and bought a store's-worth of merchandise.

Our trade did not consist of competition with my father, but to travel among the fairs in the neighboring *shtetlekh*. We obtained all the needed tools, such as tarp-covered pallets, iron and wooden crowbars and stakes, strong ropes and the like. We found all of this at my father's from back in the day when he, himself, traveled among the fairs.

I remember our first excursion into the new venture as though it were today. Our debut was made at our own Khonorod fair. On Sabbath night, right after *havdole*, we had go out to the market place to assure a good spot. All the merchants at the fair were Jews, except for two Gentiles, pure *katsapes* [derogatory: Russians]. So the Russians played a trick on us and went onto the market place during Sabbath, so of course they took the best spots. As soon as it grew dark, our brothers the sons of Israel appeared and began pushing and shoving for the "best spot" at the fair.

Our first venture was fortunate; it was harvest-time, the Gentiles had a lot of money and they bought a great deal. I recall that we took in the sum of 115 rubles. We turned the money over to my father and, after supper, not to lose time, we packed up and went off to the next day's fair in the neighboring *shtetl* of Patereye. If we lacked certain articles, my father loaned them to us from his store. And after having bought everything in Uman, we returned everything according to measure [?].

And so we traveled from Patereye to Lidvinke, from Lidvinke to Dubove and from Dubove to Pokitilev and to dozens of other *shtetlekh*. From Sabbath night to Friday evening we traveled in this manner and came out not badly at all. All this was while autumn was fair and dry. As soon as the rains and muds began, our lives turned awful. More than once our wagon and its load were mired in deep Ukrainian mud and we, the young traders with our young shoulders, had to hitch ourselves up to drag out the wagon.

It was far more bitter when winter arrived. The snow storms and blizzards drove us off the roads more than once. This resulted in our missing the fair and the waste of all our efforts. I recall that once, during such a snowstorm en route, we came upon unexpected guests. A "*tishke*" [pack] of wolves approached to welcome us. First to sense the "guests" were our horses, that began snorting and twisting in place. We jumped down and seized the carriage shafts. Then we hear other travelers shouting for help — they had lost their way. They began striking flintstones against each other, sparks began to fly, and the evil eye was averted; the wolves ran off.

Going through this week all week long was not easy to swallow. Days went by in which we had nothing warm in our mouths. After toiling thus a whole year long with my partner Velvl, we tallied up a net profit of one hundred-sixty rubles, which meant eighty rubles "*na brata*" [Russ: per brother/partner]. Worst of all was that I began to lose my strength and once, when I returned home for Sabbath, my mother protested that she would no longer allow me to travel among the fairs.

In addition to that, my cousin Velvl became engaged; he married and went off to London. And so ended my career as a dry goods merchant at the fairs.

## I Am Taken to the Military Draft Board

At the end of my sixteenth year I felt that my contra-alto was turning into a solid man's voice. I did not know what the quality of that voice might be, but I sensed that I was beginning to develop a powerful urge to sing, to unload myself, while I had no opportunity to do so. The throttled desire to sing with a *khazn* flamed up in me. I told my father about this, but he again succeeded in convincing me that it would be better for me to remain as his assistant at his store. I was too weak and too helpless to oppose my father's desire.

In addition, there suddenly arose the question of my possibility of being drafted. In past years it was the Jewish custom to protect one's child by not registering a son's birth. When the child grew older, it appeared that he was a "*brodyage*" [vagabond], whose birth date was unknown to anyone. The question arose especially sharply when one reached draft age. In such a case the young man had to report to a special Evaluation Commission that issued a "*naruzhni vid*," which means certification of the fellow's age.

In my case, too, we had to appear before such an Evaluation Commission. Since I was a healthy and hearty fellow, I was certified to be "*raoy*," which means that I am twenty years old. I was told to prepare for the draft the following year.

I was healthy, as noted, and without any disqualifications, so there was not the slightest doubt that I would be taken to be a soldier. And which Jewish young man wanted to go to serve Fonye for a five-year stretch? So a wailing began at home and it was determined that the only person who might rescue me from Gentile hands would be the Kontekozive *rebe*, R' Arn Yoyl, may he live.

The draft usually took place between November and December. When the Days of Awe approached, my father says to me: "Well, my son, during the holidays we will, if The Name wills it, travel to the *rebe* in Kontekozive." That *shtetele* was some twenty *viorst* [13+ mis.] from Voznesensk, in the Kherson Region. Along with some other *khsidim* my father rented a coach and we rode off to Voznesensk. All through the journey the *khsidim* kept saying various *tfiles ha'derekh* [prayers for the journey].

Upon arrival in Voznesensk the *khsidim*, including my father, held that, in order that the trip to the *rebe* might be most successful, it would be worthwhile to go the last short distance by foot. The greater the effort, the greater the reward. And we went off walking. Along the way I heard no end of stories, but my feet were no less tired as a result. We were all exhausted. In thus manner we walked that twenty *viorst* until arriving late in the evening at Kontekozive.

We went directly from the road to the *rebe's* House of Study, where we nicely exchanged *sholem aleykhems* with the other *khsidim* who had already arrived from other *shtetlekh*. Only later did we go to the inn. I fell down half-dead and didn't even eat supper. However, my father arose for midnight prayers and left very early in the morning for the ritual bath.

That day my father sat me down in the *rebe's* House of Study, handed me a *khumeshl* [small Torah edition], a little prayer shawl and other *khsidish* books and told me that I had to devote all my deep thoughts only to holy books. This will be a certain assurance that the *rebe*, may he live, will handle everything and that I'll be rescued from the hands of Fonye.

As though in spite, as I sat there in the *rebe's* House of Study holding the holy books, quite different ideas crept into my mind. Perhaps it is not well to admit this, but a memoir-writer must be honest first of all regarding himself. I thought, and thought with all my senses, about the girl Yehudis [Judith], the daughter of the richest man in our *shtetl*, Khayim Nakhman Gelfand. He was a Lithuanian Jew, as rich as *Korekh* [biblical Korach] and an fellow unlettered beyond compare. He owned a mill and a distillery that supplied the entire surrounding area with its liquor.

Khayim Nakhman's boy had been a friend of mine in *kheyder*; through him I became a visitor in their house. And young as I was, I noticed the pretty Yehudis who, in contrast with her ignorant father, was educated and well-read. She had completed the two-grade elementary public school in our *shtetl*, which local Jews regarded with disdain. I remember her reading aloud to her brother and me from Krilov's [Russian] fables and how much we enjoyed those clever stories.

So I sat in the *rebe's* House of Study and thought about the pretty fifteen year-old Yehudis. Is this not a terrible sin? Can the *rebe* help me, as sinful as I am, to be freed from Gentile hands? But no matter how much I struggled with these evil thoughts, they kept returning before my eyes and each time with greater force. An unclear desire plagued me to see Yehudis, though I well knew that these were idle desires. My prestigious father would never in his life agree to a match with the terribly coarse fellow, Khayim Nakhman Gelfand, no matter that he is stuffed with money.

I remembered well the time that I received two heated slaps from my father when he once caught me walking home Yehudis who had come with her mother to buy something at our store. We were engaged in a moving, childish conversation when all of a sudden my father emerged as though from under the earth and thrashed me before the eyes of the pretty child who was then the dearest in my regard. Were I to have seen an open ditch — I would have buried myself out of shame and pain.

So what good would it do to think about Yehudis if my father has such an inimical attitude toward her and her family? But who is capable of controlling young feelings and who has the strength to conquer them, even in situations as those in which I found myself at that moment?

The *slikhes* days [of special morning prayers during the New Year Festival — High Holy Days] at the *rebe's* were very fearful days. One hardly left the *rebe's* House of Study. Before dawn the House of Study was filled by half-unslept, worried Jews, but when it came to [the prayer] "*neshome lakh*" [your soul], the Jews began to roll and shake and let themselves go with such loud shouts that could truly have split the skies.

Dread and horror afflicted everyone upon the arrival of *rosheshone* [Rosh Ha'Shanah, New Year's]. The *rebe* himself prayed at the pulpit. He had a weak, but a warm and a very pleasant voice; the House of Study, crowded with Jews, swallowed up his every word and patiently waited through all the long pauses that the *rebe* made between one [biblical] verse and another as he shook and rocked in all directions.

At the close of *yonkipur* [Yom Kipur, Day of Purgation, Atonement] the moment finally arrived when the *rebe* was to have received us and heard our plea, for which we actually had come there. Untold numbers of *khsidim* stood and pushed each other to say farewell to the *rebe*. The *gabe* [*gabay*, manager] sat in a corner and write notes that the *khsidim* were to hand to the *rebe*. The *gabe* took two rubles for writing each note. The note itself was accompanied by a gift to the *rebe* of eighteen rubles in cash.

I remember that when we came in to the *rebe*'s room, my hands and feet were shaking. I had never before experienced such deep inner fervor. The *rebe* read the note, said something to my father, then he called me to him and, resting his head on his hands and with closed eyes, he said: "Zebulon, by the merit of my parents, I accord you the blessing with which our father Jacob blessed his son Zebulon: 'Rejoice, O Zebulon, on your journeys, and Issachar, in your tents.' [Deut. 33:18] Don't forget that when you report to the draft board, you are to say this verse three times, and I hope to the Master of the Universe that you will be rescued from Gentile hands."

Encouraged and enthused, with the *rebe*'s blessing in my pocket, we left early for home on the following morning. Very soon it would be shown whether the *rebe*'s blessing and the verse that I had to repeat three times would actually have the desired effect on the officials of the "*Voyinskoya prisutsviya*" [government draft board].

## They Cry Out: “*Goden!*”

It cannot be said that in our home we relied exclusively on the blessings and good wishes of the Kontekozive *rebe*. We also began seeking “grandmothers’ curatives” to find ways of approaching the high government officials who might free me from having to serve Fonye.

During the ten days preceding the one on which I was to appear before the Evaluation Commission, there were unending family consultations in our home. My uncles from Bogopol and Uman came especially [for that purpose]. The latter was a discharged soldier and for that reason he was regarded as a major “expert” who knows how to get close to [those in] the “high windows [upper levels].” But sadly all these family assemblies until late at night ended only with blessings and good wishes, imploring The One Above for aid.

The day for traveling to the draft board arrived. Well, what went on that day in our house is impossible to describe. It was as if someone, may we be spared, was being taken to his funeral. Sobs and cries echoed over the marketplace, where I, my father and the two uncles being taken along as advisors if needed, mounted a phaeton.

On a cold, rainy autumn day I arrived at the *shtetl* of Orel-Alvyopol, where thousands of draftees — ten percent of them Jews — wandered around the marketplace. In that *shtetl* lived a son of the Kontekozive *rebe*, Zisele. So how could one not visit the *rebe*’s child to obtain the final blessing before turning oneself over into Gentile hands?

The routine of the note and the gift and the good wishes was repeated. Upon returning home from the *rebe*’s son, my father sat me down to recite Psalms until late at night. The next day, at six in the evening, I was to appear before the Commission. Around four, all the Jewish draftees gathered in the House of Study to recite the evening prayer, each with a *minyán* [prayer-quorum of twelve men]. I happened to be in a group stationed at the pulpit. All the bitterness I felt in my heart was unloaded in that evening prayer.

When the prayer reached *בְּעֵינֵינוּ נָא רַחֵם* in the loud [recital of] the eighteen benedictions, I took on so high a tone that the entire House of Study broke into loud sobbing. After prayers the Jews expressed certainty that after such an outpouring of the heart salvation would arrive and that Jews would be liberated from Fonye’s hands. Thus encouraged, we went directly from the House of Study to the “*Voyinskoya prisutsviya*” [government draft board].

At around seven p.m. came the call: “Zanvel Shulimov Kwartin,” and with a heart beating hammer-blows I entered the hall. I went over to a box and drew out a number, which was 681. According to that number and to the quantity of draftees that were to be inducted that year, I should have been freed. But the government official darted a look at me that left me displeased.

He told the doctor that I should be physically examined. I stood there, naked, and my body was so clean, smooth and healthy that not the tiniest defect might be found. And then I heard the doctor’s bitter words: “Whom else should be take as soldiers if not such fellows? We need soldiers like this. *Goden!* [passed, valid].”

My eyes went dark. I felt as though my legs had been cut off and I was about to collapse on the spot. When my father and two uncles who were waiting outside saw me emerge, they wordlessly understood everything and my father fainted away.

All four of us went to the [train] station at which we were staying and had a good cry. My father, however, braced himself and said that we must not lose faith and that The One Above might come to our aid at the last moment. So as to take weight off our hearts, we again went to Zisele, the *rebe*'s son, to tell him of the great disaster that had befallen us.

As broken and saddened as were those Jewish draftees who emerged, enlisted by the draft board, just as joyful and merry were the Gentiles who had been enlisted. They went right off to the tavern, got gleefully drunk, sending their shouting into the heavens. For them, going into service was the beginning of a whole new life, full of experiences, of traveling across the breadth of Russia. A Jew, by contrast, saw serving the czar as the greatest calamity of his life.

I need not describe what went on at home when we returned. It was a combination of *tishebov* and *yonkipar* [the Ninth of Av and Day of Purgation]. I was bemoaned as though, may we be spared, I was being led to the grave. That same evening we were visited by the Khonorod rabbi, R' Itsikl, who was a close friend of my father's, and they sat down to search for an idea about escaping the plague that had come to our house.

At once, the rabbi says to my father: "Come, R'Sholem, with me into another room and we will consider ideas about what to do." Their closed-off whispering lasted for over an hour, and when they finally emerged, the rabbi said to my father: "But remember, R' Sholem, everything we decided must remain the deepest of secrets."

One can imagine the impatience with which we awaited the departure of the rabbi so that we might learn what was the idea that had been worked out within those four walls. But my father would absolutely not say anything. Finally he could not withstand the pressure that my mother and I put him under, and he told. His telling turned everything dark before our eyes.

It was about no more and no less than that I should inflict some sort of wound upon myself, an imperfection on my body. Only this might rescue me from going into service for Fonye. When my mother heard this she broke out in spasmodic sobbing. No and no! In no case will she allow her child to be turned into a cripple, even if it meant I had to serve not five, but ten years. She also found it necessary to remind my father about the pains and suffering with which I was raised, how my life hung by a hair and how much she had endured until she lived to see me standing on my little feet. And today, when The One Above had aided her and made me into a strong and blooming fellow, is she to use her own hands to turn me into a cripple? No, this will never happen.

It took quite a long time for my father to calm her down. He made her understand that the rabbi doesn't want me, may we be spared, to remain a cripple eternally. He just has a means that cannot harm my health but that can aid my liberation. We need to submit an appeal to the government official for me to be re-examined, because I'm suffering an illness that had been overlooked at the first examination.

"What sort of illness is this?" my mother asked impatiently.

My father hemmed and hawed until we finally drew out of him that this was a sort of illness, a chronic skin disease, which can make one ill if one wishes — and if one doesn't wish, one is quickly

freed of it and one returns to being fresh and healthy. And the evidence was brought from the rabbi himself, who had used this illness when he had to report to the draft board, and today he is a healthy person with not a vestige of the disease remaining.

Then my father had to precisely explain the entire “process” of the illness, as the Khonorod rabbi had explained it to him in secret when they had locked themselves into that separate room. One takes the *kore*, that is, the bark, of a beech tree, and one burns it. The cooled ash of the bark is ground down and put through a very fine sieve so that it becomes as powdery as flour. It is then dissolved in a little bowl with ordinary water and [the mixture] is then taken up by a piece of cloth that is applied to whichever part of one’s body one chooses. A few hours later, when [the spot] begins to itch and burn, the cloth is removed and one sees that the spot has turned into a slight wound that does not cause any serious pain.

And when one wants to be free of the illness, one simply applies a compress of fermented pear-juice and in the course of a single day the person forgets that he’d ever been ill. My mother heard all this calmly, but she insisted that she must test both the magic potion and whether it is true that one can later get rid of the evil nuisance. Otherwise she would not permit the whole thing to proceed.

For pardon, my father had to bring the rabbi back to our house and, in the presence of both parents, the experiment was made on me. When the cloth was removed from my foot, the rabbi shouted “Excellent!” That means that the operation was successful, the scourge is here. Now began the process of healing me. I wore the compress with its fermented pear-juice overnight and by morning I was again healthy.

My mother had been convinced by her own eyes that this was truly not a dangerous means and that I would not remain crippled by it, so she finally agreed that my father should travel to Elizavetgrad to hustle around about a “*peresmotrenye*,” that is, that the decision to induct me into the army should be reviewed on the grounds that a hidden illness had turned up in me.

## My True Deliverance Comes From Yosl, the “Resident” Tailor

In our *shtetl* there was a bungler, called Yoyne-the-tailor. He had a son, Yosl, as tall and thin as a noodle. The boy was being taught tailoring by his father, and alas, what might he learn from him? He was turning into the same sort of cripple as his father. Not once did my father point out to Yoyne: “There is no sort of future for your Yosl in Khonorod. It would be better for him to be sent off to a big city where he could learn the craft as it should be, and he could become a *mentsh*.”

“It’s easy for you to give advice, R’Sholem,” the bungler relied. “You don’t care that my son, in the big city, would become a complete Gentile and would forget the bit of Jewishness that I managed to plant in him through great effort. And besides that, the boy doesn’t have a whole pair of pants to wear, and he’d need a few *gildn* [Russian pennies] in his pocket for ordinary expenses; where would all that come from?”

My father calmed the bungler about Jewishness in the big city, assuring him that it is maintained there, Bless The Name, and that not all Jewish young people there become Gentiles. And as for the pair of pants and the loose change on the journey, he ordered Yosl to come into his store.

When Yosl came into the store, my father ordered that ten *arshin* [approx. 24’] of linen be cut for shirts, plus fabric for a suit, and he also shoved a ruble in cash into his hand, so that he might have enough for a start in the big city. Yosl went off to Elizavetgrad and nothing was heard from him for a long time. Later news arrived that Yosl, Yoyne-the-bungler’s little boy, had become a respected person in the big city. He is no more and no less than a custom tailor; that is, he sews clothes for the biggest big shots and is a hale fellow among the officialdom, including the head of the draft board and its doctor.

Now, as my father was about to leave for Elizavetgrad to arrange for me to be examined again, he remembered Yosl, Yoyne-the-bungler’s little boy, and all the favors he had done for him, helping him to leave Khonorod for the wide world. He was certain that Yosl, the custom tailor, would be able to provide the necessary connections with officialdom and actually point out where some “grease” [bribe] might help the wheels to turn more easily.

And that is how it was. On his first visit to Elizavetgrad my father stayed with Yosl the custom tailor. The joy over his presence was very large; Yosl remembered well that it was my father to be thanked for his present status as a noted craftsman in a big city, and if it hadn’t been back then for my father with the few *arshin* of fabric and the ruble in cash, he might still today have remained as an accursed patch-sewer in the “metropolis” of Khonorod.

Yosl heard the whole story about the draft and immediately asked if there were some hook that might be latched onto to justify the demand for a re-examination. It appeared that Yosl had had enough experience in such matters, because he spoke quite expertly and immediately asked how much, for instance, my father would be ready to pay to cover the costs to gain the liberation of his son.

My father replied that he was ready to go beyond his means and that he was prepared to pay between four and five hundred rubles. Yosl bargained, saying that by his calculations, they’d have to “cough up” from seven to eight hundred rubles, because there are so many hands waiting to be greased. Understandably, the matter did not collapse over those few hundred rubles.

They presented the petition and, three days later, I was informed through the local district that I am to appear in Elizavetgrad “*na peresmotrenye* [?for re-examination].” Before leaving I received for the last



time the instructions of our rabbi as to how to conduct myself when I am brought to the hospital. The rabbi also gave me the required amount of the magic bark and inserted the powders among the pages of the little prayer book that I, as a pious young man, was taking along.

It was in the month of November of the year 1895 that I, a youth as hale and hearty as a giant, lay down supposedly ill in the Elizavetgrad hospital. For eight days in a row the doctors and their *feldsher* [practitioner aides] tried to do their thing and to heal the wounds that I had with my own hands spread like poppy seeds over my body. On the ninth day there arrived the long awaited “*nye goden* [failed, invalid]!”

The matter had driven my father into an expense of almost twelve hundred rubles and it was a long time before he could recover. But he had accomplished his goal: his son did not go to serve Fonye. Yet Yosl, Yoyne-the-tailor’s [son], as it was later revealed, had participated in the matter. It is likely that all of five hundred rubles was his commission taken for carrying out the “business.” He had thought: “If one can benefit [*lit.*: lick a bone] — why would a person be a fool?”

But the joy over my liberation caused all thought of these minor matters to be forgotten. The greatest joy, of course, was my mother’s and she prepared a Sabbath meal after our return that was long remembered by the *shtetl* Jews.

## **I Am Up For Matchmaking and Every Match is a “Strike It Rich” Gravy Train**

So I'm once more my father's employee in the dry goods store. I took to the work very industriously in order to help cover the huge expense that my draft experience had cost. I become a major craftsman in the manufactured-goods aspect; I'm sent on my own to buy merchandise in the big cities according to my taste, which wasn't too bad. The customers place great confidence in me and quite often I'm the only one from whom they wish to buy.

I start to believe, in part, that the dry goods store and I are one, and that we will never separate one from the other, that it will be my career to follow the paths of my ancestors, to be a storekeeper among the Jews.

As soon as I was free of the draft, matchmakers began to come to our house and each brought a match — a real “grease pit” [gravy train], truly a well of good fortune; simply stretch out your hand and you will be joyful your whole life long. I remember them as though it were today: the Jews in their thick, muddled boots, in their thick woolen shawls wrapped around their necks, in their astrakhan caps and with their nostrils tinted green from eternal snuff-sniffing.

Their noses were always red from the constant imbibing of liquor that they drank with each householder. And they spoke rapidly and endlessly — they could've out-talked a wall. These Jews, the ancient matchmakers and pairers of the predestined didn't stop crashing the threshold of our home. And each would begin to paint in brightest of hues the dearest of matches being brought to the son of R'Sholem Kwartin.

I recall that four matchmakers arrived at once from four *shtetlekh*: Talne, Zvenigorodke, Poketilev and Uman. When my father had heard the names of the householders who wanted to be matched with him, he told my mother that these were all quite fine householders and that all were offering an attractive dowry: two to three thousand rubles, and that it is the right time for Zebulon, who has turned twenty-one years, to conclude a match. How long is a bachelor to be wandering around the house?

But the strongest net was dropped upon me by Yosl, the custom tailor of Elizavetgrad, the same who had helped to free me from Fonye's hands. The very day I was freed, he gave a little party at his house in honor of the event (and perhaps actually in honor of the fine hundreds of rubles that he'd made thereby). When we had sipped a bit, he took my father aside and said: “R' Sholem, I have a brilliant match for your Zebulon, a virtual grease pit. The bride's father is a rich Jew who owns one of the largest manufacturing factories on the main street of Elizavetgrad, “*bolshoya prospektnaya ulitsa*,” [Grand Prospect Avenue].

It appears that Yosl the custom tailor, in addition to his other talents, had the talent of an expert matchmaker. He knew to plant in my father's head the fact that the bride's father, R' Fishl Kovalyevski, has no sons, only daughters, and that I, as an expert in the manufacturing branch, will be able to immediately join my father-in-law's business and become a settled person for the rest of my life.

I noticed that my father became quite serious. It seems the story of Fishl Kovalyevski had entered his mind. The next morning, before returning home, we went to purchase merchandise and among other [wholesalers], my father took me to Fishl Kovalyevski's store. This was a major business, chock-full of

everything. The most attractive examples of fabric and the richest assortment could be found there. And everything was so elegantly arranged that I, the small-towner, was floored. We were immediately surrounded by the most elegant salesmen with their flowery tongues speaking a trilling Russian that we in Khonorod had never heard.

I did not notice at all that while I was in the store the owner, Kovalyevski, paid close attention to me and that all this had been pre-arranged by Yosl the custom tailor. I did soon see my father engaged in an animated discussion with the bride's father himself. I was certain that they were discussing the lot of goods that my father had selected and that he was bargaining for a special price, as for a wholesaler.

In truth, though, the conversation there was about me and a potential marriage partnership between the two families.

I was very overwhelmed when, upon leaving, both the owner, Kovalyevski, and his son-in-law, Dubnikov, pressed my hand very strongly. That's not the way one shakes hands with a provincial young fellow who accompanies his father to buy merchandise.

The next morning, when I returned to the store to collect the merchandise that my father had bought, Kovalyevski engaged me in a conversation. He asked me whether I was pleased by his place of business. What answer could I have given him? So I said that meaning no harm — may it come to us all — I would consider myself very fortunate [with something similar]. I was still a quite naïve fellow and didn't know the secret that not all that glitters is gold, and that no one knows whose shoe is too tight. Only later did I learn what was hidden behind the elegant manufacture-business on the principal boulevard of the big city. But I will tell about that separately.

When we returned home with the purchased merchandise a fine season actually developed. Gobs of money were earned, and since it was still a month before "*rozhdество*" (Christmas), my father says that it would be well if my mother and I were to return to Elizavetgrad to buy a similar lot of merchandise, because what had been bought from Kovalyevski sold very well. My father had a hidden purpose: that my mother might observe Kovalyevski's girl and express her opinion about the match.

There had already been heavy snows, so we rented a good sleigh, drawn by three horses. We dressed heavily in sheepskin coats and *voylikes* [?] and rode into Elizavetgrad. The first stop, of course, was at Yosl the custom tailor's. My mother considered it her obligation to thank him in person for saving her little boy from Gentile hands. Seizing the opportunity, Yosl began a conversation with my mother about the fortunate match he has for her child.

The next morning, as planned, we went to Kovalyevski's store to select a lot of merchandise. But that Yosl had arranged everything earlier, and everyone in the store knew that a potential mother-in-law had come to regard the bride. We were shown fabrics of the best and finest sort and were quoted prices that seemed very cheap to us. In short, we bought three times as much as had been intended. And then the unexpected arrived: Kovalyevski himself invited me and my mother to come to his home that evening to meet his wife and children.

My mother went to the rich man's house, but I did not accompany her. I went to see Yosl who began to tell me of the great, fortunate match for me he had proposed to my parents. and he pointed to himself as an example. What would've happened to him if he had stayed stuck in that small *shtetl*? I, too, would be

strengthened by marrying the rich man's daughter and becoming a partner in his gigantic business on the main street of the city.

My mother returned enthused by the reception she had received in the palatial house. She was especially pleased by Mrs. Kovalyevski, a truly saintly woman, a Hasidic follower of the Tolne *rebe*. A woman involved in following the commandments and doing good deeds. My mother did not deign to speak with me about the bride. That was postponed to the family conversation upon the return home.

Quite early the next morning we again dressed in our furs, burrowed deeply into the sleigh and rode home.

## How Jews Conducted Themselves Fifty Years Ago

It is worthwhile to stop for a while to see how differently Jews conducted business more than fifty years ago. There were Jews who labored mightily, laying-by a penny to a penny, so as to marry off their children in prideful joy and delight, to give to charity according to their means, and not to explode people's eyes with exaggerated status and luxury. The main thing was to lead an honorable life — for God and for people, pious and observant, guarding against harming anyone or taking anything from anyone.

There was also another type of Jews who were not so meticulous over the sources of their money as long as they were prominent, showing off their riches and living in luxury. Such a Jew was not overly concerned about not having, in the past, promptly met the financial obligations he had undertaken, or had [English] “settled,” as is now said, by paying only part of his debts. Therefore, such a Jew considered it necessary that he be the first among the followers of the *rebe*, to give the first donation in town for a charitable cause, to insinuate himself into the top of community matters, to make the best matches and to shine everywhere as the leading rich man and philanthropist.

It was this second type of Jew that defined R' Fishl Kovalyevski of Elizavetgrad, whom Yosl the custom tailor had offered to my father as his future in-law. He was not an especially well-educated man, as was the case with the majority of Jews at that time, but he distinguished himself through unusual energy. One might say that his head had, from the start, determined not to go along a straight path, but deviously, with wily concepts and tricks. Somehow, he was not drawn toward making a straight trading business, even if that might have provided a decent income.

Therefore, he was drawn toward those businesses where one might make some sort of scheme, where one could out-trick another. I don't know how much this agrees with reality, but years later it was related that this R' Fishl had, despite the evil eye, gone bankrupt during his lifetime no less than all of twenty times.

The manufacturers and major traders in such Polish cities as Lodz, Zgierz, Tomaszow and Bialystok knew Fishl well and his weakness of declaring bankruptcy every couple of years. So they knew in advance that they must charge him at least thirty or forty percent more for the merchandise, so that later there would be something left to lose while collecting the payments...

And despite all this they willingly dealt with him, because he was, after all, a big customer and the small loss through non-payment was covered by the large quantities of merchandise that he bought during the year. Quite different was the appearance of relations between Fishl and the major Russian manufacturers in Moscow and Kharkov. A Gentile isn't fooled, and if one writes a check it must be covered. So that when bankruptcy affected such firms as Marazov in Moscow or Konshin and “Nyevskaia Manufaktura” [New Manufacturing], Fishl was left with the short end. The Gentles sent their agents to Elizavetgrad and they were prepared to auction off Fishl's entire store.

Here there was little aid from all the wily tricks of “arranging.” He had to pay the Gentiles eighty, and often even all of ninety cents to the ruble. In simple Yiddish this means: Both stinking fish eaten and out of town driven. Because Fishl's name was already besmeared as that of a financial failure.

But at the very same time Fishl was the prominent Jew in town, a good and broad-hearted man toward the poor. If a poor bride needs marriage funds — he is the first with a handsome contribution. If a fallen person sadly needs help — Fishl will never deny an interest-free loan to pay off a debt. In all the *khevres* [communal aid groups] and charitable institutions Fishl is the first, both with providing the proper contribution and with taking on the post of leading figure.

And the household he led — may it come to every Jew. His daughters were always dressed-up in satins and silks; the table did not lack any bird-milk [delicacies]. And at the same time this was a pious Jewish home which bore the stamp of Fishl's wife. She was an observant Jewish woman who knew nothing of all her husband's tricks but was truly pious and God-serving, like the saintly women of old. The *tsene urene* ["Come and See" — women's prayer book] did not leave her hands, and not only on the Sabbath.

So it is no wonder that my mother, may she have a bright heaven, was very pleased by the house into which she had been invited. The pious-Jewish atmosphere that she encountered there was very much to her heart's liking. In her holy naiveté my mother did not see the unhealthy and unethical foundation on which Fishl Kovalyevski had built his life.

Herself worn out from labor and suffering, whose every achievement in life was gained by honest toil, she used the same measure in evaluating all the people she met. From my earliest years, she and my father placed major emphasis on honesty and justice toward fellow humans. Heaven prevent [them] from taking anything away from anyone. All that she aspired to in life was to make sure that her children would be good, pious Jews who would follow the same paths as her parents had.

So it is therefore no wonder that the home of R' Fishl Kovalyevski pleased her so much. When she returned from Elizavetgrad she told my father that, truth be told, the bride was no great beauty, but since our dear Zebl is not a spoiled child, he will, if The Name wills it, grow accustomed to the girl. The main thing is that she was pleased by his future mother-in-law, and that the house is bathed in gold: three servant-girls puttered around the table. It is, by her lights, a true "grease pit" for her child. She is completely in favor of the match.

My father, more sober, felt that there is no reason for haste. Since during the time of our absence our threshold was freed from the four matchmakers of the neighboring *shtetlekh*, he believes that we need to proceed cautiously, to take a look at those matches; we can speak later about Kovalyevski.

As you can see, all the time of the debate about a match on my behalf went on without me, who was also somewhat involved in the whole matter. That was in the spirit of that time, that the main thing was for the parents to determine whether the [family] pedigrees matched, if the dowry would be settled on time and at the proper height [value]. Whether bride and groom pleased each other, that they might feel something toward each other, that was among the lesser important things. And a child considered himself to be fine and honest if he piously and obediently surrendered to this procedure.

And just at that time other little birds began fluttering inside my head. Old, long forgotten dreams suddenly began to awake and they began to worry my mind, giving me no rest. At that time I noticed that my voice had become ripe and manly. Again I yearned toward *khazones*, toward a good, hearty Jewish *khazn*, and perhaps toward singing myself; one must determine on one's own whether I can do something

else, or have my dealings in the dry goods store completely devoured my childhood's talent that had shown itself so well?

I felt through all my senses that now would really be the right time to travel off somewhere to a great *khazn*, to study with him, and mainly to hear the fine Jewish melodies for which I yearned so much.

And on one wintry evening, when the family had settled around the glowing heating stove and recommenced the conversation about my being an old bachelor and that it was time to make a match — I summoned my courage and told my father about everything that was pressing upon me. I reminded him that since my eighth year I've been carrying an inner desire to sing and that they had never wanted to listen seriously to my desire. May my parents know that I will never give up my dream of singing and of *khazones*.

Right on the spot, I formulated a specific plan for my parents to allow me to travel to a large city, like Odessa or Berdichev, where I might study music and get voice-training, and that this would be the reward for my obedience and devotion to my parents to this very day. I do not ask for any money. I will earn my keep one way or another and will study music and *khazones* in the evenings. In addition, I enthusiastically promise to be a pious Jew and to observe all the commandments, just as I do at home.

As to my mother, that quiet dove, I would've succeeded one way or another. But my father, who was an unmovable rock, had strong objections about my plan. And in order to completely beat down my wings, he told me a story that was intended to demonstrate clearly and accurately how dangerous was the path I intended to take.

## A Story About a Rabbi's Son Who Converted

And this is the story that my father told me in order to deaden forever my desire to go to the large cities seeking adventures in singing.

This happened a few years ago, when he went to Kharkov around new year's for the "Annual Baptismal Fair." Traders from the most varied cities met at the train station. After supper, Jews sit there, talking of all sorts of things. When things grew quite boring, a Jew from Belotserkov interjects:

"D'you know what, Jews, I've an idea about how to spend the evening, so that we won't be bored. The Peterburg Opera has come to Kharkov on tour. Come, so we'll all together hear a few good singers, and pass the evening that way."

The traders almost all agreed to the plan, except for two Khabad [Chabad] *khsidim* who considered going to the theater to be a great sin. Among those who did go was a Jew from Rokitne. When they reached the theaters and read the posters, the Rokitne Jew shouted:

"Oy, vey [o, woe], Meyerl Medvyedev is singing tonight. This is the famous Meyerl, a son of the Rokitne rabbi, about whom our *shtetl* raged when he went off into the wide world and emerged with an evil reputation. I attended Berl the teacher's *kheyder* with him."

Interest in the performance grew even stronger among the Jews. They quickly bought tickets and entered the theater. The opera was "Demon." Since it was the first time in his life that my father had visited a theater, everything was new to him and very interesting. It was only somewhat uncomfortable to see the half-dressed dancers as, before everyone's eyes, they embrace with the artists and kiss them. A pious Jew has no great interest in viewing such scenes.

But the singing and music were outstanding and the Jewish traders thoroughly enjoyed themselves. During all that time the Rokitne Jew was extremely excited, especially when Meyerl, his friend from *kheyder*, appeared on stage. He recognized his voice at once, though he was dressed in various tassels and colorful rags. But he was the same Meyerl. He could barely wait for the first intermission, when he had decided to notify his friend that he is in the theater and wants to see him.

He wrote a note and, putting a silver ruble into the usher's hand, had it taken to Medvyedev. Great was the amazement of the Rokitne Jew when the usher returned with the reply that Meyerl Medvyedev is ready to meet with him after the performance and asks that he come backstage.

The Rokitne Jew shone with joy and he said at once that he would take along the whole company of Jews that had accompanied him so that they, too, might have the pleasure of getting to know his great fellow-townsmen. They could barely wait for the end of the performance when the same usher led the Jews backstage to Meyerl Medvyedev's dressing room.

The route backstage led through long corridors from which, through half-open doors, they could see the dancers and chorus-girls changing clothes, and some of the Jews began to regret letting themselves be led onto this slippery slope. But finally they reached Medvyedev's dressing room. No matter how strange it sounds, the great singer was overjoyed to see his *kheyder*-years friend and even the Jews whom he had brought along. The dressing room table quickly produced a bottle of liquor and a *lekhyaim* toast was made.



And as “in wine there are no secrets,” Meyerl Medvyedev became very talkative and began to relate many details of his life. Among other things he said that he had to hurry, because he was awaited by the noblewoman whom he had arranged to meet after the performance. What sort of noblewoman this might be — the Jews later learned. Since the Rokitne Jew saw that he would not have much time to spend with his friend, he asked him to gratify him by singing something of the Jewish prayers with which he was famous in the *shtetl* before leaving for the broad, wide world.

Meyerl did not wait to be implored for long, sat down at the piano and backstage was suddenly filled by a homey Jewish sound that encompassed all the hidden pain of a Jewish heart that is supposedly made happy by the Gentile world. Medvyedev sang *המצער מן*. He put all of his bitter heart into that bit of prayer. The Jews, my father among them, forgot where they were; it seemed to them that they weren’t behind the scenes at an opera but, may they not be compared, in some small-town *shul* where a hearty Jewish prayer-leader dissolves into praying over the eternal Jewish grief and yearning for deliverance.

In Meyerl’s singing it was felt that his life is just as restricted and bitter as was then the bitter life of all Jews in Czarist Russia. He was not enhanced by the supposed radiance of his own life; deep in his heart he may have yearned for the Jews of his hometown, Rokitne. Perhaps at that moment he recalled his father, the rabbi, who had exerted all his strength to retain him in his Jewishness. Meyerl had a sharp mind and could study well, and his father hoped quietly that his son might take over his rabbinical post in the *shtetl*. But life led him onto far different paths.

At ten-eleven years of age he already prayed very well and when he reached seventeen — he already had a wonderful tenor voice. So he went off to Svenigorodke to study with the *khazn* there. A half-year later he left for Byelotserkov, and from there to Kiev, where he came to the famous *khazn* Koretski, of [famed mogul] Brodsky’s *shul*. When the Brodskys heard the young singer they invited him to their home where there were assembled many prominent guests of the Jewish and Russian aristocracy.

The Brodskys kept an eye on the highly talented singer; they took him to study with a professor with whom he made very great progress. But at the same time his career veered and from *khazones* he turned evermore toward general singing, especially to opera.

The same group of philanthropists led by the Brodskys sent Medvyedev to Peterburg to study at the conservatory there. He completed the conservatory in three years and became a fully fledged singer. He joined a touring opera company and traveled to all the major Russian cities, where he was successful everywhere. During that trip a Russian noblewoman fell in love with him and it was she who led to his conversion away from Judaism.

The noblewoman, who followed Medvyedev to all the cities, determined that he must sing with the Peterburg Royal Maritime Opera. And doing that while lacking a baptismal certificate was impossible. That was how the Rokitne Jewish lad with the sharp Talmud student’s brain was enmeshed in a net of love and big-city splendor that eventually led him to the baptismal font and to superficially leaving his Jewish heritage. That he was uncomfortable with the whole matter could be concluded by the *המצער מן* that he sang tearfully and heat-brokenly backstage at the Kharkov theater for his friend of their *kheyder* years. But there was no way back. As he was singing the hearty Jewish prayer, the usher arrived with a note from the noblewoman saying that she is impatient over his not showing up so long after the performance.

Meyerl Medvyedev quickly became no *khazn* but an opera singer once again; reality called and he quickly bade farewell to his friend and the other Jews. And so my father ended his telling to me of the notable story of a Jewish lad who fell victim to the evil spirit and emerged besmirched, who had left not only his father's house but his heritage and his people forever. I should draw the moral of the long story myself: that I should once and for all drive out of my head the idea of going out into the world on my own. "Here y'see, my child, to what such things lead. Nothing good comes of it and as long as your father is your father — he will not permit it.

"It is far better," my father concluded, "to make a respectable match, to accept the considerable dowry, to open a store and follow the Jewish path as your parents and ancestors did. This will be both for God and for people, to the great joyful pride of your parents and of the whole family."

## I'm Taken Around to *Shtetlekh* to See Potential Brides

That's how my father drenched me with a pailful of cold water and I had to, again, postpone my dreams about *khazones* until who-knows-when. Rather, matchmakers filled our house and we had to take off across the countryside to regard all the matches brought to us as "true grease pits" by the matchmakers in their matted beards.

I made my first visit to Uman as a bridegroom seeking to see his on-offer bride. I got dressed in finery from tip to toe; that is, I went to a notions store and chose the most handsome paper shirtfront, a stiff celluloid collar, a pair of heavily starched paper cuffs with a pair of tin cufflinks, all topped off by a small black necktie bound in a bow.

When I returned home I tried on all of that, peered into the mirror and was highly pleased with myself. That is how, I thought, a true bridegroom-fellow should appear and there is no bride on earth whom I would not please in this elegant outfit.

Dressing-up thus in these holiday clothes, it also occurred to me that, if a potential father-in-law were to ask some question about religious lore, one needed to know a good reply. But that was a minor problem. My main concern was whether the bride would start a conversation with me about secular, worldly matters — she's from a big city, after all. What if she starts to talk with me about Russian literature? There I'd be a dead man — we didn't know about such things in our *shtetl*, and the fear about the intelligence of my future bride drove me out of my mind.

And as I sit there in the Uman inn, sunk in thought, Sholem the matchmaker enters and says that it is time to go, the in-laws are waiting. We went off to the prominent Jew, R' Sholem Apteyker [Aptheker] was his name. The potential in-laws were introduced and met. The bride was nowhere to be seen. I sit there as on hot coals, the stiff celluloid collar almost slicing into my throat, the starched shirt-front cracks and crashes with my every bend and movement and it seems to me that it is about to peel out from under my jacket.

Finally the girl entered. I noticed the matchmaker beckoning everyone else to leave. We remained alone and this foolish scene remained well in my memory for many years. I sat in my chair stiffly, nervously, as though I were made of clay. I was afraid to make any move, lest my shirtfront and the cuffs come loose and roll off onto the floor in full sight of my future bride, may such an hour never arrive. I can highly imagine that the same confusion and lostness played-out in the heart of the young small-*shtetl* [?] girl.

Conversation could simply not begin. Neither one of us knew where to start. Finally the girl gathered up the courage to start in Russian: "Is the place where you live a large city?"

I felt as though a heavy stone had rolled off my heart. First, I took a breath and then eagerly replied that the metropolis of Khonorod is actually not a city, but a *posada*, that is, a large village. And I showered my compliments upon her city, which is almost a province by comparison with my town. I said that I greatly envy her for living in such a metropolis, for having the opportunity of meeting intelligent, educated people, to go to the theater, listen to a concert, all such things of which we can only dream. How happy I would feel if I were fated to live in a large city.

I was covered in sweat when I finished my long speech and it was only then that I glanced at the person who was supposed to be my *basherte* [predestined one]. I cannot say that I saw before me a great beauty. To the contrary, this was a short, heavyset girl with a not-pretty face. And as to the intelligence that I so feared, that could also be dealt with. She didn't have much to say about my tirade on the importance of her city.

I was again sitting as though on hot coals and waited for the door to open soonest so that an unfamiliar person might appear — so heavy was the burden of seeing eye to eye with the predestined one that Sholem the matchmaker had found for me. Heavy perspiration broke out on my forehead and I was truly overjoyed when the door finally opened and the bride's mother entered, inviting all the in-laws to tea.

Meanwhile, the matchmaker spun to and fro around my father — he wanted to know where the deal stood. But my father explained to him that so important a thing could not be decided at the spur of the moment and that when, The Name willing, we return home, we will consider the thing and will inform him.

On the way home I told my father that if all the other offered matches were of this type, we might as well stay home and not trouble our heads. My father was not insistent, but he still believed that, as he had promised to go next week to Zvenigorodke, he had to keep his word; one must not bring shame upon people.

On this second trip I was already an experienced bride-gazer and was no longer as nervous as on the first time. My shirt front and the paper cuffs were firmly placed this time and I no longer feared that they would fly off me at the very heated moment of meeting my future predestined one.

Again, we arrived in the middle of a bright day at a fine householder's home, creating a hurricane there and causing the heart of a kosher Jewish daughter to tremble.

This time the bride was a very fine girl and I had no objections to her. It was my father who was displeased this time. He checked the fortune of his future in-law and he somehow quickly sensed that the dowry promised by the matchmaker was not quite certain. No, the Jew won't default, he'll simply not have the resources. The second drawback was that Zvenigorodke lacked a decent *khazn*. And my father wanted to combine both things: to make a match, but at the same time to give his son the possibility of learning a bit of *khazones*, to allow him to fulfill the weakness that has filled his head for so many years.

That was how my two unsuccessful jaunts to examine a bride ended. But the thing didn't end there. Returning home we found a letter from our old acquaintance, Yosl the custom tailor of Elizavetgrad who hadn't given up hope of licking a bone with Sholem Kwartin, this time in the form of a matchmaker's commission from his son. In his letter Yosl wanted to instill fear in us that the door has not been closed by Fishl Kovalyevski, the Elizavetgrad rich man, to matchmakers who bring golden matches to his home, and if we do not hurry up, someone else would seize the bargain, leaving us with nothing.

My mother was truly frightened because — there is nothing here to hide — she was very pleased with the match from the first moment, and in her mind it had long since been concluded. Only gentility kept her from putting pressure on her child. This last letter from Yosl gave her courage and she came out with speech, insisting that we pack our things at once and travel to Elizavetgrad. "This is a betrothal from heaven," she argued, and, this time, even I did not oppose my mother's will. I had my own consideration

in this. At that time there were in Elizavetgrad several good *khazonim*: R'Yankif Shnirman led prayers in the Large *shul*; Meyer Pisak was the prayer leader in the Large House of Study. Somewhat later, there arrived the *khazonim* Meyzel, Kanah and, finally, Arye Leyb Roytman. These were the most famous singers of that time and I aspired with all my might to get close to them. Perhaps something might adhere to me, perhaps my hidden dreams will begin to be realized.

## I Marry Fishl Kovalyevski's Daughter

My mother's instinct turned out to be the best guide. My parents and I traveled to Elizavetgrad and the engagement was quickly concluded. However, in order to portray the mores of those times, it is useful to spend a bit more time on the event, to provide a picture of the people involved and their behavior.

He went to the finest inn in Elizavetgrad and quickly Yosl the custom tailor showed up along with Kovalyevski's son-in-law, Dubnikov, who, in the name of the future in-laws invited us all to their home that evening for tea. We were led into a large, attractive hall equipped with plush furniture and the most expensive divans placed along the floor.

It was later said in Elizavetgrad that Kovalyevski was a great artist in three aspects: in calculating exactly when to declare bankruptcy, in attractively decorating the show-windows of his store so that every passer-by had to stop to take a look, and the third art was — catching good sons-in-law for his daughters. For the last there was unleashed a large propaganda machine that arranged everything precisely so that the fledgling would land in the nest.

I again sat stiffly and starched, waiting for my pre-destined one to arrive. However, I was not as lost as when I first “inspected” the bride in Uman. Finally the girl came in, accompanied by her mother. She sat down on the sofa near me and we were to have exchanged some words. But how to speak when one's mouth will not open? I noticed that the girl spoke a fine, lyrical Russian and that, in that sense, I was certainly behind her.

A solution to the dumb scene quickly arrived when the serving girl entered and announced that tea was served at the table. A more free atmosphere developed around the steaming samovar and the pastries, and a light conversation ensued. Among other things there was mention of a new *khazn* in town with a very nice voice. Here I could no longer remain unconcerned and declared my great interest in *khazones* and that at the first opportunity I would go to hear the new, as well as the old, *khazonim* who pray in town.

The crowd arranged it so that I might be alone with my future bride for a short time. And then I had an opportunity to regard somewhat more closely and to assess her. She is not particularly pretty, and I cannot say that I fell in love with her “at first sight.” She had a pair of pretty eyes, was somewhat well-read, having gone through five grades at the gymnasium. I was most pleased by her attractive Russian, especially when she said charmingly at our leave-taking that: “I will be very pleased to see you [polite form] here at lunch tomorrow.”

Upon arriving back at the inn my parents asked me how pleased I was with the bride. But not waiting at all for my reply, they said: “*Nu*, may it be in a fortunate hour. Tomorrow, if The Name wills it, will we write the marriage contract.” And again they began to praise the in-laws, what prominent people and rich folks they are, and how well-educated are the sons-in-law they have chosen for their elder daughters, and the pot of gold I've fallen into. My mother, especially, insisted that this was a match made in heaven. And that the mother-in-law is a true saint.

Not a word was heard about the bride, about her virtues — this was a minor matter. Love-shmove...one falls in love after one marries, when one has children, and if the One Above gives aid, there is unstinted income — there is no greater joy that one might wish.

My parents sat there until two [o'clock] at night with me, describing the joy that awaits me. And when I fell dead-asleep, I dreamt of none other than Getsl the *khazn* of Balta, who had appeared like a meteor 12 years earlier in our *shtetl* and ignited a hidden desire in me that had not been realized to the present day. I saw myself in my dream dressed in a cape with a six-cornered hat on my head, surrounded by a large choir as I stand praying in the main Elizavetgrad synagogue and my father, who did not approve of my dreaming about *khazones*, stands there and listens and is astounded and is in seventh heaven for joy.

But a sudden shove tore me out of my dream. It was well into daylight and, seeing that I'd overslept, my father woke me up to go to pray and to get a bite to eat. I returned from my sweet dreams to reality, to the Kovalyevskis, and that I would soon need to go to the lunch to which my bride herself had invited me in such sweet language.

After my parents had interpreted my dream positively, I began, myself, also to believe that all was from the heavens and that it would turn out well, and in heightened spirits I went off to the house of my future parents-in-law. The mood was far more free and the few hours went by quickly, until at evening my parents arrived and they began working out the marriage contract.

For that purpose, my father, my intended father-in-law, Fishl Kovalyevski, and the marriage broker, Yosl the custom tailor, went into a separate room where they worked out all the "points" of the marriage contract. My father-in-law promised a dowry of eleven hundred rubles, to which my father was to add his own three hundred rubles. The money was to be deposited with Tsalel Kaminsky, the major wholesale dealer in manufactured goods. After all had been written and signed, plates were broken and everyone was wished *mazltov*. I, the bridegroom, was told to kiss the bride.

I must admit that that was far from those flaming kisses delivered by a young fellow for the first time in life to his predestined and chosen one. It was more of a "to be expected" kiss, cold and dry, with not the least Jewish flavor. I don't know how my bride felt, but my heart was very depressed. I was quite clear that she, too, has no special feeling toward me, and that the kiss was more a requirement than a pleasure.

Later it actually turned out that my bride's heart was pitifully very broken at that moment in which she was supposed to be joyful with her groom. As is the custom in the little *shtetlekh*, she was involved in a one-sided love and she took it all to-heart. Meanwhile it was all expressed in her cool and formal attitude toward me, which I immediately felt.

After delivering the dowry, that is, after depositing it with the above-named Tsalel Kaminski, my parents returned home and I remained for a week as my bride's guest.

This was truly a week of great spiritual happiness for me. At the very first I went off to hear the *khazonim* Snorman and Pisak, as well as a third *khazn* who prayed at the little choir synagogue. I also attended a concert by a woman singer from Peterburg. All of this began again to tickle my voice. Old feelings and old yearnings began to awake in me. I began to sing to myself in a half-voice. And so, as I

hummed in the salon of the Kovalyevski's, there entered my future brother-in-law, Dubnikov, who understood a bit about music. Hearing my humming, he insisted that I sing something.

I did not long to be asked and sang the Russian romance, "*glyada na lutsh purpurnova zakata*" and when he was mightily pleased by that, I then sang "*azra*" by Rubinshteyn and "*didyatko*" (my child) by Dragozmizshki. As I sang my bride, too, entered, and at once I became far greater in their eyes. They somehow did not expect that this small-town fellow might sing so well, and in Russian, to boot.

And I became more important, as well, to myself after this unexpected musical debut in the home of my future father-in-law. I specifically felt that by emerging from the tail-end of Khonorod into the larger town, a new chapter in my life was opening up. I no longer thought of the engagement, of the joys I had been promised. I thought of only one thing: that I would finally arrive at that toward which I had secretly striven all those years, to my musical and *khazonish* career. May it even cost the price of a marriage without feelings and without love — it is all worth it. My inner strengths will finally emerge into the open and I would convince myself once and for all whether I am actually able to attain something creative and independent, or if all this is no more than a childish imagining from which one needs to free oneself as soon as possible.



## **My Brother's Death Disturbs My Wedding**

The sweet intermediate period at my bride's home was suddenly interrupted by news from my home that my elder brother Uziel had fallen ill suddenly and that I was to return home at once. Doctors were brought from Talna and from Uman and it appeared that my brother's health was beginning to improve. But that was only a dream. After a week's suffering, my brother died at a young age, leaving a wife and two children. He was talented and gifted, and in addition had a good baritone voice and was, generally, a deeply-musical person.

It is difficult to relate how heavily that disaster affected me and my parents. And the wedding season had already been agreed, because Fishl Kovalyevski was in a hurry, he had no time to spare — there were two other daughters waiting in line, and he wanted to finish off all three matches that winter before he went on to his next bankruptcy.

So he kept on bombarding my parents with letters demanding that, for the sake of God, the wedding be rushed up, while no one at our house was in a rush, and after our disaster, one's mind was hardly concentrated on carrying out a celebration.

In the meantime a letter from my bride arrived in which she invited me and my sister to come to visit them for a while. We went there, and while my sister spent her time mainly with my bride, I reviewed somewhat the business of my future father-in-law and saw many strange things that appeared significantly weird to my eyes.

I had noticed upon my arrival an unusual nervousness on the part of both Fishl Kovalyevski and his son-in-law, Dubnikov. They were always whispering, conferring, running from one storeroom to another. And on one fine day two Gentiles arrived, wearing cockades on their hats and carrying thick ledgers in their hands. They inspected the house and every piece of furniture. My future father-in-law and mother-in-law kept signing papers that the Gentiles presented to them.

When I, the naïve young fellow, asked the meaning of all these notations by the Gentiles, the reply was that an insurance policy was being issued. I accepted this as valid and placed no further queries.

Before the death of my brother, the in-laws had agreed, under pressure by Kovalyevski, that the wedding was to take place on the 14th of February. The year was then 1896. Fayvil the tailor had been sitting for weeks on end, sewing the trousseau; Tshornomoret's the cobbler had sewn especially shiny little boots and ankle-boots for the wedding, and Gnese the seamstress was sewing the shirts and nightgowns. The house was in a whirl over the preparations for the great event. And then, such a tragedy! Deep sorrow enveloped the house, and hands were no longer being raised to do anything; one's mind couldn't even think about celebrations.

But after the thirty-day mourning period a strong letter arrived from Kovalyevski, in which he absolutely insisted that the wedding take place on the agreed-upon date. He was prepared to make only one concession. As the tragedy left us unwilling to partake in a noisy celebration, therefore a quiet wedding should take place for a small gathering of relatives and close friends, and if we wish, he is even prepared to move the wedding from the big, noisy Elizavetgrad to a small *shtetl* nearby. He named the *shtetl* as Khmyelevoy, not far from a train station.

I now recall that wild station where my wedding took place. There were all of forty Jewish families living there, and there was, of course, no wedding hall, so the wedding took place at the home of the local *shoykhet* [kosher slaughterer], was also the wedding officiant. It was a frosty winter's day and we dragged on the sleighs for over twenty-four hours, wrapped in our sheepskin coats and blankets, until we reached the station.

As a pious young man I, of course, fasted on the wedding day. I was fed, therefore, with chapters of Psalms and other recitations provided by my uncle Isaiah, the military veteran, to whom my father had turned over supervision of me until I stood at the *khupe* [wedding canopy]. The same uncle led me to the *mikve* [ritual baths], though it was bitterly cold there, causing teeth to chatter, and I barely managed to emerge alive from there.

After the ritual bath there had already gathered at the *shoykhet's* a *minyem* [prayer quorum] of Jews, and my father put out cake and whiskey for them. A little later the relatives of the bride's side arrived. All the female relatives on my side immediately went out to greet the bride, and the men of the bride's side came to my *kaboles ponim* [welcoming].

My advanced-thinking brother-in-law, Dubnikov, actually wanted me to go greet the bride before her veiling, but my uncle Isaiah said “*loy!*” [emphatic Hebrew: no], there is no such custom among pious Jews, and I obeyed.

When the *badkhn* [wedding jester] began to recite his rhymes at the veiling and the *klezmerim* [musicians] began to play the traditional Yiddish *freylekhs* [happy tune] that is so heartily sad, my mother dissolved into bitter weeping, immediately joined by all the other female relatives. There was nothing to envy my mother for, as she had just recently buried her son, a father of children, and now she is required to bring sounds of joy from her heart upon bringing her other child to the *khupe*. The joy was wrapped in deep, unending sorrow, and with those mixed feelings my parents came to bless me at the *khupe*.

The *khupe* was placed outdoors, under the open sky, in a hoary frost. The cold bit into one's bones and the Jews who held the staves of the *khupe* had frozen fingers. But all survived. Uncle Isaiah kept close guard so that everything would be in full accordance with custom and law, according to accepted tradition, not deviating by a hair's breadth. When the wedding officiant began to read the *ksuve* [wedding contract] — it went on endlessly and people almost fainted because of the cold.

Finally we went into the house, which was the women's prayer-house, since it appeared that the *shoykhet's* house was too small to accommodate all the relatives.. Many window panes were broken out and we resumed shivering. So everyone sat down at the tables in their sheepskins and caracul hats on their heads. When the first *lekhayim* [toast] was made with the 96-proof whisky, the crowd warmed up a bit and finally achieved the true wedding feeling.

The *klezmerim* struck up a “*vivid*” [happy tune] in honor of bride and groom, then one in honor of the relatives, and things grew very lively. I cannot say, however, that I, the groom, felt that exultation and spirituality that a young person should feel on his wedding day. I sat at the head, next to the bride, and my mouth did not open to say a single word. Some sort of internal depression pressed on my heart and I felt very unfortunate. I did not hear the *badkhn's* jokes, I did not listen to the heartfelt Yiddish “bits” that the *klezmerim*, especially the flute, played so movingly, I even paid no attention to the “*mitsve tentsl*”

[celebratory dance] that the two mothers-in-law performed so piously, so that the match might be fortunate.

It was as though I were totally in a world of chaos. At the blessings, when the *shtetl's shoykhet* warbled “*mercy on the God of our people, Israel,*” I was jostled and awoke from my lethargy. In that “*mercy on*” there was much Jewish feeling and heartfelt pain, and it occurred to me that it was I who should be singing that bit of prayer; it would express my inner experience at that moment. And at the same time I had the thought that very soon, in the great city of Elizavetgrad, I’d be hearing great singers and *khazonim* and that my life would take a new turn. That thought cheered me up. I felt with all my senses that the day is approaching when all my deepest-buried dreams will come true.

When, therefore, the time arrived for taking farewell of my parents, of my childhood home, I was very encouraged. My mother, of course, shed bitter tears, but I consoled her with inner certainty that she would be hearing good news from me from afar, which would compensate her for all the pains she had suffered through me from the first moment when I had arrived in this world.

That was how I separated from my parents, who mounted the sleighs with heavy hearts and teary eyes. I and my young wife and my parents-in-law and the other relatives went off to the train, headed for my new home, Elizavetgrad.

## The Beginning of My Musical Career

It can be clearly said that my moving from Khonorod to Elizavetgrad marks the end of a new and very important chapter in my life. This was my emergence onto the broad swath of developing my inner strengths and of the true determination toward which I had had a calling from my earliest childhood. And here is how it came about.

The first *shabes* [Sabbath] arrived on which I, the young householder, went with my father-in-law and brothers-in-law to the Great Synagogue where, by custom, I was awarded the honor of reading *maftir* [the closing selection from the Prophets]. The *gabay* [lay leader] of this Great Synagogue was the brother of my father-in-law, Berl Kovalyevski; the *khazn* there was Mayer Pisak, who had previously been the chief tenor with Nisi Telzer.

Mayer Pisak stood [at the lectern] to chant “*shukhen ad.*” He had a very strong tenor voice and it was a joy to hear him. The choir sang the correct chords and responses, and its singing created true satisfaction. When they sang out “*titborekh*” and the first holy exaltation — my eyes lit up. A sweet warmth suffused all my body, my head spun and my fantasy began to work: “How would I have sung this little bit?”

When the *khazn* completed the Eighteen Benedictions and began “*eyn komokho*”, “*vehi bnoso*,” and delivered a recitative at “*brikh shema*” and “Hear, O Israel,” and the choir sang out “*lekh d’hagdula*” and then the *khazn* with the choir, “*ob harakhmim*” I reached such ecstasy that I actually began to float in some far off heavenly spheres. I thought only: “Master of the Universe, what joy it must be to possess such a wonderful voice!”

At that time I didn’t have the slightest idea of what sort of voice I myself possessed. I did not yet the flexibility and softness of my voice and did not know what sort of richnesses are hidden in me. But this was the first time in my life that I was able to imbibe until sating so much hearty Jewish melody at one time. I was simply intoxicated by the sounds and united with them to the extent that I began to believe that it was I singing with the choir.

During the conclusion of the Torah reading I looked over the Psalms section, going through it with its rhythm, as I used to do it in my boyhood years in our *shtetl*. When I was called up for the *maftir*, and when, from the women’s gallery, nuts and raisins began to rain on me and the *kheyder*-boys came dashing up to the pulpit to gather up all those sweetnesses — I began hopefully and courageously to recite the blessings with the characteristic melody.

Suddenly, one could note in the synagogue a strange attentiveness and wonderment. During the last benedictions after the Psalms, at *rakhim al tsiyon*” I performed several coloraturas and I noticed there was stirring going on in the synagogue. Jews are whispering to each other, telling secrets in their ears. When I finished the great amazement awaited me. the *gabay* approached and, wishing me *mazltov*, he says that in the name of the congregants he asks that I lead the *musif* [supplementary Sabbath morning prayers].

I was completely lost. First, I say, you have such a wonderful *khazn* and such a great choir; secondly, this is the first time in my life being in such a great synagogue and my stage fright won’t allow my mouth to open; and, third, where in general did you get the idea that I, the young householder who hasn’t yet

properly warmed up my pew in this synagogue, can lead the *musif* — how are you certain that I won't shame you?

At this point the main-*gabay*, Berl Kovalyevzski, intervened, pointing to a Jew standing wrapped in a large *talis* [prayer shawl]. “That Jew there is from your town and he is a good witness to the fact that you can pray the *musif*. So don't wait to be asked and go up to the pulpit.”

The Jew was Fulye (Raphael), the drayman of Khonorod who had blundered into Elizavetgrad of a Sabbath. In reply to my argument that it would be an insult the Mayer the *khazn*, the cantor himself came up and assured me that it would not, heavens preserve us, be any sort of an insult to him. And again, as it is said in the Holy Writings, “**mikol mlamdi haskolati**”, even from a young fellow who has just arrived in town to eat as a guest at his in-laws' table...

When I glanced over at my father-in-law I saw that he had turned green-and-yellow through fear that his son-in-law might have a failure and would shame him in the eyes of the congregation. At this point my ego arose and I wanted to calmly assure that Jew that his fears are unfounded.

I loudly proclaimed *yakum purkon* [opening and name of two Sabbath morning blessings]. The *khazn* at once turned over to me the choir that accompanied me very tastefully. This warmed me up greatly and I went off praying, weaving into it the coloratura that I never lacked.

This was my first *khazonish* appearance with a wonderfully trained choir that, though I was a stranger to it, immediately latched on to all my nuances and followed me step by step, as though we were a long-existing totality. The effect was extraordinary. The dead silence in the synagogue gave evidence of that. And, in addition, a singer feels when he is heard and how he is heard. It was enough to glance at the face of my father-in-law, as his human coloring returned to him and a rosy smile spread across his face, to know that I had not shamed him.

The first to approach me after the *musif* was Mayer the *khazn*. His admiration was for me the greatest experience of that Sabbath. I felt very complimented that so splendid a singer had so many good words to say about me. My father-in-law received more than a few congratulations for having managed to bring such an “*antik* [rarity]” into his family.

When we left the synagogue and met the women who had descended from the [segregated] women's balcony, a new chapter of congratulations began. My young wife was very proud that everyone had congratulated her on my fine praying. Too, at the great *kidush* [Sabbath celebration] at the home of my in-laws there was no end to the talk about the important and entirely unexpected happening in the synagogue.

Today, so many years later, when I look back at that first Sabbath in Elizavetgrad and at my first independent appearance ‘before all the people and congregation,’ I see what a tremendous turning point in my life that was. I can say that this was the first joyful day in my life. I began to believe in my strengths and abilities. I felt more secure and encouraged in terms of the future that awaited me.

My brother-in-law, Dubnikov, who was incidentally just a “person” [employee] in his father-in-law's business, nevertheless had a certain musical feeling, and after my *musif* praying, he began to hang around near me, and I grew tremendously in his eyes. He dragged me and my wife along the principal “main street” where all the passers-by stared into our eyes and wanted to see the prodigy that Fishl Kovalyevski had brought into town and who had caused such an uproar in the synagogue today.

All that Sabbath day-long until late at night the door never closed at my father-in-law's house. At Sabbath nightfall, relatives began bringing wedding gifts; they fawned on me. I, the small-town young man, lacking education and even the ability to speak Russian well as do, for example, the first best employees in the large enterprises of Elizavetgrad — suddenly grew to a tremendous height that neither I nor anyone around me could anticipate where it might lead.

## Musical Education

Having completed the Seven Blessings and overjoyed by the success of my first *khazonish* appearance in the new city, the ordinary weekdays arrived. By formality, I was a guest at my father-in-law's. But from the very first day I wanted to transmit the feeling that I plan to earn my living on my own. I exerted all my strength to make myself useful in my father-in-law's business and, by my work, to justify the expenditures required for the support of myself and my wife.

As I was no stranger to the manufacturing branch, I immediately joined the work in the business as a craftsman. I began to examine every piece of merchandise filling the shelves of the huge enterprise. I worked ceaselessly until late at night. It did not take long for me to discover that there was no shortage of "*bovel* [cotton]" (which means useless materials) stored on the shelves and this is only a weight on the business, because notes are issued against materials that can never be sold.

Once I gathered up my courage and told my father-in-law that, in the future, in ordering merchandise from the traveling salesmen coming from Lodz and from Bialystok, from Moscow and from Kharkov, one must be very careful; one must choose only among the certified samples, rather than all that the clever salespeople offer and convince one to buy.

*Nu, nu*, I'd invited trouble with my innocent comment. Just as a drunk doesn't recognize bad liquor, so a merchant does not know what is at risk in "regulating" his debts made up of bad merchandise. Everything is saleable...it's not paid for, but covered by promissory notes; so what might be bad? And he dunked a pail of cold water on me, saying that in time I would come to understand the difference between a small-town storekeeper and a big city merchant. I kept silent and went on with my work.

On the next Sabbath I went to the Great Synagogue with my brother-in-law Dubnikov to hear the other *khazn*, Yankif Shnirman. He was a man in his sixties but his voice still resounded well and warmly. His health was weak and it was said that he would soon retire. Shnirman had already heard of the *musif* I had sung in the Great Synagogue the previous Sabbath, so, after prayers, he asked me to sing something for him. I sang "*takonis shabes*" and "*ahave rabe*."

I was deeply moved by how this prominent *khazn* embraced me and called me "colleague." "You are still a young man," he said [in the polite voice] "but you have already fully earned the title of *khazn*. Your pronunciation of the words, your clear articulation and, most of all, your powerful vocal organ, give you that right. I can clearly say that you will someday be one of the greatest *khazonim* among Jews. You will not have to exert yourself to please that Jew. When you only stand at the pulpit and proclaim the clear words of the prayers, simply reciting them, that will be enough to elicit exultation among your listeners. That is the power of your clear voice. Especially if you study a bit and train your voice — you can become not only a famous *khazn* but also one of the greatest opera singers."

I need not add how sweetly those words rang in my ears. It had been my most deeply hidden dream to hear such words; I had dreamt of this in all the years I wasted as an employee in my father's dry goods store in that muddy provincial *shtetl*. Is all that *khazn* Shnirman said not true? Am I actually standing on the threshold of a great musical career?

My head began to swirl and my brother-in-law, Dubnikov, who was listening to Shnirman's words, took me by the hand and led me out of the Great Synagogue. On the way home he said to me: "You

know, Zinovye (that was how they then Russified my kosher Jewish name, Zebulon), the words of our *khazn*, Yankif, registered well in my mind; I should like to help you to actually begin studying music now. It has occurred to me that the same *khazn* Shnirman has a son, a piano graduate of the Peterburg Conservatory, He actually gives music lessons in our town. Tomorrow, The Name willing, we will call him and learn what he might do for you.”

My brother-in-law, a capable trader in our father-in-law’s business, appeared to me at that moment as a true messianic angel. His words affected me like sweet balsam. If I had not been ashamed of myself I would’ve embraced and kissed him. He appeared to me to be the only person who shares what is going on in my heart.

The next morning, on Sunday, the young Shnirman was already at our house. We decided that he would teach me to play the piano and singing four times a week. It will sound strange, but this was the first time I laid eyes on a keyboard. At the very first lesson he tested my hearing. He played various chords, passages, both ordinary and chromatic, and told me to sing them. He was amazed that I made almost no mistakes.

The young Shnirman was a fine musician and, after the lesson, he asks me to sing some aria or a ballad, if I can. I sang “Azra” by Rubinshteyn and a ballad by Tchaikovsky, “*gasnut dalnye alpukhari*.” He greatly praised my coloratura and the clearness of my voice. His imperative advice was that I not lose any time and take to an intensive further training of my voice. For this purpose he recommended a special singing-teacher, a former opera singer, a certain Anna Pavlovna Bromberg.

My brother-in-law, Dubnikov, again came to my aid and we arranged a meeting with that teacher. She was an elder gentlewoman who, in her day, was known in the Peterburg salons as a famous singer. When the times of her successful opera appearances had passed, she retired to the provinces and took up teaching singing. She excelled in her fine taste, and when she heard my voice for the first time she was full of praise and she even undertook, within the course of a few months, to prepare me for a public concert in the Russian-aristocratic “Dvoryansky Club”...

Now my head was totally confused. My entire presence was stuck in a tiny *shtetl* with its pious Jewish mores and customs; the vision of my strict parents and of all the God-fearing aunts and uncles accompanied me at every step. My ears still echoed to my father’s farewell warning that I must, in His Name, tread the Jewish road and not shame my ancestors. And here comes the first temptation: the Khonorod young man, who emerged from his nest just weeks earlier, should appear before Gentiles, generals and officials of the Elizavetgrad aristocracy, gathered in the “Dvoryansky Club!” My eyes were well dazzled and I could not begin to understand how I might deal with this new role that had been placed before me.



## A General Invites Me To Sing

My music [*sic*] teacher, Anna Pavlovna Bromberg, was an involved pot-stirrer in the social circles, both Jewish and Russian, of the city of Elizavetgrad. She knew what was cooking in everyone's pot and was involved in all the performances, concerts and theater presentations that were held, as in all the larger Russian cities, for charitable purposes. Not a thing was done without her; everywhere she was the honored in-law; she was the main organizer of all the social celebrations in town.

Wherever this Anna Pavlovna Bromberg came — and she came to all the prominent houses in town — she considered it her obligation to tell about her new student who is unusually good, of whom the world will resound. And until the wide world begins to resound with me, she advised the city's social activists to meanwhile utilize my unusually strong voice to raise funds for their institutions.

Once, when I was just standing at my father-in-law's dry goods store, arguing with a customer, my brother-in-law, Dubnikov, comes to me and tells me that a Russian general and two gentlewomen were asking about Kovalyevsi's son-in-law, Kwartin. My hands and feet began to tremble. A general is asking about me? What do I have in common with a Russian general? Perhaps this is a carryover from my appearance before the draft board and I'm being called again to serve *Fonye*? And, chiefly, how does one speak with a general — I've never seen a general before my eyes until now.

But there is nothing for it, one mustn't show oneself as a small town twerp, and when called one must go. With a beating heart and swirling brain I approached the highly-placed guests that had deigned to come to my father-in-law's store. It was well that my brother-in-law stood nearby; otherwise I'd have been completely lost in this unexpected encounter.

Dubnikov already knew that one must address a general as "*vasha prevoskhoditelstvo*," [?your honor]. I myself hadn't the slightest idea of what the word meant. He introduced me to them, the general presses my hand and says: "I am very pleased to inform you that Anna Pavlovna has told us about your fine voice, and since we are arranging a major concert on behalf of the Russian Red Cross, we would implore you to participate in that concert."

My fluster over the invitation was so profound that I did not understand that one could not refuse such a thing, one must give thanks for the great honor that is given by the invitation and quickly accept it. Instead of that, I said that I am very proud (not of the invitation), but that Anna Pavlovna has so high a regard for my voice and that I will consult with her about my program for the concert, and if she will allow it, I will quickly inform the general.

Only later did I realize that such an answer was rude enough, and I sought to correct the bad impression. At the next lesson with Anna Pavlovna she began to prepare my program for the concert, and after the program was put together, I went to the chancellery of the general, who was the commander of the city garrison, and asked that the general be informed that I accept the invitation with pleasure.

The rehearsals and preparations for the concert went on for months, as it was to be the greatest event in the social life of the city. Anna Pavlovna knew well that the greatest Russian figures in town would be on hand, and she devoted her greatest energies to prepare me properly, because my success would certainly be her success.

The program of my first public appearance was to consist of the following numbers: the aria of Lord Sinadal from the opera “Demon” by Rubinshteyn; Valentin’s aria from “Faust” by Gounod; “Azra” by Rubinshteyn; “Didyatko” by Dargomyzhski; the ballad “*gladya na lutsh purpurnavo zakata*”; “Sharmanshtshik” by Schubert; “A Lullaby” by Gounod; “At the Rousing Ball” by Tchaikovsky, and “Evening” by Monyushko.

As can be seen from the overloaded program, I did not lack for work to learn all this by heart and in the proper Russian accent, rather than in the half-Ukrainian that I had brought along from my *shtetl*. Believe me, I was not to be envied. When I stood at my father-in-law’s store, I no longer thought about the customers, but I kept memorizing the difficult words of the arias and ballads.

In addition, at that time I was behind in learning how to read scores. That means that I simply had to commit both the melodies and the lyrics to memory. I must also note that the program included numbers both for a tenor-voice and for a baritone. By the high, middle and lower tones of my voice, I was able to achieve both of these types of singing. My teacher came to that conclusion after studying the program over the course of some four months.

I was in a fever over this first public appearance that awaited me. But at the same time I noticed that my young wife did not participate at all in my experience. For her, the entire thing had not the slightest import; she went about pouting, as though she was entirely unhappy with this new career that had begun to develop for me.

I was very upset about this and it weakened my urge to go on with my musical education and even more to further my voice. This also greatly disturbed the preparations for the great concert which the entire city awaited. But there could be no retreat and with all my strength I overcame all the psychological disruptions and arrived at the day of my public appearance.

This was on the First of June, 1896. The “Dvoryansky Club” in Elizavetgrad was packed with military men, judges, officials of the entire Russian elite of the city. At the front, on a specially raised chair, sat the Grand Official, the person who embodied the highest Russian power in town. As to Jews, there were only my entire family and a few other prominent families who were in business contact with the Russian world.

I am not capable of describing what took place in my heart before I was to go out onto the stage. Everything in me sobbed in fear that I might fail, that I might forget all that I had so energetically and tortuously memorized. I remember that I even vomited because of the great emotional strain, but the good Anna Pavlovna calmed me and said that this was still better for the voice: it would sound more purely and clearly.

Half-consciously I went onto the stage and when I heard the first chords of the piano, played by my teacher, Anna Pavlovna, I immediately came to. I no longer saw the hall with all its high-placed people; I became completely absorbed in myself and began to sing. I was myself amazed at how my voice rang out like a mighty bell, clean, pure and beautiful.

I went into a trance and, from number to number I grew more sure of myself. At the end of the first half I was deafened by a storm of applause. But I myself was as in a purgatory; I was totally disinterested in the huge enthusiasm that ruled in the hall. I was more interested in singing further, never ending my

singing, so captivated was I by the basic task of my music. It was like a thirsty wanderer getting to a well, drinking and drinking without being sated.

I completed the second half with the same fire. I was greeted from all sides, thanked and had my hands pressed, but I felt that in truth I had myself more to thank. If the people were to know how exalted I felt, how my heart beat subconsciously in me for having finally entered the proper path, that I had finally lived to achieve the realization of my most intimate ambitions — and all this is thanks to the opportunity I was given to test my strengths, then they would know that I owe them more than they me for the concert that I had given for a charitable purpose.

## **Famous Artists Assess My Voice**

The happenings at my father-in-law's house after the concert at the "Dvoryansky Club" are very hard to describe. The Gentiles were, themselves, delighted, and praised the Kovalyevskis' young son-in-law. What greater praise can there be among well-to-do Jews than the verdict by "officialdom" that all is good?

Everyone was delighted, except my wife. I could not at all understand why she did not participate in the slightest in my great joy, as though the whole thing was none of her concern. By contrast, my brother-in-law Dubnikov participated in my success as an actual brother. Somehow he intuited that my singing grows far over the borders of the provincial city and that some sort of rich future awaits me, and he exerted himself to be a co-participant in that future.

A week after my concert my brother-in-law, Dubnikov, comes to me and says: "You know, Zinovya, since I'm going to Kharkov in a few days to buy merchandise, it has occurred to me that you should come with me. In Kharkov there are several well-known music professors and opera-artists from the Peterburg opera who are now on tour there. It would be well if they were to audition your voice and advise about which roads you should pursue."

He was truly interested in my continuation of music studies and he himself wanted to hear what such famous artists as Medvedyev, Tartakov and Vinogradov might have to say about a voice such as mine. I seized his offer with both hands. First, my own heart yearned to know the assessment by great singers of my "instrument," and along with that I thought that if nothing comes of my delusions about singing, let me at least know what doors could be opened in the big city where merchandise is bought, in case I might someday need to become an independent dry goods merchant.

We traveled to Kharkov and as soon as my brother-in-law had completed his business affairs, he made the first visit with me to the well-known voice professor Everardi, an Italian who spoke broken Russian. We waited a bit in his studio, and when he had completed teaching his class he was ready to audition me. He played a tenor scale on the keyboard and I sang along. Then he played several chromatic scales and chords to test my ear.

I sang for him several of the numbers from my recent concert in Elizavetgrad and the elder professor stared at me. "Where have you been until now?" he asked in wonderment. Why am I coming to him only now? Why am I not studying? He is ready to teach me without a penny's fee because he is certain of the glorious future that awaits me.

My brother-in-law, the tradesman, who measures everything by its monetary value, replies to the professor that since I am by now an independent trader and have an income of some five-six thousand rubles a year from my business, he wants to hear the professor's opinion as to whether it is worth abandoning an accomplished thing that bears certain income in favor of an entirely new road of music studies that would demand long years of hard work.

To which the professor replied that there cannot be a better future for a person than to develop his inborn talents, and that for the young man standing here before him there awaits the most beautiful career of a first-class opera and concert singer, which, even if one were to translate it into monetary terms,

would be worth far more than he now draws from his business. But the most important thing is not the great earnings, but the profound inner satisfaction of the person having attained his destiny, that he is developing all his hidden strengths for his own joyful pride and for the joy of his fellow-humans.

When my brother-in-law heard such words, that my voice is worth money, I became still more prominent in his eyes. He almost didn't hear the professor's last words, asking that I be left with him for a year's time, that he would teach me without cost and that he would even wrangle for me "*provozhitelstvo*" (permission for Jews to live outside the Pale of Settlement), so that I might be his pupil. He quickly refused [immediate agreement] and promised that we would let him know what we had decided.

On that same day we also went to see the famous opera artist Medvedyev, that very same Mayerl Medvedyev, the little son of the Rakitne rabbi, about whom my father had told me that he was a convert, in order to frighten me away from a singer's career. Here we were met by a doorman who absolutely refused to let us meet with the singer, insisting that we had to first send him a letter stating our request. Dubnikov understood that such cases might be helped by a ruble placed in the doorman's hand, and so it was.

The doorman announced that people who had come from a distant city urgently needed to see the great singer. We were immediately ushered into his office. Here, too, the *rosh ha'midabrim* [chief of words, spokesman] was Dubnikov, who explained why we had come. Medvedyev measured me with his eyes. Perhaps I reminded him of his own childhood, how he had wandered with his voice to various *khazonim* and singers to have them audition him and express their expertise.

He immediately sat down at the keyboard, struck several chords and asked that I sing along. I felt before whom I stood; I recalled my father's story about Mayerl of Rakitne, and resounding, bright notes poured from my throat. Medvedyev said nothing, but ran over to the bell pull-cord. When the doorman entered, he was asked to request the duchess to be so good as to come down to his room.

Before the duchess appeared, I sang "Azra" and the aria from "Damon" that I had sung at the Elizavetgrad concert. As I sang there appeared on the threshold the duchess, a middle-aged woman with many aspects of aristocratic beauty on her face. She applauded me, wished me much joy in my musical career, and left the room.

Dubnikov, the trader, again wanted to calculate how much my voice is worth in rubles. So he told Medvedyev the same story as he had earlier told professor Everardi: that I am a rich trader, earn fistfuls of rubles per year, and now the question arises whether it pays to abandon such a golden business and waste several years on studying singing and to begin a new career the result of which can't be known.

Medvedyev was livid with anger and assaulted Dubnikov in these words: "Why are you babbling about your business dealings? In the voice of this young man are hidden more millions than you own or will ever own through all your businesses. I can assure you that in the course of three-four years he will be the first tenor in the Peterburg Royal Marine Opera. All of Russia will resound with him. And if you really want to know how much money he will earn, I can assure you that it will be no less than fifty thousand rubles per year."

And calming down a bit from his fervor, he went on: "But who thinks about money at such a moment — this is a pearl, a gift from God that appears so infrequently before people. And it is only the duty of

that blessed one, who was gifted with such a voice, to develop it properly for his own satisfaction and for the great joy of all humanity.”

Medvedyev, who had been caught up in his great enthusiasm, went on [addressing in the polite form]:

“My proposal to you, young man, is that you should remain here with us in Kharkov. I am ready to devote my free time to you and to share with you the rich experience that I have gained in all the years of my career. Later I will take you to Peterburg and will see to it that you enter the Royal Conservatory. I will see to it that it will not cost you any money, and should you need a stipend [in English:] (scholarship) you will receive it, as well. But study! It would be the greatest sin if you were not to further train that voice, until you bring it to its greatest fulfillment! The only thing I request of you is that you consider yourself to be my pupil, which I would consider the greatest honor for myself!”

So spoke the great artist Medvedyev, the one-time Rikitne little boy Mayerl, the son of the local rabbi who wanted with all his senses to rescue another Jewish talent from being lost in the narrow Jewish streets where so many Jewish talents had been frittered away and where everything is traded for practical results, for golden rubles. We could feel his feverishness in his speech, how he really honestly wants to reveal my buried abilities. As he himself had abandoned Jewishness, he also bound my future to the opera.

Dubnikov totally lost his speech, hearing such flaming words by the artist who was then famous in all of Russia. Tugging at my coattail, he barely grunted that as soon we returned home we would think over the plan he had proposed to us and would let him know at once. Meanwhile, we both thanked him for the interest he had shown to us and for the dear time he had devoted to us. And, over-filled with joy, we left Medvedyev’s office.

## The Baritone Vinogradov Correctly Diagnoses My Career

Two such visits, with a famous Italian singing professor and with the opera singer Medvedyev, with whom Russia was by then resounding, might have been sufficient even for someone so avid for good tidings about me as was my brother-in-law Dubnikov. But his appetite was beyond sating; everything was not enough for him, and upon leaving Medvedyev he insisted that, as we are in Kharkov and it is where one could find the famous baritone Vinogradov — we should arrange a visit with him, as well, to hear what he might have to say about my voice.

I cannot deny that, as any person, I was also not sated and wanted to hear more and more good tidings about me, and I eagerly agreed that, before leaving for home, we should also visit Vinogradov. Here there could at once be felt quite a different atmosphere. We were greeted at the door not by a doorman in a uniform with silver stripes on his pants, but by a simple Ukrainian serving-girl, and in the corridor we encountered Vinogradov himself, who asked us quite courteously what we require.

Vinogradov was and remained a hearty Jew with a trembling Jewish soul. It was even said that he was a pious Jew who dons phylacteries every day, but I cannot say how closely this adhered to the truth. From the first word we said to him, we felt a strange kind of homespun heartiness, as though we were visiting a close relative who is bound up with your entire family and who will right away begin asking after every uncle and every aunt in turn.

He, too, sat down at the keyboard and told me to sing something, and one could see that he listens in great earnestness and deep thought. He did not start throwing around [talk of] operas and conservatories and the golden joys awaiting me as soon as I emerged into the broad Gentile world. His first word was to ask the *shtetl* from which I came, and then he asked me to tell him something about my life, what I had been doing until now and in what sort of environment I had grown up.

A different approach was quickly apparent and quite a different sort of interest in the Jewish young man who appears before him. When I told him everything, he asks me whether I had ever heard a good *khazn* in my *shtetl*. So I recalled Getsl the *khazn* of Balta who had appeared in our *shtetl* when I was yet a small child, and the last two good *khazonim* that I'd had the opportunity to hear in Elizavetgrad.

Then Vinogradov asks me if I were willing to sing some bit of *khazones* for him. At this, I felt my heart grow warmer. I felt quite at home and went off singing a bit of “*tsur yisroyl*” [Rock of Israel] which virtually kept me alive. I was tired by then of singing the foreign, memorized Gentile words over which I had to break my teeth, and I was yearning for a home-grown, hearty Jewish melody. And when the famous opera singer asked me to sing something from our own home-grown treasures — I could not believe my ears.

And after “*tsur ysroyl*” I began to serve up more and more. I warmed up and flared up at the old source from which I drank from my earliest childhood. I did not spare the coloratura and reached quite high notes. Vinogradov remained earnest and reserved and did not let fall a superfluous word.

When I finished, he sat me down next to him on the sofa and said in a soft voice: “It is true, young man, that your voice is exceptionally attractive, your ear is good and you have all that a good voice needs for its development. But, according to the description you provided of your home and of the education

you received, I do not believe that you need to seek your future on the boards of the opera or of the concert stage. All your roots are embedded in the rich earth of your home-town *shtetl* in the generations-long foundations of the Jewish lifestyle; that is where you should seek your future, that's where you belong."

And Vinogradov continued in his soft voice: "Do not let yourself be captured by the outer luster and glare of big-city theater life. Everything there is lustrous and glaring only on the surface; inside, though, everything is rotted and permeated by filth. There is no heart and no soul in all those successes that people achieve there. I'm not even speaking about the fact that a true Jew loses himself there entirely, and quite often he is simply driven to deny his heritage and to reject his faith. But simply a genteel person, not a Jew, cannot abide the unbounded intrigues and slyness that is so rife in theater and opera life.

"I myself, as you see me here," Vinogradov continued, "endured enough dangers until I managed to retain my Jewish face and to remain who I was at my parents' home. You know, of course, that we live in Russia, where for even the greatest of talents, if he is a Jew, all doors are barred against his breaking through even with his own head. And should you manage to become a famous opera singer, not having paid for it with your faith, you will be surrounded by so much envy and hatred that you tire of your life. The minor singers do not begrudge you your success and they exert themselves to embitter your life. You are slandered and bespattered behind your back so that all your life you have to explain yourself to someone, to excuse yourself for living in this world.

"No, my dear young man, you are too honest and innocent a person to go down into the abyss of filth and envy. I see a better road for you, a road that reflects your education and your mood, and which will certainly provide more spiritual contentment than the opera road. With your voice and coloratura you could become one of the greatest cantors among the Jews. It will be far more noteworthy for you, in the spirit of your tradition, and it will provide the fullest opportunity to develop your inborn, highly gifted abilities no less than the opera."

Thus for a long time spoke to me and my brother-in-law the famous baritone Vinogradov. These were quite different words than those that we had earlier heard from Medvedyev. Thus spoke a Jew with a pained Jewish heart who had endured much because he did not wish to trade away the golden coin of Jewishness and who wanted to prevent another young man from going down the painful road that he had trod.

I remembered for many long years those heartfelt words that Vinogradov spoke to me then in Kharkov. Many years later, when we met in New York and later in the Land of Israel, I reminded Vinogradov of those words that he had spoken to me some thirty years earlier. I told him — this was quite soon before his death — that he has a large part in the fact that my life took that road rather than another. It can be firmly said that his words in Kharkov caused a profound upheaval in me. I had begun to understand my father, who had so stubbornly, in the course of so many years, held me back from going alone into the world to seek my fortune. There was sense in keeping me from adventures, in the desire to keep me at my roots and through that generations-old heritage to gain strength and inspiration for a creative life.

Deeply moved, we quickly bade farewell to Vinogradov and, the next morning, rode off to Elizavetgrad.



## An Uncle Who Opposes My Cantorial Career

Upon returning home after having heard such sweet talk, you'd think it would've been good, that it must by now be clear to everyone the direction my future must take and what needs to begin to be done — but no way. I was again at the very beginning, I had to fight for my path, and it did not come easily to me. There was only one difference: before, it was my parents who intervened and kept me bound to their coattails; now it was my father- and mother-in-law and all their hangers-on except, of course, my brother-in-law Dubnikov, whom I will always recall gratefully.

The very evening after our return from Kharkov, we all sat around the family table and Dubnikov retold in full detail what the professors and great singers had said of me. Dubnikov concluded that, in his opinion, I had to go off to Kiev or Odessa to continue my singing studies there. It was not to be seen at the table that my father- and mother-in-law, or even my own wife, were particularly enthusiastic about that idea. One could more easily read on their faces: a person has talked himself into madness and there's nothing to be done!

But in order to not completely cut off my wings, it was decided to summon my father from Khonorov and then everyone would consult on what was to be done. Meanwhile, Dubnikov was to travel to Kiev to buy merchandise, so he invited me to accompany him and we would also see some musical personages there and hear out their advice.

In Kiev I visited Professor Fine-Mathias and the singing instructor at the conservatory there, Blumenfeld. They added absolutely nothing to what we had heard in Kharkov. It was all the same: one must study and I would grow to be something indescribable. In the evening we visited the opera, where they were performing "Damon." I must say that I was not particularly impressed by the voices I heard. The acting also failed to make a strong impression on me, perhaps because I was still quite weak in Russian and did not understand it all.

At the same time the visit to Kiev strengthened me still more in the conviction that this is my road: to study and develop my voice. For the first time I felt a resolve and stubbornness in myself not to allow myself to be driven off that path. And it was with that resolute decision that I determined to meet my father who was to come to the family consultation at the home of my father-in-law.

This was quite a strange family council and I must digress about it a little. The Principal Spokesman of the Convocation was my wife's uncle, Berl Kovalyevski, who was, as I've mentioned in an earlier chapter, the main *gabay* [administrator] of the Great Synagogue in Elizavetgrad. He was a rich Jew and one who demanded obedience. Short in height, he nevertheless weighed about three hundred pounds, so that he could barely move. He spent most of the day sitting in a special chair that had been custom-made for him, drinking tea from a samovar in a special glass that was as large as the biblical King Og of Bashan...

Other than the labor of tea-drinking, he practiced another craft: computing to the last penny the percent of interest owed to him by the Jews in town for the money he had lent them. His greatest debtor was his own brother, Fishl, who was always in need of interest-free debt. But since Jews did not compete in giving him interest-free loans due to his frequent bankruptcies, he had to resort to borrowing at a percentage and from his own brother, to boot.

He [*i.e.*, Berl] was a thick-skinned Jew whose like was rarely to be found even in the conditions of ancient small-*shtetl* life. But my father-in-law was very dependent upon him and therefore he had to consider his opinion even in family matters. It was that uncle who issued the decree against my dedication to a cantorial career.

His argument was that I'm involving myself in foolishness. It would be far better to get serious about business and to become a good merchant. And in order to drive the desire for *khazones* out of me, he cited examples from his practice as the *gabay* of the synagogue. There are always conflicts among the *khazonim* and their assistants; they're somehow less than human, he concluded.

And besides that, what sort of an outcome is it for an honorable person to become a *khazn*, over whom every *gabay* or just a householder in the synagogue has some power and considers him to be his personal servant? Such a *khazn* is never certain of his income in the event he quarrels with the *gabay* over some minor issue — the latter can show him the door. A *khazn*, he continued, must be insolent, with sharp elbows, lest the entire community rule over him. "And you, my nephew, come from a genteel home. this is no livelihood for you. That business will not work out for you. So my advice is that you follow the path that your parents and ancestors trod. None of them was a *khazn*, but honest and honorable dry-goods merchants; so you, too, should become a dry-goods merchant, and I hope that you will succeed, if The Name wills it."

Thus uncle Berl finished his preaching and one could see that everyone present at the family council was nodding in agreement. I became very angry at hearing those words. But I felt that anger would accomplish nothing here, so I adopted a sentimental tone and asked my assembled family what I should do with the extraordinary bounty with which nature or Providence had endowed me? Do I have the right to toss it aside? This is, after all, a fortune that even Rothschild himself could not buy with all his millions. Here, after all, was my brother-on-law Dubnikov, with me at all the greatest experts in Kharkov and Kiev, and let him relate what they said. And I concluded that I am firmly decided upon going on my own path and that I will no longer let myself be diverted from it. I have already lost enough time. I ask only one thing of my family: that they not hinder me. Should you wish to help me — I will certainly be thankful to you for my whole life.

Uncle Berl stood up, insulted, and left without a farewell. The only one who stood at my side this time was my father. He agreed that I should go off to Odessa to study with the famous conductor Novakovski. In addition, I would have the opportunity there to hear the world-famous *khazn* Pinye Minkovski and others. The ice moved and I stood facing a new epoch in my life.

The question arose as to whether my wife, who was already far into her first pregnancy, should accompany me. I was entirely in favor, although my wife showed no great desire to leave her parents' house in that condition and to travel an unfamiliar road, where unlimited temptations awaited us. Still, the thought that the family should not be torn apart ruled and the day of our departure was decided. My good brother-in-law, Dubnikov, also volunteered to be our trip companion.

Thus, in my twenty-second year of life, I finally achieved that which had been my most intimate goal since my earliest childhood. I found sufficient strength in myself to tear out of the chains with which others had wanted to bind my inborn abilities and aspirations. I felt that I am going toward my future, that a great event was taking place in my life.

## My First Visit With Cantor Pinye Minkovski in Odessa

So it was that I, an inexperienced young fellow, with a wife and a first child on its way, arrived in the big city of Odessa to find the key to my joy and future career. Where does a young man go, who wants to be a *khazn*, if not to the world famous cantor of that time, to Pinye Minkovski?

I could not, understandably, imagine the bitter disillusion that awaited me at this first visit with the greatest genius of *khazones* at that time. But let us describe it contemporaneously, as it happened. When we rang the bell at Minkovski's door, we were met by a large dog with a dramatically bass voice. I was quickly seized by fear. In our *shtetl* I never imagined that a dog would welcome a new person at the home of Jewish *khazn*...

Behind the dog, at the crack of the door, there appeared the face of the Christian housemaid, who questioned us suspiciously and left us standing there for long minutes. Finally, Minkovski came out and led us into his office. I poured out my entire heart to him and told him the reason for my coming, that I want to be a *khazn* for Jews and that I want him to hear my voice and to advise me on what I should undertake.

I cannot say that the reception I received from the greatest liturgical authority of that time was encouraging. To the contrary, he poured cold water on me and again I stood there, lost. He sat down at the keyboard and played several chords. I followed them correctly. Then he asked me to sing something *khazonish*. As I sang I noticed his expression changing, but I couldn't determine exactly what it meant, if it was enthusiasm or some other reaction.

When I had finished, he said to me: "Young man, you have a very fine voice, but it would be a great sin if you were to devote that voice to *khazones*. What sort of an outcome is it for a young person to become a *khazn* for Jews? It is a thankless occupation and there is no lack of *khazonim* for Jews. What there is a lack of — is jobs for existing *khazonim*. You have the best of chances to become one of the finest opera singers; this is a far more honorable career for a young man such as you. And as to teaching — I don't engage in that, but I will direct you to someone who can be of help."

That was the welcome I received from Pinye Minkovski, from the genius who I hoped would be the one to warm and enthrill me and give me added spirit to meet all the obstacles that were still awaiting me.

This strange attitude toward a young person, of whose talent he had been convinced, was a riddle for me for a long time. One must remember that Pinye Minkovski was not only the most noted cantor for Jews at that time, but he was truly the most learned in his field. In the knowledge of music, in Jewish liturgy, both traditional and modern, he had no equal. In addition, he was a great Talmud expert, and as to income, he was assured for the rest of his life. He had the best life-long position. So where did he get such a denigrating attitude toward a beginner who was helplessly asking his counsel about how to go toward his future?

By simple logic, Minkovski should have been overjoyed that young forces were coming into the field of Jewish *khazones*. Instead, he pushed me off roughly and sent me to the Gentiles, to the opera sets which the artist Vinogradov had so sharply denoted as a net of filth that leads finally to desertion of one's

own people. I could explain it only in the remnants in him of the small-*shtetl* assistant's non-forgiving sense that in no way matched the high position that he had already achieved in public Jewish life.

But I understood this all only many years later when I myself entered the "line of business" and learned of everything behind the scenes. In that moment, however, when I heard those bitter words from Minkovski, I stood there broken and disillusioned. I could not hear all the advice he began to give me, his recommendation to a certain woman music teacher named Vasilenko, who would take me through all the a-b-c's, like: solfeggio, harmony, music theory. I quickly bade him farewell and left.

The next day I went with my brother-in-law to the famous choral conductor Novakovski. The visit with that excellent musician restored my spirits; I again became hopeful in myself and full of belief that I am still on the right path. When I told him what Minkovski had said to me the previous day, that even without me there were too many *khazonim* for Jews and that I should drive *khazones* out of my head — he laughed at it. "You, with your voice," he said, "when you have learned singing development a bit better and will become more acquainted with the *khazonish* craft, both with the traditional style and the modern one, you will see that you will not have to worry about a position. There is never an over-abundance of good *khazonim*, and Cantor Minkovski frightened you for no good reason."

Novakovski underlined how important it is for me to hear much singing and also instrumental music. Most importantly, I should hear every *khazn* and even more every genuine leader of Jewish prayer. And at the same time to study theory and harmony. When I asked him if I would be ready to be the one to teach me, he replied that he is involved only with students who are more advanced, but that possibly he might give me two hours per week.

I began to study with Novakovski, but I quickly saw that it is too hard for me. He was too high a professor and I was in need of an elementary music teacher who would understand where I was in the world and whom I would understand. I told Novakovski about this and he himself advised me to hire an advanced conservatory student who would be quite sufficient for me at the beginning.

He directed me to a certain Boymel who, in addition to classes, allowed me to come every day to the Brod Temple where he conducted rehearsals with the choir. This greatly developed my ear. That same Boymel died in New York a few years ago. Thus I began bit by bit to enter into the Kingdom of Music, mastering ever more and better all the complicated aspects of this genteel art.

But suddenly a disruption occurred that forced me to interrupt my studies, that I had finally begun after so much effort and torture. First of all, my wife's condition left me no rest. It was very difficult to leave her in that state. This greatly disrupted my studies. The second reason was — a sudden demand from my father-in-law that I return home immediately.

Why my father-in-law needed me so desperately I learned only upon my arrival home. It was a quite simple story: my father-in-law was preparing for his next bankruptcy and for this purpose he had to disappear from Elizavetgrad so that his creditors would not have him arrested. So I was sent a telegram saying that my father-in-law had become "very ill" and that I should come at once with my wife.

The plan was that my father-in-law would go off to a certain sanitarium outside Vienna and that I would accompany him. Why does he need a companion? So that it would appear more obvious that he was truly ill and could not travel alone. No matter how badly I thought of this latest effort of my

father-in-law, somehow I was pleased that I'm getting the opportunity to travel abroad. New possibilities opened up for me.

## A Polemic With Cantor Pinye Minkovski in Odessa

This happened many years later, after I had first met Pinye Minkovski of Odessa, the famous *khazn* and great scholar of Jewish liturgy. I was then located in Budapest and, on one of my concert tours through Russian cities, was scheduled to appear in Odessa.

*Khazn* Minkovski had by then published a small brochure on Jewish liturgy that was very professional and learned. At the same time, the brochure sharply criticized those *khazonim* who performed at concerts and on gramophone recordings. He strongly attacked *khazn* Gershon Sirota and, as well, did not spare me, because at that time we were the two most popular Jewish *khazonim*, known across the entire Jewish world due to the gramophone recordings.

Before my arrival for the concert in Odessa, in the year of 1908, *khazn* Pinkhus [formal name] Minkovski considered it necessary to publish in the local Russian newspaper *Odeskiya Novosti* [Odessa News] an extensive article in which he attacked me for profaning Jewish prayers by appearing on the theater stage and in concert halls. He also wrote that no other representative of other religions had allowed himself to do such a thing as performing religious prayers or songs on the stage.

The day before my concert a representative of that newspaper came to my hotel and asked for my reply to those accusations that had been publicly launched against me by *khazn* Minkovski. I replied that, first of all, it is not correct that Sirota and I are the first *khazonim* among the Jews who, other than in synagogue, have appeared with religious prayers in theaters and in concert. Decades ago, the same was done by such well-known Jewish *khazonim* as Nisi Belzer, Zaydl Rovner, Burekh Shor, Burekh-the-Artist or Konstantiner. They all toured from city to city and gave concerts if not in theaters then in wedding halls or in clubrooms of the well-to-do that were so widespread in Russian cities.

It was even reported that the cited *khazonim* were very proud that their concerts were attended by high government officials, military men, and even by Russian Orthodox clergy.

And as to the other accusation, that no other official of another religion had yet allowed himself to sing religious prayers on gramophone records, I demonstrated to the Russian newspaperman that this, too, was not correct. I showed him the catalogue of gramophone records published by the firm with which I recorded, and there one could easily find that no one more august than the pope himself had recorded his church messages on gramophone records. There were also listed untold numbers of recordings of religious songs, sung by the Vatican Choir.

The very next day the *Odeskiya Novosti* published my interview and my response to all the complaints that Minkovski had lodged against me.

I must say that, despite this incident and the bitterness that I felt at first over this unfriendly “welcome” by *khazn* Minkovski on my arrival in his city of Odessa, there still remained in me deep respect to him for his profound knowledge as a *khazn* and for his deep proficiency in all the old Jewish sources from which he drew his inspiration.

Many years have passed since that incident. I have wandered across the world and have come to America. The First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution have destroyed the dear Jewish

communities of Russia. The best *khazonim* have lost their positions and among them, understandably, was also *khazn* Pinkhus Minkovski of the aristocrat Brodsky's synagogue in Odessa.

Once, when I attended a meeting of the Cantorial Association in New York, I heard that *khazn* Pinkovski is located in Paris in great need and that he is seeking a way of coming to America. It immediately occurred to me that, since the Cantorial Association had long been discussing the establishment of a cantorial seminary, Pinye Minkovski would be the most ideal man to lead and be the spiritual director of such a seminary. His mastery of Jewish liturgy and the old prayer style was beyond comparison. No one could compare with him as a prayer leader, as well as an Orthodox *khazn*, as well as a modern cantor. He incorporated in himself all the leanings in *khazones* and that was a perfect fit for the position of director of a modern cantorial seminary.

My proposal was listened to, some even applauded it, and it was decided to organize a large concert in Carnegie Hall with the participation of all the most famous *khazonim*, the income of the concert to be given to a fund for the establishment of the seminary.

Before that occurred, *khazn* Minkovski was brought to America through the help of his brother, who was a *khazn* in Detroit, and with the help of other relatives. He was invited to the above-cited concert as Honorary Chairman. The soloists appearing were Yosele Rosenblat, Hershman, Roytman, Shteynberg, Pintshik and myself.

I remember my solos: "*ma gdolu*" [How Great You Are] by professor Braslavski. I improvised the "*reboynu shel oylem*" [Our Master of the Universe] in truly Yiddish style; then I sang the "*reboynu shel oylem*" of the Yom Kippur service. I improvised that in a truly modern presentation. In truth, I did this in large measure due to the presence of *khazn* Minkovski who, until that time, had not heard me sing.

It was one of my most profound life's experiences when, after the concert, *khazn* Minkovski came into the backstage dressing room and expressed his recognition of me from the depths of his heart. We forgot all our frictions of years gone by and we became true friends.

However, the plan for a cantorial seminar in America with *khazn* Minkovski as its spiritual leader was not accomplished, despite the fact that the cited concert was not only a moral, but a significant financial success.

The irony of fate determined that the great *khazn* Pinkhus Minkovski, in America in his seventy-third year, would have to begin touring through various cities and towns to present concerts, something that he had years earlier so bitterly opposed and had condemned other *khazonim* who had done so.

I have heard that in his final years in America, Minkovski attempted to make gramophone recordings, but as far as I know, he did not succeed.

He died in great loneliness on one of his concert-tours across American cities. May his memory be a blessing for all Israel.

## I Come to Vienna for the First Time

Preparations began for the first trip abroad of my life. It was not such an easy thing in Czarist Russia to obtain an official government passport. Here, too, one had to find the right person to “*shmir*”[bribe] to rush the thing along. But since the ground was burning under my father-in-law’s feet he had no time to wait for me. So it was decided that he would cross the border on his own and wait for me in Podvalotshisk.

We arrived in Vienna in mid-winter and went to a hotel in the Jewish neighborhood on Tabor Strasse. As luck would have it, in that hotel I met a Jew named Kirzhner who was the bass at the Leopoldstad Temple where Chief Cantor Goldstein then ruled. We conversed and I told him that I was interested in studying singing and especially *khazones* in Vienna, so perhaps he might be of some help to me.

The first thing Kirzhner did was to move me into a private dwelling, precisely one belonging to a *khazn*. This was Herr Smotritski, the third [-ranked] cantor of his Temple. How chance sometimes affects a person’s life [!] This Smotritski played a decisive role in my life and I consider it necessary to devote a few words to him here.

He came from a village in my area of the Kherson Province. His father ran a threshery where grain is threshed with the aid of a horse that turns a large wheel and the two heavy stones behind the wheel separate the grain from the chaff. His job was: standing all day and whipping the horse. Standing on the stone left him with two huge flat feet with callouses as large as logs. While driving the horse he would hum along in time in his bass voice.

When I had the first opportunity to hear Smotritski’s voice — I was flabbergasted. The quality of the voice was extraordinary. It began from a deep *tsedi* [note] to the high *tse*, that is, three octaves. The deep tone sounded like a wonderful, clear, first-class organ note; sweet, bright, juicy and mild, while still darkly bass. His middle register sounded more bass-baritone and it was like a sweet, deep cello’s note. Beginning with the second *tse* to *mi-fa-sol*, the tone sounded like that of a true hero-baritone. And when he reached the highest *sol-la-si*, then the voice sounded like that of a true hero-tenor. In all three registers the tone was as soft as satin that stroked and caressed the soul like balsam.

This is no exaggeration, but Smotritski’s voice was so strong and powerful that when he sang in the room the walls shook and the lamps began to go out. When he would reach the deeper tones I, sitting in my chair, had the feeling that an earthquake had struck around me...

And at the same time Smotritski remained as clumsy as clumsy can be. I have traveled across half the world and have heard singers in operas and at concerts beyond counting, and I must say that I have never encountered so strong a voice as Smotritski’s. But at the same time he remained the village horse-driver at his father’s threshery...And this coachman with a lion’s roar was to be my teacher on the path of *khazones* and of the modern cantorial craft.

My father-in-law went off somewhere to a sanatorium near Baaden and I moved to Smotritski’s as a tenant. When Smotritski heard my voice for the first time he remained speechless for a while and he lacked the courage to say that he would study with me. I believe that he somehow felt that there was not much left for me to learn.



His first impulse was that he would take me to the famous Vienna singing professor Steinschneider and let us hear what he has to say about it. Before we arose to go I ask Smotritski to deliver [sing] a little something. So he smashed out an aria from “The Huguenots,” that had me thinking I would roll off my chair. When, in my small-town naivete, I asked him: “How is it, Herr Smotritski, that with so powerful a voice you have barely managed to be the third [-ranking] cantor at a Vienna temple?” So he replied with certain bitterness: “When we get to know each other better, you will learn that in life things do not go as a person plans.”

The cited Professor Steinschneider had a strange persona. A patriarchal man with a long, white beard and with a fine, genteel face, goodness and mildness streamed from him. He welcomed me with fatherly lovingness and asked about all the details of life in Russia, about my childhood and my parents’ home. Smotritski was more facile in the German language than I, so he served as translator.

Then came following his chords, scales and passages. I felt strangely encouraged in the company of the professor and my voice sounded especially clear and strong. He measured me with his bright gaze behind his gold-framed pince-nez and says to me: “My dear child, I will devote to you as much interest and time as I am able, because your voice earns the right to be developed. But you must contribute your share, which means: you must be attentive, diligent, serious and arm yourself with much patience and endurance. Then I assure you that you will attain the best results.”

The first hour of voice training that I had at the beginning of 1897 by this dear professor was one of the happiest hours of my life. And so it went on. Spending time in the professor’s house was always a holy day for me. I looked up to this professor as to a liberator who had liberated and brought forth into the light of day all of my dreams and most hidden strivings of many years. I did not allow myself a free minute and all my thoughts and my entire energy were devoted to that which the professor strove to implant in me.

Studying with the professor was only interrupted by frequent visits to the opera and concerts. Other than that, one can firmly say that I spent days and nights studying. I energetically learned all the aspects of voice training, mouth movement and solfeggio. I was no longer a callow youngster who has a wife and is awaiting a child; I returned to my *kheyder* years [of basic learning]. But this time I felt as though I had encountered a well that was to sate my thirst, a thirst that had tortured me through all my years.

At the same time the cited *khazn* Smotritski was my teacher in the modern functions of a cantor. He went through with me first of all the “*lekho dodis*” [come, my beloveds] by Zultser and all the other proclamations; then “*borekhu*,” “*shema yisroyl*,” “*kadish*” [blessing, hear o Israel, mourning prayer]. Smotritski was somewhat at home in all these because he had heard them repeatedly in all his years with the higher ranking cantors: Singer, Goldshteyn and Shiler. When a better and finer thing was at hand, Smotritski was dead. In these he himself was as helpless as a child and one could not expect anything from him. Since it did not suit him to admit that he was a great ignoramus in these things, he said in his defense that he had been very busy attending weddings, circumcisions and — funerals...

One thing, however, that Smotritski did for me that I will never forget him for: he went over to his bureau and took out Zultser’s “*shir tsiyon*” [Song of Zion] and said to me: “Here is the treasure of a modern *khazn*; study it by day and by night, learn it by heart and you will be a fine *khazn* among Jews!”

## Cantors in Vienna Fifty Years Ago

I followed Smotritski's advice and threw myself into Sultser's "*shir tsiyon*." This was actually at that time, and perhaps still remains, the best and richest source for modern religious services. But what use is Sultser without a choir? And a really good choir that would help to present the compositions and the cantor's solos? I also found it as necessary as life itself to hear other cantors, how they deal with the same compositions. But where was I to obtain all this?

I lived two hours travel-time from the main temples in Vienna, and, most importantly — services took place on *shabes*, and I did not travel on Sabbath. And, just between ourselves, there was no one worth hearing in the two main temples. Chief Cantor Singer, who prayed at the Zaytenshtadt Temple, was not distinguished by an outstanding voice. When he would start singing in his bass-baritone voice you would have the feeling that a peasant was driving his un-greased wagon and the wheels scrape so [loudly] that your body shivers...

He was a quite intelligent and musical person, even a former officer in Kaiser Franz Josef's army, but that has nothing to do with *khazones*. His second [ranked] cantor, Shiler, had a better voice and one could listen to him, but there was nothing to be enthused about. And therefore the saying spread around in Vienna that Singer can't sing and Shiler can't create... [*"shiler,"* in Yiddish, means scholar.]

The crown among cantors in Vienna at that time was worn by Chief Cantor Goldshteyn, who prayed at the Leopoldstadt Temple. He was a small little Jew but had a very large voice, which, despite its beauty, was very Gentile-like and could not warm the heart of a Jew from our Russian lands. On the three Friday nights in which I heard him, he sang Sultser's "*lekho dodi*," Sultser's "להודות טוב" and, finally, Sultser's "אבות מן." When the bass would sing "נעבוד לפניו" Goldshteyn screamed along with the bass, but one octave higher.

Well then, Friday-in and Friday-out, one could hear exactly the same things by Sultser. This could upset even an insensitive digestion. There was one *khazn* in Vienna whom I always went very willingly to hear; that was *khazn* Mayer Shor in the Polish Temple (he was the father of the famous opera bass who sings with the Metropolitan Opera in New York). He had a wonderfully dramatic baritone [voice] and was intimate with both traditional and modern *khazones*. Beyond that, his praying possessed much homeliness and heartiness that spoke directly to my heart.

As I had very good relations with my Profesor Shteynshnayder and was very home-like with him, I would present him with the compositions I had learned from Sultser's "*shir tsiyon*." Though the professor was a Gentile, he had a great deal of understanding of the modern cantorial craft. In addition, he knew Sultser personally and had heard him constantly over the course of many years.

My professor had the highest praise for this greatest Chief Cantor of the modern style, who also bore the title of "Singer of the Kaiser and Royal Court." As I performed Sultser's compositions for him, he would point out to me the correct character of their performance, to preserve and present all the beauty and nuances hidden in my voice. He himself had a very lyrical voice and it was a pleasure to hear him as he taught me [timbres] "parlando," "piano," "crescendo," and "decrescendo."

I can clearly state that this professor was my teacher and guide who prepared the path into *khazones* that I later trod. If I owe anyone thanks for leading me onto the proper path — it is this professor with his white, bright beard and the golden character of a true lover of Israel.

But most markedly, that same professor who knew Sultser personally and who had a rare appreciation of traditional Jewish vocal music, who understood all the twists and turns of Jewish melody and for whom there was special pleasure when, at his request, I sang something from the old-Jewish traditional stylings — this same professor insisted that I should base my future singing career on opera and on the concert stage, and not on the old Jewish pulpit.

I could not understand this, and I nevertheless pursued my studies. My professor began to teach me several songs of Schubert and also some opera arias. I also studied a repertoire of Russian songs and arias with a specific Russian teacher.

Once my professor gave me the news that he had decided that I should appear at the annual concert in the Beisendorf concert hall, which features the best students of the preceding year. Well, if one must, one can't argue. So I rented formal attire, dressing up like the total singer in such a musical city as was then the city of Vienna.

I imagine that I must not have sung too badly at the concert, because in addition to the applause of the students and of their aristocratic parents, my professor himself heartily embraced me after my performance, pressing me to himself as only a father might do to his own child.

I also had my own guest at that concert, my father-in-law Fishl Kovalyevski. A bit earlier he had received a letter from his son-in-law, Dubnikov, that his bankruptcy had fortunately been completed, agreements had been made with the creditors to pay them thirty and forty cents to the dollar, so that the fear of arrest has finally passed and he can securely return to his hometown. So I kept him another day so that he might experience my joy over my first appearance in the global city of Vienna.

Although he greatly enjoyed my singing and the honor that was accorded me both by my professor and the other students, he was still not much pleased with the fact that I was surrounded by so many pretty ladies, each of whom showered me with her individual compliments. Somehow I felt that those compliments would later miscarry...

A few days before my father-in-law's departure, my professor says to me that the concert at the Beisendorf hall was attended by the steward of the Vienna Royal Opera, and that he had expressed the desire to again hear *khazn* Smotrinski, myself, and a certain young baroness Kelenberg who also distinguished herself with her attractive voice at that cited concert.

I had to specially prepare several arias for the audition by this opera steward. I recall how hard I had to labor to learn, in a short time, such coloratura arias as the swan aria of "Lohengrin," and an aria from "Lucia di Lammermoor." The latter aria was to show off my lyric tenor and the first, a Wagnerian aria, was to emphasize my hero-tenor voice, that is, that my voice was suited for both roles.

In the course of the limited days I had left I learned both arias by heart and "said" them as a pious Jew says familiar prayers. My professor loved me greatly and he was somehow strangely interested in my success with the steward. So a few days before the concert, in a quite gentle voice so as not to insult me, he suggested that I see a cobbler to have him add some leather to the heels of my shoes so that I might

appear taller when I stand before the steward and sing. In the opera, he said, they're not fond of short people...

And so the day arrived when the Vienna Royal Opera had to judge whether I was suitable material.

## My First Compositions

So flowed my weeks in Vienna. As time went on I began to realize that the modern *khazonish* repertoire pleases me less and less; I was drawn more and more to the Conservative, Orthodox and Traditional. I began to seek out compositions, recitatives and improvisations that originated with the great Orthodox *khazonim* of the old, traditional model. I succeeded in tracking down in Vienna the melodies of Yerukham HaKoten [the short], Nisi Belzer, Shestapol. I immersed myself deeper into these original creations that breathed of generational rootedness in Jewish life.

But the more I delved into these creations the greater grew my desire to add something of my own to that which generations of *khazonim* sang out in piety and fear of God about the pain and the hidden hopes of their people. Usually this happened at evening time in the large, but entirely strange to me, city. I sat in my dark room, not having any desire to turn on any lights, and my thoughts wandered far, far off, to those times in the *shtetl* of my birth, when my father sat at the Sabbath tables and improvised various melodies to the prayer-tunes.

I recalled the melodies, I drew them out, deepened and broadened them, closely tied a biblical verse “Words” to the sounds that arose in my brain, and so compositions were developed that laid the foundation for the later abundance of my creations in the liturgical field. It must be remembered that I was far from my home, from my wife and my parents; I often yearned for the nest from which I had emerged to be thrust into the unknown world that simultaneously entices and frightens.

In addition to all that, my future was so entangled and undecided. Where am I going? What awaits me? Which path will I finally pursue? Toward the Gentile opera or the broken but hearty Jewish pulpit? All of this often brought me into a depressed, sorrowful mood, and these moods found their expression in the compositions that I helplessly began putting together in the Vienna evenings. It was an outpouring of the soul; all my youthful pain and yearning were expressed in them. I put together prayers, fantasies and improvisations without end.

At that time there arrived in Vienna a young *khazn* from Kherson, named Kilimnik. He was very talented and musically inclined, possessed of a lovely lyric tenor voice, and as many talented young people of that time, he was drawn to the metropolis of *khazones* which Vienna then represented. There also appeared in Vienna an intelligent singer from Riga, named Fridman, and our old acquaintance, the Elizavetgrad *khazn* Mayer Pisak, the former assistant to Nisi Belzer, also turned up in Vienna to complete his knowledge and to see what new things are being created in the *khazonish* field.

I became very friendly with this group and we would keep together. Every day we would meet at lunch time at a private family’s home and we would share both our accomplishments in this great musical center and our yearnings for our old homes. Once, as we sat there, the door opens and there enters, ragged and tattered, a thin and starving young man who asks that he be given something to eat because he can barely stand erect.

We, of course, stuffed him full, and only then did he begin to tell us who he is. He comes from Bessarabia, from a *shtetl* named Kalarash, and he’s had a leaning toward *khazones* from childhood. In the *shtetl* he was told that if he wanted to obtain some achievement, the only way is — to come to Vienna. He didn’t have a farthing to his soul, so he set off by foot onto that long road. He went from town to town

and from village to village, spending nights mostly in Houses of Prayer and, when it turned out — also on open fields. He stole across the Russian border at night, so he didn't have any need for an official passport...

He was on the road for three months; where a day was spent — not that night, as long as he could reach his goal — arrival in the yearned-for city of Vienna. He had finally arrived yesterday. The first Hasidic Jew he encountered on the street led him to the synagogue on Schiff Street, in the Second District, where Khatskele the *khazn* is the prayer leader. There, kind-hearted Jews made a collection of several *kreutzers* for him and led him off to the home of a poor Jew where he had a bite to eat and spent the night. At morning, an assistant of Khatskl gave him our address and here he is now.

We observed the young man and admired the strength of will among Jews to be educated and to reach the goal one sets, despite great difficulties, the scarcity of the most elementary requirements. We became very interested in the young man and wanted to know whether he actually knew something or had merely convinced himself about a talent that who knew if it might be real. We asked him to sing something for us. Since the time for *minke* [afternoon prayers] had arrived, the young man says that if there were a *minyen* [12-man prayer quorum] present, he would lead the group.

We gave him permission to sing the *minke* prayer and to say the high Eighteen Blessings without a *minyen*. He began with "Happy" and then with "Righteous in all His ways" he began to fantasize with such strength that we were all astounded. His little lyric tenor voice was quite small but very sweet, flexible, with a wonderful little coloratura. He sang the high Eighteen Blessings as would a true prayer leader, and the further he prayed, the more he delighted us. There was so much of the traditional in his praying, so much deeply felt outpouring of the soul, that we were actually entranced.

I must admit that if it is said of me that I am an expert in praying the weekday afternoon Eighteen Blessings, I base it on that young man's singing so many years ago in the city of Vienna. Somehow his praying penetrated my bones and I was unable to free myself from it. I became interested in that young man and he became a frequent visitor of mine. I took pains to assuage his poverty in the strange city.

Once, on an afternoon, I took him along to my singing professor. He heard him out and said that his voice was small and limited and that no greatness might be expected from it. This struck him like a thunderclap, his spirit fell strongly. He began to appear less frequently at my home; in addition, I heard that he is sick person suffering from epilepsy. While sitting and talking he might fall from the chair and lie there unconscious for a quarter-hour, until returning to consciousness. I was full of sympathy for his loneliness in the strange city, began to search for him to see what might be done for him, so that his great inborn abilities might not be lost, but he disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared. No amount of searching was of any use; his being was dissolved and to this very day I do not know what became of that original, highly talented Jewish "brodyaga" [vagabond]. But his sweet praying of the weekday *minke* remains with me to this very day.

An important event on a pleasant day interrupted my normal living schedule of profound musical study. A telegram from my parents in-law informed me that my wife had, with good fortune, given birth to a healthy daughter and that she was named *Khava* [Eve] and that details will be forthcoming in a letter that is en route. With the impatience of a young father with his first child I awaited the details about this great event in my life. The letter was from my father-in-law, who wrote me that he is very happy with his

new grandchild and he believes that the time is right for me, the father of the child, to come home and that finally thought be given to practicality.

Somehow the word “practically” did not please me. That would mean that all that I’ve done until now is not at all practical, that something else needs to be begun. Does this not mean, in the hidden language of my father-in-law, that I must take my wife and the newborn child, pack up our belongings and put an end to the parents’ hospitality, to free up the place for the two new sons-in-law that must come into the house?

With all my strength I wanted to be at home all the faster, to see the new little creature that I had brought into the world. But, at the same time, how does one interrupt everything that I had constructed with such torturous effort? I was afraid of my homecoming, that it would mean an end to my entire life’s dream, and that I would again be harnessed to the dry-goods store, or in the best case, to take off “on my own” and to open my own store. In my thoughts I was quite far removed from such plans. My few months in Vienna had made me a singer, more than all the years I’d lived through before my emergence into the world.

Was all this to come to an end? I actually shivered in fear, but right after my father-in-law’s letter another letter arrived, this time from my brother-in-law Dubnikov, a devoted friend and the only one of my entire family who understood and sympathized with me. His letter cheered me up somewhat and, freshened, I began to prepare for the journey to visit my wife and newborn child.

## My First Concert in Lodz

My brother-in-law Dubnikov wrote to me in his letter that, since it had been decided at home that I should return there, and as he was traveling to Lodz, Tomaszew and Bialystok to purchase merchandise, he would advise that I should travel via Lodz where he has many friends among the factory owners and major traders, and that he would, with their help, arrange a concert for me.

I was overjoyed with this proposal. After the “cold” Vienna top-hat wearing Jews, I was anxious to have a look at the truly rooted Polish Jews in the city of Lodz, which by then already had a reputation as a great Jewish center. And, in addition, I would be singing for them after such a long interruption. And I am now somewhat of a “graduate,” who had heard and learned so much in Vienna. It was with particular anxiety that I prepared for my trip and the forthcoming first appearance before the Polish Jews.

Before departing I decided to tell my professor that I was leaving. He was aware of all my family secrets and he knew well that I face resistance by my family against my devoting myself to the art of opera. But for as long as I was in Vienna he continued to hope that my being far-off from home and from its influences would have its effect and I will be able, finally, to decide on an opera career and that he would be able to see with his own eyes the successes of his student and to derive prideful joy in me.

My interruption of my studies, he feared, would be the loss of all his work. However, he did not have the courage to convince me to do otherwise because he knew that this was about family life and he guarded every word at be sure that he would in no way implicate anyone in my family. However, he did say one thing: that I should not convince myself that I would be able to be happy in my life if I were to leave that which is the most sacred decision of my life, that is: singing! Perhaps I might be able to earn a great fortune by other means, but — he assured me — it would bring me no joy. It would only break me and always, wherever and with what I might be engaged, it would draw me as though by a magnet, back to that very dream that arose in me back in my very early childhood.

In moving words he asked me to assure him that if I were not to go onto the opera stage, I should at a minimum practice the cantorial craft, which will certainly provide me with deep inner satisfaction and that in this area I would certainly attain such heights that would not shame him, my teacher. He kissed me paternally and we parted movingly.

I began to purchase no limit of things, mainly those that could not be obtained in Russia. And as I was not yet at that time an experienced traveler, I miscalculated the costs and therefore suffered many travails en route. I had forgotten one detail: that even when one had purchased a train ticket, one had to leave a few rubles in one's pockets for any events that might arise along the way.

And I had spent all but a single *kreutzer*. In the car riding to the Austrian-Russian border I had to pay an extra charge and so I found myself with two heavy suitcases, but without a single cent. I lacked the cash to buy a ticket from the border to Lodz, and a person needs to eat, as well. In addition, the crossing from the Austrian border to the Russian was over a high viaduct above the railroad tracks and getting to the viaduct one had to climb innumerable stair-steps. I dragged my suitcases over the steps and finished in exhaustion. My greatest concern was caused by the new high-hat that I had bought in Vienna. It had to be



kept in a separate case to keep it from being ruined, and my hands were loaded with my huge baggage, and there was nothing to pay a porter...

So I tied the high-hat case around my neck and thus, with good fortune, I crossed the border. I borrowed a ruble from a stranger to send a telegram to Lodz, asking that I be sent some money via the railroad cashier. The Jew had not even wanted to take anything in pawn, he only agreed to give me his address, so that if I wanted to, I could repay my debt.

Since there was no money for seeking out a place for the night, I lay me down on the wooden bench at the train station and waited for Lodz to respond and provide the means for further travel. The porter awakened me at six o'clock in the morning — the cashier is looking for me. He had telegraphically received twenty rubles and I can finally travel on.

At Lodz I was awaited by my brother-in-law and a whole group of his friends. Right there at the station they showed me a printed poster about my concert that is taking place at the main hall of the Grand Hotel on Pyetrikova Street, in the very heart of Jewish Lodz.

It is difficult for me to describe what that concert in the city of Lodz meant to me then. The hall was over-filled not only by "Litvaks," [*i.e.*, non-Hassidim] but precisely by the typical Polish Jews in their long coats and the tiny little caps on their heads, whose eyes were alight with enthusiasm when I sang bits of the traditional style. Their enthusiasm was transferred to me, as well, and I warmly did not spare my voice.

This was my first contact with the Polish Jews and I felt as though I had been immersed in a sea of Jewishness. Although many of the Lodz Jews at that time had come from Russia, having come to the great Polish factory-town after their expulsion from Moscow, the Jewish character of the city was imparted by the Polish Jews. The streets were full of them, and after Berdichev, this was the second truly Jewish city in which I had the occasion to be.

My concert in Lodz in 1897 was distinguished by one other characteristic detail, which makes it unforgettable to me. That is, namely, the very young musician who accompanied me at the piano at that concert. This was an eight-year old wonder-child. I had only one rehearsal with him and he accompanied me without a single mistake. He is the current great piano artist, Artur Rubinshteyn [Rubinstein]. I met him at the house of his uncle, a certain Vizel, who was a major commission-agent with whom my brother-in-law Dubnikov did business.

After supper the little boy played on the piano things by Mozart, Chopin and Bach, and it was as though the Holy Spirit was resting on the face of this highly-talented child. When he concluded, I congratulated him warmly and wished that he would become a second Rubinshteyn (I meant, of course, the great composer and pianist, Anton Rubinshteyn [Rubenstein]). So the little one isn't taken aback and he replies: "Why be the second? I desire to be the first Rubinshteyn!"

The Lodz concert, which gave me such spiritual pleasure and provided so much inner security after my Vienna studies, was also the first concert in my life that brought me significant income, the quite significant sum of over four hundred rubles. This was a ton of money at that time and put a bee in my bonnet. It must not be too bad a trade, I thought, if a young man such as myself is brought so much money to hear him in the course of two hours.

A letter from my parents awaited me in Lodz, telling me the not very good news that my mother was not feeling well and that my father begs me that, on my way to Elizavetgrad, I should stop at Khonorod. I did not think for long and quickly packed my things for the trip home, to that nest that had brought me into the world and for which I'd carried boundless love and respect all my life.

In Uman, where I asked telegraphically that someone from home should await me, there was quite a pleasant excitement waiting for me: my mother herself came out to welcome her son, who was returning from the wide world. In addition to her there was my father, my sisters and my brother-in-law Nyemerovski. My eyes grew bright and my heart lightened when I saw my dear mother, that she was able to come herself to greet me. I said to my father: "You 'pulled a fast one,' which means you fooled me, but I wish that you should always fool me in that way." My mother quickly explained that as soon as the news arrived that I was coming, she quickly recovered.

Right at the Uman station I was awaited by three prominent Jews of the town who urged that I must, in any case, conduct Sabbath prayers for them. The town had already heard that Sholem Kwartin's son was coming through from Vienna, so how could such an opportunity be passed by? Later I learned that it was my brother-in-law Nyemerovski who had arranged the whole thing before my arrival. As I was facing a done deal, I agreed under the condition that a choir and a conductor would be created for me. But meanwhile I was hurrying home with my family, to Khonorod, where my homecoming bore a very special joyful character.

## Back To My Home-Nest, Khonorod

This was a wonderful journey back home after having absorbed the impressions of the large cities, especially of the world center, Vienna. The drayman who drove us from Uman to Khonorod fell upon a strange idea. Before approaching our twin-*shtetl*, Torgovitse, he tied bells on the horses, as was done by the excise tax inspector who would happen into the *shtetl* to determine whether the Jewish merchants had purchased the proper licenses.

When Torgovitse storekeepers heard the bells tinkling, fear befell them; they were certain that the excise fellow was approaching, and Jews grumbled: 'Here he comes again, that enemy of Israel.' And they quickly began pulling part of their merchandise out of the store so that the remainder would be covered by licenses of the third or fourth guild, rather than of the second guild, that cost oceans of money, as much as 150 rubles per year.

However, when our coaches came to a halt in the middle of the marketplace and the Jews of Torgovitse saw that this was Sholem Kwartin with his little son, the graduated *khazn* from Vienna, and all his family — they breathed more easily, and wished all the evil years on that excise guy, so that he might not live to come to bother them. The Jews surrounded our coaches and in this manner we arrived at Khonorod.

The first honor was given my grandmother, at whose store the coaches came to a halt. Jews ran out of their stores and began handing me "*sholem aleykhems*" [greeting handshakes], as though a saintly Jew had arrived in the *shtetl*. Suddenly, everyone began to address me as "*eer*" [in the polite form] and call me "R'Zebulon": "How are you, R' Zebulon?" "And what news from the great world beyond, R'Zebulon?"

The real celebration began when I finally entered our home. The house was full of people. The rabbi came along with the most prominent householders, and the Jews were anxious to learn how Kaiser Franz Joseph was doing, and whether it is really true as they say that the Kaiser is descended from a notable Jewish family in a Galician *shtetl*? The questioner, a very rich man named Rosenberg who was also the main *gabay* in our synagogue, confirmed that he had read it somewhere, but he can't remember where.

They also turned to me to explain the politics that were now roiling the world. Since I've come from Vienna I must surely have been a frequent visitor at Kaiser Franz Joseph's and at the Parliament there, so I must provide my opinion about all the major matters that plague the *shtetl*-Jews.

Finally they allowed me to get some rest after the journey, and before I had yet managed to smooth my bones, the rabbi himself came out with the request, in both his own name and that of the entire community, that I delight them with the Sabbath prayers. There was no attention given to all my complaints that I am dead-tired after the long journey. The Jews replied to this that they are all full partners in me and in all that I'd accomplished in the wide world. They had prayed for me that I might be rescued from Gentile hands when I was in danger, so they had all participated in the joys and sorrows of our house before I could stand upright — so now how could I insult them by not praying the Sabbath for them?

It was truly difficult to reject all these arguments and I had to promise to pray on Sabbath morning. Meanwhile I fell asleep, dead-tired, and awoke only at evening on Friday. My parents had spent all day

walking on their toes to avoid waking me, may we be spared. When I awoke and saw my mother near me, her face shining with joy — the light shone in my heart as well.

When my father returned from the [ritual] bath and downed the few glassfuls of tea, he began to chant *shir ha'shirim* [Song of Songs] in the old melody that was so familiar to me, that was still implanted in my bones. Then we began preparing for the Sabbath. My father donned the long overcoat with its broad silk belt; my mother dressed up in the best and finest clothes she possessed: the diamond earrings and the string of pearls and the Turkish shawl on her head. My father told me to put on the new top-hat that I had brought from Vienna.

When we were ready, my grandmother arrived with all my uncles and aunts and simply neighbors and close friends and thus, in a joyous procession, we headed to the House of Prayer, where, at the entrance, we were awaited by untold numbers of young folks from both neighboring *shtetlekh*, shoving each other to see the “Vienna young fellow.” They especially pressed forward to catch a glimpse of the shining top-hat the like of which had until now never been seen in the *shtetl*. (Ay, if they could only touch the top-hat with their fingers, to tell if it is really made of satin or of real silk.) By great effort we managed to push through into the House of Prayer.

Here the problem arose: Who is to welcome the Sabbath? Everyone’s eyes turned toward me. But I had agreed to pray only in the morning, so no one dared to suggest that I be the one to welcome the Sabbath. But at the same time there arose murmuring and noise and whispering: How is it possible that our Zebulun who had grown up with us, of whom all of us are so proud — no one would dare to approach the pulpit while he is here with us.

And so it went on for a long time; no one approached the pulpit. I again explained to my dear fellow-townsmen that I am not prepared to pray, that I will pray tomorrow morning as I had promised, and I ask that I be given the opportunity to rest up properly after my long journey, so that my voice might sound clear, as my home-*shtetl* deserves.

Not one of the four prayer-leaders of the *shtetl* would yet dare to approach the pulpit. I myself had to ask my uncle Eliezar that he rescue me and welcome the Sabbath. He finally let himself be convinced, but he was pale and fearful, his voice trembled, but he quickly regained himself, he warmed up and prayed “Let us sing” with his old luster and with the same heartiness that, in my earliest childhood, had so powerfully influenced my being. I recalled my boyhood years when we sat at the warm furnace as uncle Eliezar rolled out and began to sing various parts of the Days of Awe prayers and we, the youngsters, provided the “tone.”

When “Blessed be” arrived the crowd in the House of Prayer again began to murmur that I should go up and at least lead the evening prayer. At “Lay us down” I could no longer get out of it. The four prayer leaders stood around me and supported me with a chord-tone and — so I concluded the praying. Since all Jews considered themselves great experts in *khazones*, all the heads around me nodded, lips smacked, and after the conclusion everyone kept wishing my father well. All of my friends from *kheyder* were very proud that a friend of theirs had gone so far that a town full of Jews talks of him and delights in him.

I will not forget that Friday evening at my father’s house when, finally after untold good wishes the moment came for pronouncing *kidish* [wine blessing], and my mother stood at my right side and her face shone with pride and joy. After the loneliness and chill that I had endured during the short time I had

spent in Vienna, I felt that I had again been immersed in a sea of genuine patriarchal Jewishness. There was style and beauty in that Friday evening; it gave me warmth and boundedness for all the years that I later spent wandering around the world. The picture of my mother, the true Jewish princess, with piety and goodness in her gaze, accompanied me for a lifetime.

The main substance awaits me the next morning, early on Sabbath. A delegation of the most prominent householders came to take me to the synagogue. I was led as a bridegroom: my mother and grandmother led the way, followed by the rest of the family and almost half the town's Jews. We could barely push into the synagogue. I put on my Viennese narrow little prayer shawl with its golden collar and asked the *shtetl* singers to stand with me at the pulpit and to provide me with a chord.

Until "He dwells forever" I improvised and it went quite coldly; only at "God be praised" did I warm up and assume a high tone. I was not stingy with any coloratura and as I was in a good mood I presented everything of which I was capable to the indescribable joy of all my relatives and all my *shtetl* Jews.

At my father's request I began the *musaf* [supplementary Sabbath morning prayer] with "Seeds live and endure" and when I finished the "May He who blessed" the door of the synagogue opens and there enters all of the Khonorod officialdom led by the constable and village elder. They were also accompanied by several Gentiles who occupied various positions in the *shtetl*, such as the excise-man and a few teachers. One of the teachers had an extraordinary bass voice, so he couldn't resist and began to sing along with me as I sang the high Eighteen Benedictions of the *musaf*. A Gentile choir boy — something the *shtetl* had never seen nor heard. And the Jews were very proud of this, seeing in it a sign that there will no longer be any enemies of Israel in the world.

My praying went on until late in the afternoon. When they left the House of Prayer the Jews of both *shtetlekh* stood in two long rows to make a pathway for me, but there grew such crowding and pressing that the constable had to issue an order to his Cossack squad and policemen to restore order and it was under that guard that we were brought home, where my mother had prepared quite a *kidesh* for the whole town with three sorts of *kugel*, with *shtrudel* and cakes, with marinated and cooked fish and with all of the royal dishes that I can still taste to this day.

## Days of Awe Prayers in Elizavetgrad

After that Sabbath at home, when the door of our house did not rest for a single minute and people went in and out to greet my parents' guest — the famous *melave malke* [leading out the Sabbath Queen] arrived, when the house was full of the *shtetl*'s householders. The traditional white borsht with bow-tie noodles was served and the Jews, after the few hearty glasses [of liquor] they consumed, became quite tipsy. Understandably, there were demands from all sides that I should sing some Days of Awe bit. But this time I was more interested in hearing my hometown prayer leaders.

And, as drunk as they were, they didn't wait to be asked. One by one, all four of the prayer leaders, especially the old ritual slaughterer, presented the most sparkling and hearty [tunes] existing in the traditional Jewish style of chanting. They didn't actually have good voices, but there was heart and they could have moved a stone with their prayers. I needlessly convinced myself again that only this style provides the foundation of Jewish prayer.

Before leaving home on my way to my wife and child, I sought an opportunity to have a talk with my parents about the matter that most interested me: plans for the future. I told my father about my achievements in learning singing in Vienna, and also about the offer from the Vienna opera and that I am personally determined to return to Vienna at the first opportunity to continue my studies; so I wish to hear what advice my parents had for their child.

Contrary to my expectations, a change had come about in my father's view on the question of my future. True, he didn't even want to hear about opera-shmopera: how does it come to a pious Jewish young man who has come from such a home to speak about such foolishness? "But y'see, my child, a *khazn* for Jews — this, yes. I see quite well, after this Sabbath that you prayed for us, that this is your path. So, whatever, go and learn and be successful and may Jews rejoice in you." But my father did not fail to add: "Remember, my child, that little dot, the Jewish essence! You should never slip up and [fail to] remember the kind of home from which you come."

My father also made sure that, since I am a young fellow with his own family, it is no more than right that my wife's opinion also be heard and what we will together decide — so it will be, in a fortunate time. I must add that my heart grew brighter after these clear and wise words from my father and, in high spirits, I took the road at once to my wife and child. But on the way I had to stop over in Uman to pray on the Sabbath in accordance with the agreement that had been made on our way to Khonorod.

Since Uman was not far from Khonorod, my mother and grandmother came there with the whole family of aunts and uncles beyond counting. When I went to the synagogue on Friday evening I was again surrounded by a large number of family members, as in Khonorod. When I entered the synagogue they were still at the evening prayers, so I calmly began to put on my cantorial clothes: the Viennese cape, or as Jews call it, the *tendeverende*; then the almost [Christian] priestly fez with its four corners on my head, and I had bound the collar with a white bow.

The closer it came to Welcoming the Sabbath, I saw the *gabai* hanging around me, wanting to say something, but his mouth does not open; he is obviously very nervous. I saw him examining me from

front to back but still speaks not a word. So I could not resist and asked him: “*Gabay*, do you have something to say to me before I go to welcome the Sabbath?

“Yes, my dear *khazn*, something is bothering us, but we haven’t had the nerve to tell you. We believe that the Jews in the synagogue will look askance at your cantorial outfit. Mainly they object to the fez with its four corners, that doesn’t look at all Jewish, and to the white bow that also smacks of a priest, may God help us, and since, may no evil eye threaten, in our synagogue there pray many Jews who are truly God-fearing, scholars and Hasidim, we consider this to be not appropriate.”

I was somewhat lost. I had convinced myself that the Uman Jews would be greatly impressed by the outfit that I had just unpacked from my luggage and thought that small town Jews would take pride in it. So I asked the *gabai*: “So what are you requesting me to do?” That Jew did not hesitate to require one minor thing: I should remove all of it and put the prayer shawl over my head and proceed to pray, as generations of Jews had done before me.

I had to surrender, donned a long prayer shawl and an ordinary *yarmulke*, shoved the white bow into a pocket, and thus I proceeded to the pulpit. One might have choked in the heat. The synagogue was overfilled by congregants. As soon as I opened my mouth, the splendid acoustics and the resonance of my voice were extraordinary. I kept on improvising, starting from “Do not harden your hearts” until beyond *kidish*. The Jews stood there for two hours on end as though entranced. They didn’t even feel the heat in the synagogue, but gulped down the sounds and, their eyes alight, were prepared to hear more and more.

Again the town-full of Jews awaited me upon exiting the synagogue and everything was repeated. On Sabbath night, at my inn, as I prepare to depart, the door opens and the synagogue *gabays* come in along with some householders and they want to arrange with me to be there all during the week of the Days of Awe. And I hear mention of an amazing sum at that time: eight hundred rubles.

They are even ready to engage a choir at their expense as long as I promise them at once that I am theirs on the Days of Awe. No matter how pleased I was at the great honor, I immediately determined that I cannot now undertake any sort of obligation until I see my wife and child. It remained that in the course of five days I must telegraph them; then they would send out a contract and an advance fee.

After long wanderings and after such joyful experiences, where I could clearly see that the dreams of my youth are beginning to come to pass, I finally came home to my wife and child.

**[Photo caption on following unnumbered page: Zavel Kwartin takes his first steps as a *khazn* in Elizavetgrad, 1897]**

My joy was very great and, with fresh energy I prepared to meet my future. I did not know, however, what my wily father-in-law had planned against me behind my back.

Right after my arrival in Elizavetgrad, when I prepared to reply to the Uman *gabays* that I am ready to accept their offer about presiding with them during the Days of Awe, unexpectedly a delegation of very prominent Elizavetgrad Jewish householders showed up, led by the especially prominent R’ Yoyne Tiomkin, the father of the later famous Zionist activist, Vladimir Tiomkin. I quickly noticed that my

father-in-law was welcoming the delegation with special respect. The Jews proposed to me that, since Elizavetgrad is the town where my cantorial talent was first revealed, it would be a great honor for them if I were to agree to pray the Days of Awe at their little synagogue, where the first Lovers of Zion [proto-Zionist settlement movement] prayed.

I thanked them very politely for the honor that is being given me and said that I cannot provide a reply at this moment; I will consider the matter with my family. I noticed that my father-in-law became enraged at my reply. Actually, he had arranged the whole matter with the delegation, hoping thereby to draw me away from the thought of returning again to Vienna to continue my musical studies.

My father-in-law's plan was: since I would pray during the Days of Awe in Elizavetgrad, I would please [the population] and would not depart Elizavetgrad again. They began to work at me from all sides to send a refusal to Uman and to accept the offer of the small little synagogue. My wife, too, under her father's pressure, spoke up and declared that she would in no case allow me to go to Uman for the Days of Awe.

I could not singly go up against all, so I surrendered. I spoke of only one condition: that right after the Days of Awe I should not be held back from returning to Vienna to continue my studies. That same day I informed R' Yoyne Tiomkin that I would pray in the little synagogue of the Lovers of Zion, not for any money, may we be spared, but that this is a gift from me for the high ideal of the Return to Zion, which was then beginning to seize the minds and hearts of the Jewish youth.

It was a small, little synagogue and they could not allow themselves great expenses, so I had to tell them, too, that I would chant without a choir. I must add that it was no small drudgery for me to prepare to do all the Days of Awe chanting all alone, without the aid of a choir. I recall that I kept myself strictly to the old style of prayer, and that right after chanting on the first day of *rosheshone* [Rosh Hashanah, New Year], the town was astir as though some great event had occurred. On the second day they came to hear me from many other synagogues and the tiny one was unable to accommodate them all.

Since the *gabays* wanted to make a *kopek* on behalf of the Land of Israel, they left their pews and sold their places to the new arrivals. They themselves went into the anteroom or outdoors, where one could hear the prayers through the open windows. There was also great inflation in the [sale of] *eliyes* [calls to read holy texts]; single verses were sold and at quite a high price. I recall that the Lovers of Zion then took in the huge sum of twelve hundred rubles. I could only rejoice in the depths of my heart that my modest strengths could lend a hand to create the means for this noble cause.

The Lovers of Zion, too, knew how to appreciate my contribution: on *yonkipur* [Yom Kipur, Day of Atonement] night, right after the fast ended, a special committee came to my father-in-law's house, led by R' Yoyne Tiomkin, who handed me a tray with a silver service of six beakers and a wine pitcher, finely engraved with my name. This was accompanied by a letter of thanks with thirty signatures of the most prominent householders. I had every reason to be proud of this gift.



## **I'm Offered a Fortune to Abandon *Khazones***

An uncle of my wife, called Moshkovitsh [Moscowitz] lived in the city of Ekaterinoslav [now Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine]. He was a very rich Jew who owned countless houses and large businesses. They had no children, so they showed great interest in the children of Mrs. Moshkovitsh's brother, that is, of my father-in-law. Generally, this Moshkovitsh greatly helped out my father-in-law when he was quite often hard-up in his business affairs. This resulted in my father-in-law's taking his brother-in-law into serious account, because one obeys him upon whom he is dependent.

I mention this uncle here because he played a significant role in my further development. As soon as my father-in-law returned from Vienna, where he had witnessed my first public concert — a panic arose at home. He somehow told fantastic stories about Vienna's aristocratic ladies who had surrounded me during that cited concert. In his eyes it appeared that these ladies would, at any day, tear me from my wife, their daughter, who is about to give birth, and might, heaven forbid, become a deserted wife [unable to remarry lacking her husband's *get*, divorce].

So the entire family was put on alert, among others the Ekaterinoslav uncle, seeking advice on how to pry me loose from the devil's grip, God help us. First of all it was decided to bring me home soonest, and there was the best excuse for that — my wife is about to give birth. And when I will be at home they will then find the best means to, for once and all, drive out of my head the wild craziness of singing and *khazones*, in which I've enmeshed my mind and am unable to get rid of.

Now that I have come home that plan began its work. To begin with, they did not allow me to fulfill my agreement with the Uman Jews about praying there on the Days of Awe. And then a second surprise awaited me. When, after the holy days, I prepared to head out again to continue my studies in Vienna — an invitation suddenly arrives from Uncle Moshkovitsh in Ekaterinoslav, asking that I not refuse him the kindness of coming to them with my wife and child as guests for a visit of several weeks.

The first thing I thought of upon reading the invitation was: may all my nightmares settle in my enemies' heads. Who can now think about traveling as a guest when I stand at the crossroads of my life, having left trading and not yet attained my new determination: singing, or *khazones*. So why would I go and waste time on useless visits with uncles and aunts?

But it is a figment of the imagination that, at that time, under the patriarchal relationships that then ruled in Jewish families, I might have so easily thrown aside Uncle Moshkovitsh's invitation. First, he was the richest man in the family and that was in itself enough reason to show him the greatest of respect. And, secondly, it was a previously agreed-to bit of work in the family that I should be enticed away to Ekaterinoslav, to the wealthy uncle, and that he should assume the objective to "make a man of me," that is — to beat *khazones* out of my head.

I very badly did not want to travel there, but I quickly saw that all my family, led by my wife, had arisen against me: how is it possible to refuse the offer of the wealthy uncle? That is inconceivable. It would mean creating an upheaval in the family. It would mean stopping the aid that constantly flows from the uncle for the teetering business dealings of Fishl Kovalyevski. How could I assume such responsibility? So right after the holidays things were packed up and we were off to the uncle in Ekaterinoslav.

The uncle and aunt awaited us in their own equipage and in a lordly way drove us down the Ekaterinoslav highway. As we drove along, my uncle already pointed out: these are his houses and these are his businesses. I thought to myself: no harm to him, may the same befall all Jews. I need not relate that the house on Aleksandrovska Street, where he lived, was equipped with many rich things, and as usual in such cases — not with much taste.

There were many other rich Jews invited to supper. They talked about all sorts of business deals but not a word was dropped about my having anything to do with *khazones*. Someone might ask me to sing something, as often occurred in such cases. I regretted the matter and actually provoked a discussion about the *khazonim* currently located in this large Jewish city. And I quickly offered that I would have no objections to praying on a Sabbath at their wealthy, above-all-others House of Prayer, where my uncle is the head administrator.

The wealthy householders, whose names were: Korpus, Madaynski, Shtromberg, Dolnik, etc., were pleased by this and they urged my uncle to see that it occurred. My uncle was not particularly pleased with this because it didn't match the hidden plan to drive the silliness out of my head, but he was unable to oppose it and it was decided that on the next Sabbath morning I would pray at the leading House of Prayer.

Friday evening, when I went with my uncle for prayers at the leading House of Prayer, a very pleasant surprise awaited me. At the lectern stood praying their annual master of prayer, Moyshe Krivayzer, or as he was known, Moyshe Bershader [from Bershad]. He was a very pious Hasidic Jew and, as well, an unusual master of prayer. The register of his voice was by nature smooth and trained, with an enormous range from a baritone's lower "*sol*" to a truly lyrical tenor's highest "*do*." Understandably, he prayed in the authentically old-traditional master-of-prayer style that was also deeply rooted in my entire being. It was enough for me to hear his first notes to become totally affected and, enthused and enchanted, to follow his signing of 'welcome to the Sabbath.'

The next day I sang the morning and supplemental prayers. The enthusiasm of Friday night still filling me, I strained mightily to show that one can combine the old-traditional and the modern cantorial styles. I improvised and coloratured over all of creation. The Jews stood there, amazed. No one had expected this by any means from Moshkovitsh's nephew (at that time no one could call my real name).

Since I took no payment for this praying, the administrators came to my uncle's house and brought me the gift of a gold watch. My uncle was displeased by this gift because it was, again, a disruption of the plan that had been worked out behind my back.

The next day my uncle took me in his equipage to see the town and how very prominent he was due to his wealth. After seeing all his houses and manufacturing businesses, he led me to the *gorodskaya дума* (municipal legislature) of which he was a member. Then he led me to the *Azovska-Donski* Bank of which he was one of the main shareholders. All of this was meant to overwhelm me with his wealth so that I might not have the nerve to oppose the plans he had worked out about me.

And then came the main blow. Once, as we sat together after supper, my uncle delivered a speech in these words:

"You know quite well, my nephew, that I and your aunt are no longer young and we no longer have the strength to work as before in business. We can allow ourselves to live out our years in comfort,

not working, and since we have no children, we have therefore decided to turn over our business to you, our nephew, so that you may build a fine future.”

And with these words, my uncle and aunt fixed me with their eyes to see what sort of impression their offer had made on me. But as to me, I was perhaps an idler in that I did not seize their offer with both hands. But I replied quite cold bloodedly that my plans for the future are otherwise directed. I want to continue to study to become a *khazn* for Jews.

At which my aunt, who was a truly pious woman of valor, spoke up and came out with the following:

“A fine livelihood you have beaten into your head, my dear nephew! For this you have to travel to Vienna, wasting money and time, abandoning wife and child, to learn how to be a beggar, to always be holding out your hand, to sing a little *mi shevorekh* [He who blessed] or a little *al meyle rakhmim* [God of mercy], waiting for someone to put a forty [kopek coin] or at best half a ruble into your palm? For this one has to travel to study as far as Vienna? This can be learned easily in Shnipishok [slum street in Vilna]! There are plenty of beggarly ‘professors’ there who know the craft.”

She spoke with gall and bitterness and the poison of her words penetrated all my limbs. I saw that anything I might say in reply would be wasted. Still I gathered up my courage and answered this heiress that she understands as much about *khazones* for Jews as might a rooster about humans. I saw that my reply struck them deeply because they were not accustomed to having a family member oppose them. They are, after all, the powerful and the treasure-bearers and are offering their belongings to a useless young man who cannot guarantee a livelihood for his wife and child. And this fellow has the nerve to not accept but to speak in opposition?

The relations between us grew very strained after this conversation. I quickly packed our things and returned to Elizavetgrad with the sacred decision to at once prepare to travel onward, to Vienna. But a man’s plans do not always come true.

## **My Father-In-Law Bitterly Derides My Urge to Become a Cantor**

I was awaited at home by my good angel, my brother-in-law Dubnikov, who began to prepare me for the difficult battle facing me with my father-in-law concerning my plan to go to Vienna to study. In the course of which he revealed to me that he, himself, endures huge problems over me because he is constantly suspected of being the main conspirator who helped me arrange my music studies and who encouraged me in them.

He told me that the plan about transferring to me the manufacturing business of Uncle Moshkovitch in Ekaterinoslav was actually worked out while I was still in Vienna and that it was my father-in-law who had arranged the whole thing and that I will have to endure a difficult struggle to change that decision by the entire family. He, on his part, tried to calm me [by saying] that I had to understand the good intentions of these people. “How would it be,” he argued, “if you were not blessed with a fine voice but were an ordinary young man who needs to go out on his own to build his future, and here they come up with such a golden proposal to strike him rich with a real pot of gold, a business with established customers, with unlimited credit — would you then dare to reject such a proposal?”

He was actually correct in that comparison, but I raged upon hearing how I was treated behind my back as though I were not a living being with his own will. Beyond that, my few months in Vienna had so changed my attitude toward trade and riches that it simply struck me as wild to leave the path I had already begun and to return again to storekeeping. So, therefore, I began to prepare myself for a sharp debate with my father-in-law which I knew I could not avoid.

And the uncomfortable meeting arose very soon thereafter. One evening after the meal I see that my father-in-law is somehow very upset. He is beating his fingers so nervously on the table, his nostrils quiver as usual when he is preparing to do something reprehensible. Soon he asks me to accompany him into another room, as he has something to tell me. He started with some smooth talking:

“You know, of course, my son, that I love you more than my own eyes, and I want you and your wife and child to be happy, and I search my mind for ways to arrange your future. And it is high time to think about ways to reach the goal. I still have two daughters to marry off...”

This was a sort of gentle indication: it was high time for me and mine to leave off living in his home. And then he went on: “So I searched and thought so long until I finally thought of something. It was as though it truly fell from heaven! My brother-in-law and your Uncle Moshkovitch in Ekaterinoslav loves you very much and I succeeded in convincing him that, at his age, he doesn’t need to work, and since they have no children, it is a good idea that, under certain conditions, he should transfer the business to you and you will be able to earn honorably for your domicile. *Ну*, what have you to say about this joyous plan, my son?”

I strove to reply as calmly as possible, but I was unable to control myself entirely and I decided that the knot had to be undone for once and all. I thanked him for being so concerned about my future, though I had never asked anyone to worry about me. Secondly, he cannot by any means make me believe that I and my wife and child are living at his expense. Of the eleven hundred ruble dowry that he had given me, along with the three hundred that my father had added, six hundred had been expended on my studies in

Vienna and on my family's expenses that are covered by regular monthly payments of forty rubles. So I, accordingly, am consuming my own fortune, not his.

Further, I argued, who had asked him to negotiate with his brother-in-law, Moshkovitsh, about a business for me without my knowledge and agreement? I consider myself to be an independent person who knows his own duties and responsibilities and I will, The Name willing, manage myself. No one in the family will be able to bar the way that I have clearly marked toward my career as a *khazn*. I have received a gift from God, so I hope and believe that the Creator will not shame me and will give me the opportunity to earn for my family honorably through my calling so that I would not need to turn to anyone [for support].

I again saw my father-in-law sitting and seething. He was not accustomed to having anyone in the family oppose his will. So he began to speak harsh words:

"It will never happen to me that a son-in-law may contradict me. I will not allow you to besmear and stain our good name. So far, there have not been in our family, thank God, any *khazonim*, but only fine, respectable manufacturing businessmen (I badly wanted to interrupt him: bankrupts!). How does our family get a *khazn*, a beggar, a panhandler? And my daughter, spoiled and cuddled, should she become the wife of a beggar, a panhandler, so that every fishwife might have the right to stick her nose into her business, while my son-in-law wanders about at weddings and circumcision ceremonies, *knas-moln* [engagements] and *pidyon-ha-bens* [redemption-of-the-firstborns], at *levayes* [funerals] and *yortsaytn* [death anniversaries], performing *mi shevorakhs* [Torah call-ups] and *el meyle rakhmims* [mourning prayer: God of mercy], and then reach out your hands in case someone is sympathetic and hands over a forty [*kopek* piece]?"

"And it was for this that you traveled to Vienna, to study and learn how to be a panhandler? You could have learned this in such places as: Teplik, Shnipishok, Bershad, Kharkiva [poverty-ridden locations] and perhaps even in your own "metropolis" of Khonorod. Why did you need to spend a fortune traveling so far off? Had I known," my father-in-law grew even angrier, "that you are harboring such foolish, small-town ideas as *khazones*, I would never in this life have agreed to the match. I don't need any *khazonim* in my family! I demand of you in the harshest terms that you, for once and all, drive those foolishnesses out of your head. Instead, you should raise both hands to heaven and thank the Creator for the joy that awaits you. You also need to thank Uncle Moshkovitsh for the favor he is ready to do for you. And you should know, my child, that it is the custom in our family that when the parents decide, so the children conduct themselves and there is no talk in opposition!"

Hearing those words I could no longer contain myself and I began shouting in my loudest voice that no one had bought me off and that it is a far cry from allowing myself to be enslaved by whomever it might be. At that shout my wife and the other family members came running. They understood that if they did not interfere in this heated dialogue it would proceed into very serious things...

I spent a sleepless night. I had the feeling of deep shame that things had come to such a dialogue, that there are still people who allow themselves unceremoniously to denigrate someone's quietest and most intimate aspirations, who understand nothing of the meaning of talent, aspiration to something higher and better, and who measure everything in life by the *kopek*. I was still more upset that, as well, my young wife, who had been raised in the same spirit as her parents, showed no understanding of my painful

experiences. She argued that her father and Uncle Moshkovitsh are older and more experienced than we, and if they say “yes,” I must mumble: “Amen!”

I got up in exasperation and vexation and the only conclusion that provided a moment of calm was: I will write to my father and ask him to come here at once. I need his advice, because no matter how pious and conservative my father was, his good sense shone through every difficult moment and I was certain that now, too, when I am bound in such a tight vise of my supposed “good friends” who want to rescue my future, he would lead me out of that vise.

And in order to calm even further my excited nerves, I took my little Khanele [Hannah] on my lap, cuddled her and pressed her to my breast, mirroring myself in her innocent, bright little eyes, and I again felt myself to be a free person, the master of my own fate. I felt that my duty for this child that I had brought into this world would give me added strength to go toward my goal with even firmer steps.

As I sit there and play with my child — the door opens and my father-in-law enters. There was no trace left of last night’s dictatorial tone. This time he was as sweet as sugar and his words were of pure honey:

“*Nu*, how are you, my son? I hope that you have well considered all that we discussed yesterday. I believe you will yourself admit that I am right. So I want to tell you that I telegraphically called out Uncle Moshkovitsh to conclude the transfer of the business. Ha, whataya have t’say to that, my son?”

I was in too good a mood and was not prepared to again renew the sharp dialogue. Yet I still told him that one must never strike a total sum in the absence of the owner. I thought it more comfortable to withhold anything about my calling on my father.

Three days later the wealthy Ekaterinoslav uncle arrived with great pomp in Elisavetgrad. That same day my father arrived from Khonorod. He sent word with the drayman that he had arrived. The great contest between the unequal forces was approaching. An inner feeling told me that my father would find the proper solution and that he will not let me fall into the net that was spread around me.

## My Father Delivers a Flaming Speech in My Defense

Before everyone gathered to decide what is to be done with the offer from the wealthy Ekaterinoslav uncle about giving me his large dry-goods store, I had a frank talk with my father. As always, he was deeply understanding. He calmed me down and said that we would patiently hear what they have to propose. But first he asked me to make clear to him what my aspirations are and what are my plans for the future.

I told him that from day to day I grow more secure in my conviction that my future is bound up with becoming a *khazn*. Still more, I cannot in any way conceive of my life going in any another direction. Nothing else enters my mind. I expressed to my father my profound assurance that it would take no more than one year for me to be standing on my own two feet, and perhaps I might, by that time, occupy one of the most prestigious *khazonish* roles in all of Russia.

Just as we were sitting thus and conversing intimately, my brother-in-law Dubnikov entered to invite my father and me into my father-in-law's house. This honest friend of mine considered it necessary to say a few words to my father before he went into the decisive deliberation. He said that he had heard me at the concert in Lodz and my Days of Awe chanting at the Lovers of Zion. He is entirely convinced in the totality of his consciousness that a great future awaits me as a singer, but — he dare not say a word of this because he is already regarded with suspicion by the entire family as the main culprit in the whole mess that I have cooked up.

Uncle Moshkovitsh and my aunt were sitting in my father-in-law's house along with the whole family and they were all introduced to my father. After the meal all the males withdrew to a separate hall and the conversation started. On the surface, the Ekaterinoslav Uncle seemed to be a very representative [*sic*] person, tall, with an attractive greying beard, quite well-dressed. But when it came to opening his mouth — it was at once seen with whom one was dealing. He was a common type of person who had been lucky in life, and who had managed to work himself up from a minor employee to a great fortune. And as it happens in life — money talks. Money was, of course, followed by honor and prestige and it was even argued that Uncle Moshkovitsh is very learned, for as you can see, what good is learning if stupidity rules...

The main speaker was, understandably, my father-in-law, who ran his fingers through his thin beard, threw a toadying glance at his wealthy brother-in-law and delivered a sermon in more or less the following words:

“D’you understand me, *mekhutn* [relative by marriage] this is something simply from heaven. Such joy, such a pot of gold, a complete future for our children. Simply imagine — an business established over decades, bearing a great name, and with a huge circle of customers, and unlimited credit in all the largest banks and among the largest manufacturers. It is like a *khale* [egg bread] and a knife, waiting for the *hamoytse* [bread blessing].

“And in addition,” my father-in-law continued in his honeyed little words, “my sister and my brother-in-law love Zinovyev with their lives, truly as their own child, and he will not lack *bird’s milk* [the

very best] from them. I believe, *mekhutn*, that we may wish each other *mazltov* [good fortune] and wish that it may happen in a fortunate hour. Ha?what say you to this, *mekhutn*?”

My father listened calmly to the entire sermon and then he replied: “I admit to you, *mekhutn*, and to you, Mr. Moshkovitsh, that your plan is truly a rarity, one that is not encountered these days: to offer someone a treasure and that he who is offered it should become upset and hesitate about accepting it. But several facts must be considered here, which will play a great role in the future. First, when a person undertakes some business, he must from the very first approach it with strong desire, love and courage. Further, he must be certain that he will be able to rule the business and carry out all the obligations that are involved in it.

“Therefore, one must carefully consider,” my father continued, “whether my son is actually capable of taking over such a large business. He grew up in our small *shtetl* where he observed how I conduct my small business, that I never signed any checks but bought everything for cash. I bought only as much as my business could absorb and for which the One Above gave me the strength. I never wanted to move heaven and earth, so I never knew of concerns over income, I lived modestly and slept peacefully at night, not fearing that, at morning, they would come to foreclose on my things (this was a very gentle poke at my father-in-law, who *did* want to move heaven and earth and was therefore forced into bankruptcy so many times.)

“It was in such an atmosphere that my son was raised,” my father continued. “Therefore I cannot imagine that he might be able to rule over such a large business and to assume such immense responsibilities. It is always better that a young man start small and slowly work himself up, rather than to be confused from the start. A person must attain a small success at the start; this gives him the courage to grow and to climb higher and higher. Then he becomes inventive, gets new ideas, and it becomes his ambition to grow and to develop himself more and more. If you wish, there is a specific [biblical] saying: ‘the work of my hands is glorious.’

“The greatest people in every field,” my father continued, “are all the [self-] made people, those who started out quite small and achieved greatness by their own efforts. Most of them come from small places, from poverty and need. You will permit me, Mr. Moshkovitsh, to take you yourself as an example of my thought. I imagine that you did not receive a dowry of one hundred thousand rubles when you were married, and there was not a fully organized business waiting for you, and you did not have a rich uncle who was prepared to turn over his complete business to you.

“And nevertheless, Mr. Moshkovitsh, you became rich, bless The Name, and have earned fame among people. As I understand it, you and your wife labored long and hard to achieve all this. You had the ambition to rise ever higher, you loved your energy and therefore the One Above helped you. So do not resent me for telling you that, as to my son, I want to see him working his way up by his own strengths and not coming into something that is prepared for him. I want that he himself decide on his future, as his heart dictates. He has a right to that, and no one dare ‘total the reckoning in the absence of the boss.’ In the end, this is about him and his family — and every person is the boss of his own fate.

“My dear *mekhutanim* [relatives by marriage],” my father went on, “we are not children, after all, and we need to understand that when one is forced to take on a business for which he has no desire and for which he has no love — such a business cannot for all the world be successful. And again, as a believing



Jew, I tell you that we must not forget that, beyond ourselves, there is someone else who has a word to day in this question — that is Providence. Fate decreed that my son be blessed with a golden voice and with a specific talent for *khazones*. No one has the right to oppose the Ruler of the Universe in His choice. It will, therefore, be only right on our part to wish our child success in his further studies.

“And what I’ve heard said here — that being a *khazn* for Jews means to be a panhandler, or, heaven protect us, some sort of inferior creature — is a bitter error that you’re all making. A *khazn*, according to the thousand-year Jewish tradition, is a *sheliakh tsibur* [community spokesman] for his people; in a certain sense he is the intermediary between us and the Master of the Universe. He sings of our pains and simultaneously of our hopes for a better future and the restoration of Zion in our ancient land. It is therefore a shame to drop even a single word about these chosen ones who have received the inconceivable treasure and the ability to speak in all of our names, to pray that Jews have health, joy and income.

“I will never forget,” my father concluded, “the enthusiasm I saw among the Uman Jews when my son chanted there on a Sabbath. One could perceive such wonderful spiritual awakening, such nobility among common, hard-laboring Jews who are driven and persecuted all week under the yoke of earning an income, and when the Sabbath arrived and the *khazn* with his moving prayers took them off into quite another world — they became different people, finer, more genteel, dear Jews. Do you want to convince me that this is panhandling?

“No, my dear *mekhutonm* and friends, we dare not stand against my child’s will, which, if you’d like to know, is also the will of the people that has already shown him so much enthusiasm, though he is still so young in years. Let us, therefore, wish him joy and let us hope that he will grow into the *khazonish* profession and will be the pride not only of his family but of the entire Jewish people.”

## Business-Trading in Partnership With *Khazones*

When my father had concluded his wise and well thought-out comments, the crowd sat there for a while as though frozen, and no one dared to voice any counter-thoughts. But one could see that Uncle Moshkevitch was as puffed up as a turkey, something jabbing in his stomach that he cannot express. He was not accustomed to having others say so much in his presence; to the contrary, he is usually the leading speaker and everyone is all ears to hear what the rich man has to say.

My father-in-law, too, was markedly uneasy and one could notice that my father's words had not entirely convinced him. Then Uncle Moshkovitch took the floor and spoke in this manner:

"You should not think, heaven help us, *mekhutn* R' Sholem, that the business is not going well or that I lack any money, heaven help us. My plan to turn over the business to Zinovy is because, in truth, I and my wife feel great sympathy for your son, we simply love him and we want him and his family to have great joy. Since, sadly, we have no children, we want to consider them as our own.

"We want to tell you just one important thing, *mekhutn*," our uncle went on, "though we have decided to turn over the business to your son, we — that is, my wife and I — will continue working in the business as heretofore, and you must understand that both of us won't be too bad as stewards, whom you couldn't hire for huge sums. We will also help them in every other regard with word and deed and will see to it that nothing, heaven help us, might be lacking for them and that we will regard them as our children. Therefore we ask you, R' Sholem, that you should convince your son not to oppose our plan."

And turning to me, the uncle said:

"You know what, Zinovy, since I and your aunt will spend our days at the business, you will have the opportunity to spend a few hours on your own and to do your *khazonishe* stuff. We don't even have in mind to disturb you in that, and as far as we're concerned you might even accept a *khazonishe* position as it pleases you and to continue studying as you feel necessary."

These words entered my mind well and I felt that something was turning over in my entire approach to the proposal. It seems that they're no longer laughing at my aspirations but are even giving me the possibility of following my path and to study and even to accept a *khazonishe* position, while at the same time the issue of income would no longer exist for me — this is a truly joyful idea! Why hadn't they said so at the start? All the long talks might have been spared.

I thought to myself that since Ekaterinoslav doesn't lack synagogues with fine *khazonim*, and since I wouldn't have to seek income from *khazones* and I wouldn't have to depend on the community and its administrators — it is a very dear thing, I will be able to dedicate myself to song for its own sake without the slightest consideration of material matters. It seems that the same thought occurred to my father and brother-in-law, Dubnikov, who stood up and asked me to come with him for a while into another room.

And notably, all three of us reached the conclusion that this is the correct way out, so that the wolf might be sated and the goat remain whole. My father even added that we needed to be protected in any case, should the thing in Vienna not turn out as planned, heaven help us; I might not complete my studies so quickly and even when I would complete them the right position might not turn up. Meanwhile I must remember that my capital has already been diminished by forty percent, and should it go on for another

nine-ten months and I am not able to earn, I would remain [floating] on the water with my wife and child and would have to turn to my father-in-law, which, for me, is worse than eating pork.

I saw on my father's face that he would be pleased if I were to accept my uncle's newly-improved proposal about business-trading in partnership with *khazones*. There was also the added fact that my wife had become pregnant with our second child, which placed even greater responsibilities upon me. All of this together weighed on me to accept my uncle's proposal about moving to Ekaterinoslav. However, I required that my uncle give his word, in everyone's presence, that he would not interfere not only in my further music studies, but even in accepting a *khazonish* position, should one arise.

When all three of us returned and I reported that I accept the proposal, great joy and jubilation arose; a *lekhayim* [toast] was raised and from all sides I was wished much good luck on my new path, which was the middle road between *khazones* and...trading in manufactured goods. The next day, my father went home with mixed feelings. Upon bidding me farewell he found it necessary to give me several instructions:

"My child," he said, "I want you to promise me that you will not aim to become rich by force and quickly, and that in your business you will follow my paths: you should not chase after credit and should write fewer promissory notes. And if, in your business, you walk the path of righteousness, the Blessed Name will surely help you."

A few days later I moved to Ekaterinoslav along with my uncle and aunt. On the very first day I stood in the store, and my uncle and aunt started to show me everything and reveal the secrets of the huge business. They also introduced me to all the customers, saying that I will be the future owner and that they might have the same trust in me as in the previous owners.

A week later my uncle proposed that we prepare to take an inventory of all the merchandise at the store and of their worth. True, I would not be paying any money for that, but a business likes to have a reckoning, and when I am ready, I will actually have to, in time, pay for all this merchandise. That is, in fact I was given only the firm and the store, without the merchandise in the store. And in assembling the inventory, the first quiet conflict arose between me and my uncle.

Every tradesman knows that when one transfers an old business to a new owner, the store has a lot of old goods that no longer are worth what was originally paid for them. Usually it is merchandise that has gone out of fashion, or that was slightly damaged over the years and can no longer be considered at full value. Quite a different opinion was held by my uncle, who was so proud of his store that he held that the merchandise for which a *kerbl* [ruble] had once been paid was now worth a ruble and thirty [cents]...in any case he demanded that the merchandise be reckoned at its full ruble's worth, and by the figures he came up with, it turned out that I owe him no less than forty thousand rubles.

I was truly still a quite young man with very little experience in high business matters, yet I felt that I was being duped. So I did not accept it and protested. It almost led to the entire matter being called off; at the end, the compromise was that he would consider seventy-five cents on the ruble and the entire sum is considered as a debt that I owe, to be paid in the course of three years.

So I entered into trading as a debtor with great burdens. I could not sleep at night, wondering how I might be able to pay off so great a debt. Were I to ask my father-in-law, he would tell me: "Don't be a

fool, my son-in-law, one doesn't take such things to heart; I have rich experience in such business: you ignore it and an end to it..."

It just happened to be on the eve of the Christian new year and sales at the store were going well. We had to begin to think about traveling to buy the needed merchandise that was lacking. A great journey stood before me: first to Kharkov, where the annual "*kretshenska yarmarke*" [yearly merchandise fair] was taking place, and then to Lodz, Zgierz [Zgierz], Tomashov [Tomaszow] and Bialystok, all the Polish centers that produced manufactured goods for the large Russian market.

From the very first day that I entered the store I also did not neglect the other part of the partnership-agreement I had made, that is, *khazones*: I immediately met with the administrator of the Soldiers' synagogue, a certain Shavelson; I quite simply offered that, since I do not ask for money for chanting in their *shul*, the only thing I require is that they provide me with a choir at their expense. It just happened that their usual *khazn*, Levinson, had obtained another position, so therefore my proposal was accepted with great honor. There just happened to be a good choir in the *shul* with a capable conductor, Emerman, so I quickly invited him [to my home] to discuss the program for the first Sabbath and for the coming Passover.

With a calm awareness that I am not retreating from my principles, I was therefore able to prepare to head out on my long journey.

## **A Sabbath At *Reb* Moyshe Arin Viner [Moses Aaron Weiner]'s in Lodz**

When I arrived in Kharkov a few days before the “*kretshenska yarmarke*,” I met my brother-in-law Dubnikov who had also come to buy merchandise. But there was a great difference in the way the large merchants regarded the two of us. I was armed with the weighty recommendation letters from my uncle, whom everyone knew and regarded highly, and all doors stood open for me. I could get as much credit as I wanted.

It was quite different for my brother-in-law Dubnikov, who came in the name of my father-in-law's not-quite solvent firm. He couldn't approach a single one of the main manufacturers, because they all considered my father-in-law to be a non-reliable payer. He was therefore forced to buy goods at second and often at third hand, which significantly raised their cost. Dubnikov asked me to recommend him to some of the merchants who saw me willingly. As a naïve, inexperienced tradesman, I did this with pleasure. When I returned home and told my uncle about this, I had to endure ‘charred years.’ My uncle opined that such a recommendation might cost us dearly, even though it involved his brother-in-law, but — business is business.

Every year, the Peterburg Royal Opera Theater and its stars came to the Kharkov “*yarmarke*” for four weeks. I did not miss a single evening at the opera. I had the opportunity to hear such singers as: Medvedev, Sobinov and Davidov among the tenors; Vinogradov and Tartakov of the baritones; and Antonovski of the basses. There was also the marvelous [female] singer Mikhailova. I saw the operas: “Eugene Onegin,” “Les Huguenots,” “Damon”[?] “Boris Godunov” and “A Life for the Tsar.”

I must say that my heart trembled as I heard these cited singers. I was not an ordinary observer going to see an opera. At every moment I imagined how I might sing the aria that sounds so marvelous, how it might come from me, and am I eternally condemned to be a trader in manufactured goods while my heart is entirely sunk in the world of sound?

These five evenings at the Kharkov opera so transformed me that it was with a very sad spirit that I mounted the train on the way to Lodz where I was to fall again into the world of deals and credits, of designs and samples, of woolens and worsteds. All of me conspired against the decision that I had made of my own free will, but which choked and throttled me out of my mind.

My pain was even greater because of the fact that, in Kharkov, I had signed promissory notes in the sum of over eight thousand rubles. That is, the vise around my throat had become even tighter; against my will I must proceed in the harness, dragging the wagon while my heart was totally elsewhere. But there is no way back to be seen. When one signs, one must pay up, and so that there may be with what to pay — one must be sure that the business goes well, that sales go up and that there be things to sell. That was how the *khad gadyo* [the Only Kid—traditionally long song at Passover] went on, and with that sad spirit I arrived in the city of Lodz.

This was my second time in this heavily-Jewish city and again I had the feeling that I was bathing in a deep well of truly rooted Jewishness. But there wasn't much time to lose. I had to take care of the great

number of business deals I had here. I was helped greatly by the commission-agent Vizel [Weisel?] and my cousin Grigori Kovalyevski whom I had met during my first visit to Lodz a few months earlier.

Most importantly, they connected me to the smaller manufacturers who were not as well-off materially, so that one could buy their wares much more cheaply than at the large, prominent manufacturers, such as: Sheybler and Groman, Entsel and Kunitser, Poznanski, and others, who opened wide their doors for the recommendation letters of Uncle Moshkovitsh, who also here possessed a very good name and unlimited credit.

Among the large Lodz manufacturers there was one who excelled in his brilliant creations, a certain Moyshe Arn Viner [Moses Aaron Weiner]. He produced the best cashmeres, *aderanen* [?] and other products that were very popular in Russia, and his products were greatly sought out. At the same time, this R' Moyshe Arn Viner was an extremely pious Jew, a Ger Hasid, and simultaneously a major community activist who dedicated much time and money to the Jewish community.

R' Moyshe Arn Viner was a renowned person in Lodz. He was respected by the entire city for his good deeds and also for his handsome domesticity. So I had the good fortune, when I was introduced to this fine Jew, that he told me that he had heard of me when I had my concert at the Lodz Grand Hotel and that it would be his pleasure were I to accept his invitation to observe the Sabbath at his home.

I accepted the invitation with true joy. I was yearning for a bit of Sabbath and specifically in the Jewish-Polish atmosphere of which I had heard so much. I was tired of the trading and wanted to rest my nerves a bit at a Sabbath table, and to hear the Polish style of the *zmires* [song] singing, which is so different than our Volin-Ukrainian style.

Late on Friday afternoon I was visited at my hotel by one of R' Moyshe Arn Viner's sons-in-law, who took me to his father-in-law's home. This was not a home, but truly a palace, the palace of a Jewish patriarch, surrounded by his numerous household: daughters, daughters-in-law, sons and sons-in-law, and the large number of grandchildren, and all wearing the Jewish-Polish long clothes. The men all wore satin *kapotes* [long coats] bound with silk sashes, and on their heads, tiny silk caps whose backs revealed a silk *yarmulke* [skull cap]. The women were dressed in satins and silks, adorned with genteel jewelry that did not, however, assault one's eyes, as we see among the current wealthy arrivistes.

The house gave off the aroma of the Sabbath. It peered from every little corner and shone on every face. As soon as I crossed the threshold I was struck by the atmosphere of fine, generations-old Jewishness that is transmitted so understandably from generation to generation — a Jewishness that is borne in joy and honor, that is a heritage and not a burden; a blessing in which one mirrors and loves oneself, as a dearly beloved.

I was enchanted and my first thought was — the home of my parents, but multiplied dozens of times over due to the richness of this house. But I saw my mother's bright face at the candle-lighting, her eyes that shone in joy over being able to welcome the holy Sabbath, as Jews have done over the generations.

Since it was late, I was at once invited into a side room where a Holy Ark stood and where there was always a *minyem* [prayer quorum of ten adult males] on Sabbaths and holidays. We said the *minkhe* prayers and after them everyone's eyes turned to me as if their gazes asked me to welcome the Sabbath [in song]. I was so deeply under the influence of this notable home that I asked that someone else say "*lekho narnanu*" [Prophets: come, let us sing] and I will approach the *mayriv* [evening prayer].

Meanwhile, the *minyem* became overcrowded. In addition to the numerous family, many neighbors and also invited guests gathered. Part of the room was closed off for the women behind a silk curtain. I started the *mayriv* at the lectern and chanted *ahaves oylem*, *hashkiveynu* and *vishomru* [prayer sections]. Due to my good mood, the result was excellent.

The Sabbath table was truly regal. The magnificent face of the householder shone down on his whole family. The feeling at the table was so idyllic and in such a true Sabbath restful and celebratory mood that I completely forgot where I was. When they began to sing *zmires* after the fish course, I did not wait to be asked and began to improvise as I used to do at my father's table.

The impression my singing made must have been very strong because I, still a very young guy, was accorded the honor, by R' Moyshe Arn Viner, of chanting the blessings. When it came to *rakhem na* [have mercy upon us], I really went at it: one improvisation flew after another; I simply didn't want to stop chanting and chanting. The festive meal ended late that night and the memory of that outstanding evening in such a truly Hasidic atmosphere remained in my mind for many long years.

When, in the new week, I came to R' Moyshe Arn Viner's office, they hardly knew on which chair to seat me. I was among their most honored customers; I received the largest discounts on their prices and spaced out the payments just as I wished. And thus I received payment for my Sabbath at his home, for which I should have been thankful myself because he gave me a great promotion. After that Sabbath I began to regard the Polish Jews quite differently; I had obtained more respect for them; I understood them better. I was convinced that only a settlement that is so deeply rooted and lives such an authentic life can produce such fine Jews and conduct such a Hasidic, well-to-do and aristocratic life, such as I saw at the home of R' Moyshe Arn Viner in Lodz.

## I Must Be Concerned With My Younger Brothers

My trading activities did not end in Lodz. I still had to cover Zgerzh, Tomashov and Bialystok. When, in the rail car on my way home, I made a reckoning of my purchases, I saw that I had bought merchandise for no less than forty thousand rubles. I grew lightheaded [at the thought] that overnight I had grown to be such a major trader, with so high a business volume, with bills of credit and terms. Master of the Universe, where will I get the strength and power to manage such a huge business, with such payments and obligations?

And when I saw that the worries over business are beginning to weigh on me too heavily, I left off thinking about all that and turned to my other world, to the world of melody and improvisation. Sitting there in the car, I began humming to myself some of my improvisations; I improved upon the *halel* [psalms of joy] that I had not yet properly worked out, reviewing it over and over. I also hummed some of the Days of Awe prayers, and other prayers, as well.

I stood in my compartment facing the fields and forests that we traversed. The sights of nature carried me still further from reality and I did not at all notice that my voice rang out louder and louder. Yet, all at once — applause echoes in my compartment. This came from my fellow-passengers who took joy from the unexpected musical accompaniment that had descended upon them as though from the heavens.

When I returned home after four weeks on the road I was met by a pleasant surprise: my wife and child were awaiting me and in our own, roomy dwelling that had been prepared during my absence with all the necessities. Too, the purchased merchandise was beginning to arrive and I was, from day to day, more drawn into the business. It was new year's time and sales happened to be quite good so that I was full of hope that I would be able to fulfill all the heavy obligations I had taken upon myself.

On the second day after my return I invited my conductor so as to learn what he had accomplished during the four weeks of my absence. We decided to rehearse the choir twice a week to prepare the program for the oncoming Passover. The conductor had to rehearse his assistants every day. Though the business raged and seethed from morning until around ten at night — other than my uncle and aunt there were three clerks who had their hands full — I had, after all, agreed with my former bosses that, every day at around eight in the evening, even in the face of thunder and lightning, I would leave the store and devote myself to my *khazonish* business.

Everything went properly, according to the plan. I chanted through Passover and my prestige in town and in my uncle's eyes grew tremendously. Nevertheless, it could not protect my relations with my uncle from damage. There were various reasons for that. First, as is usual with elders, especially with those well-off, my uncle and aunt began to be involved in charity matters. That is, they did not begin to devote large sums of money to lighten human needs, or to wipe away the tear of an unfortunate. No, in this they were quite stingy and calculated. What then? They were seized by the evil inclination of pushing themselves to the top everywhere, of becoming "*predsedatel*" [chair-people] in one or another association, of having their names shining everywhere.

This led to their coming to the store less often, leaving the whole pack of worries and obligations on my young, inexperienced shoulders. I remained alone with unknown employees and had to keep a sharp eye out so that my store might not be looted. There could be no talk of devoting myself to my *khazonish*



affairs, and this made me very nervous. I feared that I might be swallowed up by the daily concerns that the store brought with it.

To this was added a special concern that was unwillingly created for me by my parents who had, it is understood, the best intentions, but against their will it brought to the deterioration of my relations with my bread-givers. There were three younger brothers left at home with my father after my departure and there was no practical goal visible for any of them in that small *shtetl*. So my parents believed that, as I am, bless The Name, an accomplished person in the world with my own business, it would be no more than right if I were to take the eldest of my remaining brothers, Gedalye, to Ekaterinoslav and to make a man of him.

It is easier said than done. I could not, understandably, refuse my parents, and my brother came to me. I thought to myself: it is always good to have one of your own in the store. But it quickly turned out that my brother had not the slightest ability in business. His head simply could not comprehend it. Instead, he thought of how to dress himself up more handsomely. He was a good looking fellow, so he began thinking about how to please a well-off girl and to make a match.

Here I must tell a story within a story. Since my uncle didn't have any children, he took an orphan girl of about fifteen into his home, who was descended from some distant relative. She was a very fine child, smart and sympathetic, and my brother, that empty head, cast his eye on that girl despite the fact that she was a child. He began to stroll about with her and my uncle and aunt were displeased from the very start. And all their anger was directed at my head.

Once my brother came to me and said that since he had ordered for himself a custom-made fur coat with a caracul [Persian lamb] collar, it would be well if he had a caracul hat so that it would complete the outfit. He was certain that when he had a caracul hat it would be a definite assurance for a match, and perhaps, too, the orphan in our uncle's house would begin to regard him differently in that hat and the match might be concluded, after all.

When I saw how much my brother was burning for that hat, I asked how much it would cost. I held that, because of a silly hat, I must not assume the responsibility for my brother's future. I gave him the twenty five rubles that the hat was to cost, and that set off a true hell for me. When my uncle and aunt learned of this, they let out this shouting:

"You know, dear nephew," my aunt spoke in condemnation, "if you start to toss about twenty-fivers right and left, you won't be for long in the store that we gave you. You must know that when we had a fortune of fifty thousand rubles your uncle didn't allow himself to buy himself such a hat not only for twenty-five rubles, but not even for ten rubles."

And here she dealt with my brother:

"And how does it happen that a young man who can't count to two, who does not yet know how to earn a ruble, wastes so much money on himself? This is a useless idler, a tragedy for the family. He must immediately leave my house and my business. I don't want to see him before my eyes anymore!"

I felt a bad taste in my mouth. I saw that I was the same dependent person on my uncle that I had been earlier on my father-in-law, and that it had been only a delusion that by straying from my path I would become my own master. I wiped my lips and made no reply. Against my uncle's will I kept my

brother with me until the [Jewish new year] holidays were over; then he went home, because it just happened that his time to report to the draft board had arrived.

But relations between me and my uncle had become quite strained. They mixed into the business less and less. That is, they mixed in, but they didn't want to work anymore, devoting their entire time for the various "*blagotvoritelne*" [charitable] societies. It was left upon my head to worry about paying the debts and monitoring the unknown employees to prevent their robbing me. It became ever more difficult for me to defend my "second front," the front of *khazones* that didn't leave my mind for a single minute of the day, and which I always regarded as the most important part of my life.

No matter how difficult it was for me, I maintained my conductor's constant choir rehearsals, and as far as it was possible — I attended the rehearsals myself. I gave them my own compositions to study though, the truth be told, under the existing conditions of being occupied by the store, I was unable to develop them more clearly, but when I heard the choir singing them my heart soared. Then I forgot about all of the difficult reality that surrounded me and returned, even for a short while, to the world of dreams, to the world of creativity and discovery in the field of song that satisfied and strengthened me at every opportunity when I was able to devote myself to it.

## The First Synagogue Warden Who Wants to Rule Over Me

Lest I hadn't suffered enough with my brother Gedalye, whom my father had entrusted me to "make a man of him," a new misery awaited me. The next brother in line, Berl, or Boris, as he was called, also desperately needed a practical goal. And who was to be the goal-provider if not I, the "successful one," though oh-and-woe was my "success?" But from a distance it appeared that I was the happiest person in the world and that I am such a magician that I could wave my hand and assure income for my entire family.

That brother of mine, Berl, was quite a unique type who was entirely different from his elder brother, Gedalye. He was a fantastic young man who always lived in his strange dreams. But these dreams contained a certain quality, they were bound up with the world's order, with the injustice imposed on people by their own brothers, and his young mind sought the means to escape all those sins. He already knew of all the pamphlets that were then circulating among the youth and which spoke about the possibility of building a better world.

I felt terrific responsibility for my community, which is why I devoted much more time to the rehearsals with the choir and occupied myself with bringing my own improvisations into order. I also studied various recitatives by well-known great *khazonim*. Even then, at the very threshold of my *khazonish* career, I made it my principle that, should I be destined in my life to earn my living at *khazones* — I should be boss over myself and I would not allow anyone to intervene or to convince or give advice in those questions that relate to my cantorial profession.

But we are, after all, brothers and Sons of Israel, where everyone enjoys showing that he is an expert, and if not a real expert, a boss who has a say (perhaps because he can pay), and in which everyone who has a bit of "*tshin*" [rank] wants to take over at once, to show that he has all the power — but I had decided in my earliest youth that these things wouldn't fly with me. I will be my own boss. So at my very first *khazonish* employment, a conflict arose between me and the synagogue warden. And perhaps you think it was over terribly important matters? If so, you are, pardon me, simply in error; [it was] through the obstinacy of small-minded people.

Once, when I chanted the supplementary Sabbath prayers, I was approached by the warden of the Soldiers' Synagogue, the previously mentioned Shavelson, and, in the tone of a boss, ordered me to sing a certain prayer [*modim anakhnu lakh*] "we thank you," that I had sung on the previous Sabbath. The very thought of suggesting what I might sing did not please me. Still, I gently replied that, since I had sung the "*modim*" prayer the previous week, I had prepared a new composition for this Sabbath.

This warden of mine was not pleased by my answer and, behind my back, he addressed the choir conductor to have him sing that "*modim*." My conductor was a weak little man, lean and thin, pitiful and fearful, so how could he have had the courage to refuse when it was the warden himself speaking to him? So he nodded his head for "yes," that he would sing it. And at the same time he glanced at me [to see] what I say. I shook my head for "no."

It just happened to be the first Sabbath of the month, so I chanted alone all of [*yehi ratson*] "may our desires" and [*v'khashdeyhu*] "suspicion" without the choir and, seeing that the audience was enchanted, I thought: "Just you wait, warden, you will be rewarded for wanting to rule over me." After the quiet

Eighteen Benedictions and [*takhnes shabes*] “measure of Sabbath” when I came to [*r’tsey*] “receive,” Shavelson again came up to the conductor and, this time, specifically ordered him to sing “*modim*.” Since I could not pause in the midst of chanting, I again shook my head for “no” at the conductor. At this point the warden completely lost it and banged on the Torah-reading desk. An uproar arose in the synagogue; I ignored it and completed the Eighteen Blessings.

Then I turned to the crowd and calmly explained that since it was the first Sabbath of the month and there was so much to chant and pray, I determined that we might for once leave out the “*modim*” and it would be sung on another Sabbath. The entire crowd of worshippers agreed with me, but the warden, who considered himself to be a king, began shouting and in that heated moment, came out with some sort of an expletive.

Even back then I was among those who did not like to swallow insults, so I immediately demanded that the warden apologize to me before all the people of the congregation or else to leave the synagogue. The uproar grew still greater. The majority of the Jews held that I was right, except for the few aides of the warden, who were as imperious as he himself. As the warden did not want to make peace with me, he left the synagogue.

Saturday night, right after the *havdole* [separation ritual], three Jews came to me in the name of the warden, asking for reconciliation. I told them that, so far, I am but a *khazn* who chants without recompense, and if the warden can permit himself to treat me in such a manner, then how will it be when I am a *khazn* who is paid? I would then be trod underfoot.

That Shavelson was a very common Jew but was distinguished by a good Jewish heart and who distributed charity broadly. He was a shipping magnate who owned a great many freight wagons and horses and brought merchandise to the city’s merchants from the trains and ships. He was not a poor man, because from time immemorial it is the custom not to make a warden of a poor man, so he longed for a bit of honor and therefore supported various social welfare groups. Losing his position as warden of the Soldiers’ Synagogue would have been almost a death knell for him, therefore he sought to erase the incident, especially when he saw that the entire membership was against him.

Finally, he himself came forward and apologized to me. I explained to him that we can remain good friends in the future, but I doubt whether I could remain as their *khazn*. It just happened that I had received an offer from another synagogue in Ekaterinoslav, so I felt as though I had the upper hand. When Shavelson heard those words — he turned white as a sheet; I thought that Jew would not survive the pressure my words had created. This would have meant no less than losing the warden’s position.

But we are, after all, Jewish cutthroats, so we worked it out and I remained there for another year. This time I was given a salary: eight hundred rubles per year. I felt great responsibility toward my position, and it was therefore more difficult to maintain both fronts: both to be a great merchant with overwhelming responsibilities and money obligations to strangers, as well as being a *khazn* for my community, which also involved significant obligations.

A year later my wife bore my third child, this time a boy whom we named Dov, or Berl in Yiddish. The weight of assuring income grew even heavier. The house grew full of wet nurses, nannies and housemaids, and there was constant tumult there. I could no longer even dream of locking myself away for an hour to engage with my tunes and melodies as I had so liked to do after returning from Vienna.

I wandered about as though in a chicken-coop. I didn't walk but was carried along from the store to the choir and from the choir back to the store. And when I finally arrived home and dreamt of resting for a bit — I was met by the hoo-ha of the three little children, may they be well, and all the different kinds of serving maids who kept fighting among themselves and I thought that I might lose my mind.

In the end, my nerves did not hold out; I collapsed and had to begin being doctored. At the same time I noticed that my voice was serving me less than before. During chanting I felt that I had to strain myself severely, my chest was always inflamed and mucus-filled due to my excessive smoking. One doctor advised that I must immediately travel to Carlsbad to rescue my health. But how to go off to the warm baths when you're faced here with such a heavy pack of all sorts of worries and obligations: for the community, for the business and for your own household?

Since the business demanded that I travel to the major cities, such as Moscow, Kharkov, Lodz and Bialystok in order to make the required purchases for the oncoming winter season, it was decided to combine that trip with a quick dash to Carlsbad for a month's time to rest my nerves and to gather new energy so I could continue to carry the weight that rested on my young shoulders. Thus, at the end of summer, 1902, I arrived at the famous health resort that was, by then, filled by all sorts of good Jews with various maladies and just Jews in plush fedoras and long, fur-lined coats who had come here from the *shtetlakh* in Poland and Galicia to enjoy the well-water that was a cure for all the maladies on earth.

## My Apprentice-Singers Are Stolen From Me

At that time Carlsbad was officially under Emperor Franz Joseph's rule, but you might say in good conscience that it was a Jewish State. One simply did not see a single Gentile. Wherever you stood and wherever you walked you saw Jews carrying the little jars and the straws through which they sipped the curative waters.

But should you think that the whole of the Tribe of Israel had, heaven preserve us, fallen ill and come here for a cure, you would be, begging your pardon, wrong. It was simply the custom among the well-off homes in Russia, Poland, Germany and Romania to spend summer at the warm baths. And they often brought along their grown daughters; who knows, some sort of decent match might turn up.

And along with rabbis, prominent Jews and simply well-off householders, Carlsbad's visitors included *khazonim*. There I met *khazonim* from Hungary, Germany, Romania and everywhere else. The Carlsbad *khazn*, Goldenberg, considered it his duty to play host to the visiting *khazonim* and we all came together at his house and, as is the custom, each considered it proper to show off his abilities, the originality that he brings to the art. I would be telling a lie if I were to relate to someone that I had reason to be embarrassed before anyone.

On the morning following such a visit with *khazn* Goldenberg, he came to my hotel and took me for a walk. Not saying a word, he led me to the director of the Cure Management. He introduced me as a famous singer, which wasn't true. But he probably did so because he did not have the nerve to say that I was a Cantor, or perhaps the German, the director, didn't know the meaning of *khazn*.

In a word, I sang in the main concert hall of the Carlsbad Cure Management and I must confess that, despite the great publicity that was arranged, the concert was not a particular success in the monetary sense. After all the deductions and turning over half to the Cure Management, I was left with some sixty *kroner*, or twenty-nine dollars. I explain it only through the fact that I had sung a secular repertoire of Schubert's songs and arias from "Eugene Onegin." Had the Jews in Carlsbad, however, heard that a young *khazn* was singing songs from the old Jewish melody-treasury, I'm sure there wouldn't have been an empty seat in the hall.

And there was actually a plan for a second concert made up of purely liturgical music. And this time the management was prepared to guarantee me a minimum of 150 *kroner*, but suddenly a telegram arrived from home [demanding] that I return without delay. I had to leave everything and quickly head home. I had, however, managed during those four weeks spent at that magnificent health resort to restore my strength and to refresh myself as though newly-born.

A quite thrifty [*sic*] package of troubles awaited me at home: first of all, my wife, who was entering her fourth pregnancy, was very sick. In addition, the business situation was very tense. Business was slow during the summer months, while payments on the promissory notes continued to come due. My father-in-law went about excitedly and my uncle Moshkovitsh was as puffed-up as a turkey because he had to invest several thousand borrowed rubles into the business to make it through the dead season.

The greatest surprise, however, greeted me by my conductor, who on the morning after my arrival arrived breathlessly, complaining that a great tragedy had occurred: they had stolen his best basso and his best alto and we were in danger of not having a proper choir during the Days of Awe.

In those times it was accepted that a few months before the Days of Awe *khazonim* and conductors would head across the land, sneaking each other's best voices of the choirs and mainly the soloists among the young ones. The father of such a lad was slipped some score rubles into his palm; the youngster was seated on a wagon and led off to a new boss until after the Days of Awe. And the same story happened to my unfortunate conductor during the time I was delighting myself with my Carlsbad "gushing."

And if this were all not enough, demands came from the remaining, not sneaked-off singers, all the tenors and basses, that their fees be doubled for the month of the Days of Awe. Their season was drawing near and they felt in charge because without them the pulpit could not be approached. They beleaguered the store, not permitting any customers to enter, and it is useless to describe the troubles I suffered because of this at the hands of my uncle. This was the welcome that greeted me as soon as I crossed the threshold in Ekaterinoslav.

All my Carlsbad cures ran right out on me. But I never lost myself when heavy worries plagued me. I went systematically from one difficulty to the next and tried to straighten it all out. First of all I saw to it that my wife should get well as soon as possible. I must say that my very coming home had a beneficial result for her. Then I made the necessary arrangements for bank payments, moving everything to the fall season, hoping that the good harvest would bring good sales.

The most difficult problem was the choir that had fallen apart. When I went off to my wardens and explained my bitter situation they would not hear of covering the new expenses. First of all, they contended that their budget is already overloaded, and besides that, they said, as all wardens and synagogue presidents usually say: "The key point is that we have you as our *khazn*; the choir is for your benefit, so it's your headache."

My rail-thin conductor wouldn't leave me alone: what is to be done about the stolen singers? In addition, he burdened me with the rest of the boys who wouldn't leave the front of the store all day long, demanding their raise in wages. The conductor argued that if he had fifty rubles he would travel with the father of the stolen alto to Melitopol and would bring that rascal back home. The alto's father demands a twenty-fiver and the other twenty-five rubles would be needed for travel costs. He assured me that he would certainly bring that fellow back home.

I saw that I had no other alternative, so I came up with the fifty. But now what is to be done with that gang in rags and tatters that dogs my every step every minute at the store? They had already come to blows with my father-in-law, who was by then an employee of our business, an angry Jew who chased them to hell and back, so that they declared a strike and refused to come to rehearsal.

I called the older choir singers into the store, told them to select fabrics for making holiday clothes; to the others I distributed cuts of cloth for women's clothes for their mothers, and in this manner the dispute was settled peaceably. Meanwhile, my conductor returned from Melitopol with the stolen alto. He told me that he had been obliged to take the local conductor to a rabbinic court there and that the rabbi had adjudged that the stolen singer could not be held by force, but my conductor must pay ten rubles to cover the expenses incurred by the Melitopol conductor in the course of the "theft."

This was how I managed to fight my way through all the difficulties and was able to prepare for the Days of Awe at the Soldiers' Synagogue. My voice again served me well after the Carlsbad cure and I presented chanting that truly pleased both God and man. And I must say that we prayed ourselves into a good year. The harvest that year was unusually good. The Gentiles were loaded with the money they earned for their grain and they crowded all the stores in town. The iron factories in Bryansk, outside Ekaterinoslav, were working at full steam and their workers were good customers for stuff for the oncoming winter.

It reached the point that the manufactured-goods wholesalers were short of merchandise. But my store, thanks to the good sense I had during my buying trips that summer, was supplied with a great amount of merchandise. So that many of the small retailers who found nothing at the wholesalers came to me and I sold them large amounts for cash and remained standing firmly on my feet. I entered winter in good spirits, hoping that in the enlargement of my family the One Above had helped me to quickly clear my debts and I would be able to devote one hundred percent of my time to singing and *khazones* as I strive with every fiber of my being.

A very new idea arose: since I've already made a good start at the wholesale business, it appealed to me more than the pennies to be made at retail where one is engaged with Gentiles and their wives who take off your head with their grimacing and capriciousness. One earns less at wholesale but the high turnover covers the difference and the trading is faster, one deals with merchants and doesn't eat one's gall as is the case [when selling] by the yard. I had to discuss the plan of converting to wholesale trade with my uncle, Moshkovitsh, because that would require fresh capital.



## I Become A Wholesaler And Barely Make It Out Alive

It was my fate to make a further experiment in trade before I could finally leave business and devote myself to that which was truly the content of my life. When I proposed to my uncle the plan to open a manufactured goods wholesale business, I had the unexpected full support of my father-in-law. First, it was an inborn habit of his to trade on a large scale, buying much merchandise, so that the plan pleased him because he hoped that he would again be able to spread his arms and swim in the businesses like a fish in water.

His second consideration was that I would become still more entangled in business, so as to think less about *khazones*. Therefore, he exerted himself mightily to have my uncle agree to the plan and to provide the required new capital investment. A few days later my uncle came with this project: He is pleased with the idea of opening a new wholesale business and he has even already designated for the purpose one of his large stores on Ekaterinski Prospekt [Avenue]. As to new capital, here is his plan: Since he has a nephew in Pavlograd who is the manager of a large manufacturing business [and] who has several thousand rubles of his own and would like to strike out on his own, it makes good sense for us to form a partnership of both businesses, both the retail store and the new wholesale business that I'm planning to open. The partnership plan was: Sixty percent for me and forty percent for the new partner.

The idea pleased me most of all because I hoped that the new partner, as an experienced storekeeper, would remove from my shoulders much of the weight that lay on me. A few days later he arrived and made the impression on me of an honest man and the business was, in good fortune, settled. My new partner's first business trip was not, however, so successful. He insisted on making his first buying trip for the spring season at the Kharkov "*kreshtshenska yarmarke*" [sic]. And his very first purchase put us in a bind.

It turned out that he had small-town taste in regard to styles and colors and he bought merchandise that we couldn't possibly sell. Further, he did not get the best payment terms. Nevertheless, we opened the wholesale business with the purchased merchandise and they sold quite well during the first few months. We would sell on credit, mostly for short terms, and all the merchants paid their bills on time.

However, when there was a poor harvest the following year and the small storekeepers showed weak profits, they were not able to fulfill their obligations. For some we had to extend their terms, and others were simply in distress, and our drawers were soon filled with a mountain of unpaid notes. To work our way out of this bad situation, we decided to rent a store in Alexandrovsk in the Ekaterinoslav Province to sell out the remaining merchandise that was left.

This was actually a good idea, because in the course of two months we made fourteen thousand rubles in *cash* [English] which significantly improved our situation. That business was conducted by my partner and we moved forward with both businesses in Ekaterinoslav, with my *khazones* employment as an addition.

At this time it is well to relate that I had exchanged my Soldiers' Synagogue for another synagogue, that was called the Tailer's Synagogue. My chanting on the Days of Awe had drawn the attention of those wardens who offered me twelve hundred rubles a year rather than the eight hundred I earned at my

previous position. In addition, I was angry at them [the former employers] for not wanting to participate in covering the unexpected expenses I had in ransoming the “stolen” alto and in raising the wages of the singers, totaling the sum of one hundred and fifty rubles. So I got even with them by leaving them, although they came and pleaded [saying] that they were prepared to pay the same amount of twelve hundred rubles.

Peaceful relations in the business partnership did not last long. From day to day I felt increasingly that I am choking on all my businesses and all my “joys.” The larger the scope of all my businesses grew, the less my mind focused on them. I was lacking the fire and true interest that every business demands. My partner began to notice this and had complaints against me.

Most of all he was not pleased that my father-in-law interferes too much in the business, as though he were the actual boss. In addition, he complained that my father-in-law is being paid too high a salary by the business. My father-in-law became aware of this and it resulted in dismal scandals in the business and people often came running upon hearing terrible shouting, including the Russian swear words they launched at each other. Understandably, this did not result in great honor or esteem for the business.

That was not all that bothered my Pavlograd partner. He was also displeased over my spending too much time on my *khazonish* affairs, and he assumed the courage to demand that I give up my *khazones* so that I could devote myself more to the business. This was an insolence I could not endure, and I told him that I was ready at any moment to pay him off so that he could go back to where he had come from. That set off the flames of true discord. The business, it is understood, suffered greatly, income fell and no way out of the desperate situation could be seen.

So as to calm things down, my uncle Moshkovitsh agreed to take my father-in-law and his household under his own support, so as to lighten the expenses of the business. But as things were already heading downhill this was a minor remedy. We had to first liquidate the wholesale business. The joys we expected from that turned into a lake [of woes]. The small retailers were unable to cover their commitments and we were left with a cabinetful of worthless promissory notes. We had to call it quits quickly.

So we were, that is, back where we had begun: at the retail store. When we conducted an inventory to determine how much merchandise we own and where we stand in the world, the full calamity came clear. Even the original investment was missing; simply put, the partners had consumed too much of the business and therefore we had to cut the sums that both partners had been withdrawing weekly.

This hit me very hard because by now I was, bless The Name, a dad of four children and expenses were not light. Every day I saw more clearly that I had wandered into a swamp from which no way out might be seen. I had, that is, lost both worlds: not further studying singing so that I am in danger of spending my life as a small-town *khazn*, and as well the dream about big business had turned into a lake [of woes].

I felt that only one thing might rescue me: total withdrawal from business and return to Vienna, to reconnect with all that been torn apart against my will. But how does one achieve this? If I were to say that I want to leave, my partner would say: “Well, go off in good health, who is holding you back?” — and I would emerge without tooth or eye, lacking the money for a train ticket. A certain strategy, therefore, had to be pursued in order to obtain a proposal by my partner that he would be willing to take over the business and pay me off.

The best means of obtaining this was to shout that I want my partner to leave and I am prepared to pay him all the money that he had invested. I knew that he would never in his life agree to this because he no longer had a return route. So I therefore expected a counter-proposal from him. And that happened. He was ready to take over the business on his own.

But here there were required guarantees that all the debts we had entered into as partners would be promptly paid, and only my uncle could assure that. so there were long and intricate negotiations about this. In the meantime I lost no time and sent off a letter to my old friend, *khazn* Smotritski in Vienna, as well as to my former professor, Shteynshnayder, whom I informed that I have been for three years a *khazn* in Elizavetgrad and am successful. But, nevertheless, I see no future here for myself because I feel that there is something missing in my education. I therefore ask their advice as to whether there might be a purpose for me to come to Vienna and if there is a future to be seen for me in Vienna as a *khazn*?

I did not have to wait long for a reply. Smotritski wrote me that I should not hesitate for a moment but to come at once because everyone recalls my voice and there can be no question at all that I will settle well into one of the most honored cantorial positions. The professor, too, was very enthused by my letter and wrote me that he would overjoyed to see me again in the beautiful Austrian capital and that he would help me to the extent of his abilities.

These letters from Vienna were a wonderful balsam for my wounds. I had heard the voice of the other world. I again realized that I was alive and am not yet sunk into the swamp that had been spread before me by my father-in-law, my uncles and aunts and the rest of my family.

## **I Emerge Broke From All the Business and Return to Vienna**

No person could know about the letters that I had received from Vienna. This was my most sacred secret because I felt that my entire future, all my dreams were bound up with Vienna and everything that is happening around me is no more than an empty peel that will finally drop and disappear. May the kernel be whole and not rotted.

During the time of the negotiations about turning over the business to my partner, we managed to pay off some thirty thousand rubles worth of notes. The shelves in the store grew narrower and emptier day by day. My partner still dreamed that I might again take a trip across the land to buy new merchandise but all my senses were far distant from that.

I convinced my uncle that, since it was he who had spun my head into the partnership match, he must now see to it that I am drawn out of that rotted matter, otherwise I would wind up six feet under. There was a sharp exchange of words until I could no longer endure it and told him directly that my entire family and my future fate are on his conscience. It was he who had dragged me off the straight and narrow, promising me joys of gold, and now I am choking and struggling in a sea of arguments and constant conflicts, and the the best thing would be for me to be let out of the matter.

“I would rather,” I said, “take on the Ruler of the Universe as a partner and place my fate in His hands. I did not follow my instincts but listened to your sweet talk of growing rich. As a result I lost four of my most fruitful years. Only by a miracle did I manage to connect with the homey little synagogues, the Soldiers’ and the Tailors’, and I kept in contact with the world of song, of something higher. If not, I would now be a failed trader like my father-in-law, with all due respect to him.”

I demanded of my uncle that he take over a guaranty for all remaining debts and also for the promissory notes that my partner had written in both our names, so that I might leave the business with a calm mind and clear conscience, [knowing] that I had not, heaven protect us, taken anything from anyone, as my father had counseled me with his moving words that had never left my memory.

Finally I reached my goal. I obtained the required papers, assuring that all debts would be paid as required and that I bear no responsibility for the liabilities that my former partner may undertake after my leaving the business, and on a winter’s day I emerged broke from all my businesses. I remained working at the store for several weeks so that my former partner might be able to go on a trip to buy new merchandise as he asked of me. When he returned, we bid each other a polite farewell and I was free of all debts, but also free of any money...I emerged with what I had started.

I began to prepare for the trip to Vienna and there arose the most difficult and responsibility-laden problem in all my life: How do I secure my wife and the four children against suffering need and that they might not, heaven protect us, have to turn to others? Am I going off to Vienna for an assured bit of bread? Can I rely on what *khazn* Smotritski writes, that a very good position awaits me at one of the Vienna temples?

And what will I do if several months go by and I do not find a position; on what will my family then live? And, in general, where does one obtain the wherewithal for expenses and for the family at first? I was in quite strained relations with my uncle after having left the business, and besides, it was quite

beneath me to lower myself before him and to show him my deep pain and that he bears the major guilt for having simply tricked me with the supposed joys of his millionaire's businesses.

Aid came from a brother-in-law of mine who lent me five hundred rubles, four hundred and fifty of which I left with my wife, and the remaining fifty was for travel expenses to Vienna and for living costs in the new city until the time that my true joy arrived.

And so the most sorrowful day of my life drew near. I still recall the date: it was the twentieth of January in the year 1904 when I sat down in the train en route to Vienna. It was a real *tishe b'ov* [9th of Av, day of mourning] for my family; they cried and complained over me as though following my corpse. I myself was so broken that I thought: perhaps I dare not do this, perhaps I dare not assume the responsibility of abandoning wife and children and going off into the world to seek happiness.

"Perhaps," I said to myself, "you should have kept charge of the business, remained as a storekeeper, but with assured earnings, and have driven out of your mind for once and all the craziness of taking over the world, of becoming a tremendous *khazn*. What's wrong with being a *khazn* in the Soldiers' or Tailors' synagogue? Why reach for the far-off skies, when here you stood on the solid earth with the small but assured income; what was wrong with that?"

Thus I gnawed at myself as tears flowed from my eyes seeing the distress of my wife over my leaving her in such uncertain circumstances. But there was no way back. And besides, that was just a moment of my weakness; in my inner heart I was almost certain that I was taking the right step, that it had long been time to crawl out of the swamp into which my dear father-in-law had forcibly dragged me.

I was barely able to get my wife and the rest of the family to agree not to ride with me to the train station. I wanted to be by myself soonest, farther from the spot where I had wasted several years for no good reason, on empty dreams of wealth. I made an exception for the brother-in-law who had given me the interest-free loan. He had an open heart toward me and understanding of my experiences. It was with him that I wanted to share the final farewell.

The train started as I sat there, tired, broken and despondent, in fear of the unknown future to which I am headed. Again my conscience gnawed at me: "Perhaps you should not have left? Perhaps you should have remained as retailer of manufactured goods, as your father and grandfather were? Finally, all of them earned a livelihood, sometimes worse, sometimes better, but they happily married off their children and weren't dependent on anyone. Why must I be the exception?"

In that heavy mood I fell into a deep sleep and the sun was already shining brightly on snow-covered fields when the conductor tugged at my sleeve, asking for my ticket. I washed and began praying silently. However, I felt such a twinge and yearning and such sorrow in my heart that I would have been pleased to chant the prayers out loud, crying my heart out in the prayers and that would certainly have lightened my mood. I would not have had anything against calling together all the train passengers, even the conductors and the engineers and to sing out all my heart to them, all the pain and woe that was loaded onto me.

But meanwhile I prayed quietly and hummed an appropriate melody for each tiny bit of the prayers. And it just happened to flow out of me, as though from an open well. Just because I was so embittered, the improvisations poured out, each warmer and heartfelt than the last. As it was regrettable for me if these were to be lost, I quickly drew from my valise a sheaf of music paper and began to note the main aspects of the improvisations, each in accord with its registers. Sitting there for several hours while

writing all these ideas, I felt that I was becoming quite a different person. Somehow my mood grew lighter, I became more hopeful and believing that God would not abandon me in the wide world and that I would be able quite soon to reunite with my family and never have to separate from them again.

Sitting there thus in the car, I totaled up my “capital” and came to the conclusion that I actually did not have enough money for the trip to Vienna. I had bought a ticket to the border city of Podvolotshisk and for the few rubles left I saw that I might reach no farther than Lemberg. It is actually not a bad idea to stay over in Lemberg and to look around that large Jewish city, [to see] what I might be able to achieve there to earn enough for the coming expenses.

I had heard of the famous *khazn* of the Lemberg Choir Synagogue, Halpern. In the worst case, I thought, I could join his choir as a solo tenor. I was certain that I would not be lost in that city and would later make my way to Vienna.

And deciding to stop off at Lemberg, I suddenly remembered that I actually have an old friend there, from my *kheyder* years, of whom, truth be told, I hadn’t thought of in seventeen years. But he was still one of my own, from my homey *shtetl* of Khonorod, and he would surely befriend me. I sent a telegram to this friend of mine [asking] that he await me. But since this friend is an interesting chapter in himself — it pays to tell about him in greater detail.

## He Suffered For His Father's Sins

I will not give my friend's name because there is nothing good I can say about his father who did many not-nice things in our *shtetl*. I tell of this only because it provides a picture of Jewish life at that time and what sorts of ideas people came up with when there was no income and one had to support the household, and not all had the high moral strength to keep from sinking into filth to earn an easy coin.

There was a Jew in our *shtetl* whom I do not want to name. He was not an unlettered fellow, had even studied Talmud as a child, was known in town as a learned Jew. In addition to that, he had a quite handsome appearance, always elegantly dressed, greeting everyone with a smile. But just one minor thing: no one could say with certainty how this Jew earned his living. In addition to all this he was a Jew who had quite a nice singing voice that made him still more acceptable to people.

They knew that he was a Jew who was buddy-buddy with officialdom and that he was a frequent visitor at the estates of the noblemen around our *shtetl*. Though this Jew had some sort of small leather store, everyone knew that the store could not provide income and, generally, he was never to be seen. He would disappear for months at a time and no one could say accurately where he was. All in all, this person was wrapped up in strange secrecy.

When speaking with him one might have the impression of dealing with an innocent little lamb, a pure and holy one who can't count to two. He spoke so modestly that his words simply melted in one's mouth. But no one could imagine the kind of animal that hid under that pelt.

Suddenly, people in the *shtetl* began saying that this Jew had unexpectedly become wealthy. No one could explain from where he had obtained these riches. He bought one of the nicest houses in town, fitted it out with new furniture. His wife appeared [wearing] several new strings of pearls on her neck. The children were dressed up in new pantaloons that were a rarity in the *shtetl*. And this cited Jew bought up from a bankrupt, impoverished Jew the rights to the most prominent spot at the Eastern Wall of the synagogue. The town was agog. Where did this leather merchant suddenly obtain his wealth? Had he somehow fallen heir to a rich inheritance? But the *shtetl* would have known who had died. They knew all the rich folk and even everyone's the rich relatives as well as they knew their own fingers. The mystery remained.

When that Jew was asked: "What sort of a good business deal did you make?" he replied: "When God wants to help someone, he does it in the blink of an eye," while adopting a truly pious face as is fitting for a person who speaks only with God. But as the saying goes: God swore that no secret will be lost. And quite soon the truth came to the surface, as oil upon the waters.

On one fine day we saw driving down the main street, where all the stores are located, a handsome phaeton on whose horses' necks bells tinkled, a sign that officialdom was on its way. The sheriff led the way on his horse. The Jewish storekeepers, as is their wont, became frightened, certain that the excise tax collector would be inspecting their licenses, and began carrying their merchandise onto the street, because almost no one had the proper license required by the law.

But this time the storekeepers' fears were baseless; they were not the target. The regional examining magistrate had come, searching for none other than this cited Jew, the newly-minted rich man, the source of whose sudden wealth was unknown to anyone. Since this person had not been in town for some time,

an inspection took place at his home and at the leather store, and since not a thing was found, officialdom rode off.

Immediately after, the town knew the whole story: Our new Khonorod rich man has been, begging your pardon, in jail for several months for having done this minor thing: He had helped a rich nobleman who had carried a large amount of insurance to set fire to his grain storages. The nobleman shared the insurance payment with our Jew.

Shortly thereafter the cited person showed up again in Khonorod. The nobleman remained in jail but the Jew had found a contrivance by which to escape. It's possible that he was freed because he knew too many secrets about the high officials, the grafters, and they considered it best not to start up with him.

Pure logic would have, I think, have said: "Mr. Jew, you've been burnt once, so sit there quietly and don't make waves." But no, once the Evil Inclination has someone in its mitts, it doesn't let go. Our Jew crept into a still deeper mud hole. And listen to what a Jew can think up: He insured his own son for a large sum, sat that son onto a ship sailing on the Dnieper [River], and that son suddenly disappeared, leaving his clothes on the ship so that it might supposedly appear that the son had drowned.

The investigation of the matter took a long time; all of Russia was searched for the boy, but he wasn't found anywhere. So it appears that he had really drowned and there is no help for it but to pay the father the large fortune. The Jew again appeared in our *shtetl*, now as a still richer man than before. But his luck didn't hold out for long. There are no secrets among Jews and a "good friend" turned up, reporting to the proper place that the whole business was well orchestrated and that the son of him of whom we speak was not drowned at all but had crossed the border into Galicia, where he lives in a large city.

The Jew was again arrested and lay around in prison during the long months before the trial, and after the trial he went off on a long sentence. The son, who had in the meantime changed his name, lived abroad on the capital that his father had obtained from the insurance company. As he was a close friend of mine in our *kheyder* years, when I was still at home I wrote him a letter sympathizing with his fate at having become the victim of his money-grubbing father and having to wander about in strange lands, far from home. He then replied and asked that, no matter how agreeable my expressions of sympathy might be, he still asks that I no longer write to him, because this causes him more difficulty, reminding him of his tragic past. But I still retained his address.

Now, when fate had decreed that I, too, should be alone and thrown into solitude in this great Galician city, I recalled my friend whom I had not seen for so long, and decided to send him a telegram from the border, asking him to await me in the unfamiliar city.

He arrived on time at the hotel upon which we had agreed and our meeting was simultaneously both joyful and tragic. Somehow our common childhood years emerged in the shadows of our homes, in the beloved atmosphere of our parents, where we did not lack for all that was good, and where life flowed so unconcernedly and lustily. What could he have known then as a child that in the mind of his able father there were twisting criminal thoughts about forcibly becoming wealthy and that finally he himself would fall victim to his father's cunning while his father rots away in some Russian prison? There was nothing by which to be cleansed; the money remaining from his father's bit of work could not assuage the feeling of shame and depression.



Yet he was still happy to see me; somehow I was the personification of those innocent times before his father began his evil deeds. We spoke for many long hours and he sought to welcome me in the best manner. I told him of my situation, that I am already the father of four children, that I had already “dealt it all,” running large businesses; now I am flat broke and going out to seek joy in the wide world while remaining without a penny. Therefore I want to remain in this large Jewish city for several weeks, first of all to earn a few pennies and, secondly, to snack something from the famous Lemberg super-cantor, Halpern, who has the best mixed choir of men and women and a good organ, in addition. This was something new to me and I knew that it would all be useful to me in the wide world.

I had always dreamed about unification of the Conservative [actually, Orthodox] mode of prayer with the modern cantorial profession and I felt that here in Lemberg I might learn something about this subject. As soon as my friend heard Halpern’s name he caught fire: “He is my best friend and he will surely do everything for you that I might ask.” But until we would go see Halpern, my friend proposed that for Sabbath we should go to his home in Stanislav, where he was the manager of a large business. I, instead, wanted to spend my first Sabbath in Lemberg to go to hear Halpern and his choir. So it was I agreed and we remained in town. My friend offered me money, as much as I might need, but I considered it better not to take anything from him and to wait until the One Above would send me my first honorable earning.

## With Great Difficulty, I Am Granted an Audition at the Lemberg Orthodox Synagogue

In great impatience I awaited Friday evening in Lemberg so that I might go to the Great Choir Synagogue to hear Halpern and his famous mixed choir. I was pleasantly surprised; Halpern had a wonderful baritone voice and a fine presentation, and the choir sang splendidly. This was precisely the true God-worship I had imagined in my fantasies for many years: everything sounding harmonious, joyful, and simultaneously not losing the truly Jewish, the traditional.

After the prayers my friend introduced me to Halpern. He actually had known him for a long time. Halpern had been an assistant singer to one of my friend's grandfathers, a small town *khazn*. On Saturday morning, after prayers, Halpern invited both of us to his home, where we spent the entire day. Many pious Jews arrived for the traditional *shaleshudes* [Third Meal], and Halpern set out a table like an observant Jew. Somehow that didn't jibe with a cantor of a modern Temple. But I thought to myself: perhaps this is some sort of a special Galician tradition. Halpern asked me to sing something. But I wasn't in the proper mood and I considered it better to postpone this to another time.

On the next Sabbath I had been at my friend's in Stanislav for several days and immediately upon my return I reported to Halpern, because where else could I have gone? Halpern already knew that I planned to be an assistant singer and a soloist in his choir, so he asked me to sing something so that he might become acquainted with my voice. I sang one of my own prayer-improvisations in the truly old-traditional manner. He requested another prayer and another prayer until he said:

"You know, young man, I have not for a long time had the opportunity to hear such a voice and such an understanding of *khazones*. And you want to be an assistant singer in my choir? You must certainly be making fun of me. You and your voice could only be lost in my choir and why should I permit your voice to be lost when you could bring so much use and even be an honor to our people?

"First off, young man," Halpern continued speaking to me, "your tenor voice could make you a leading opera singer and completely independent of the synagogue-wardens, presidents and all the other big shots, all of whom consider themselves to be your boss. And secondly, if you really want to go down the thorny path of *khazones*, you should avoid my synagogue and my choir, as a devil escapes from incense. It would bring you nothing good and could only harm your *khazonish* career, if you were to stand close to me, because here in Galicia the pious Jews have simply excommunicated my Temple and they regard it as worse than a church, may they not be compared. Everything connected with my Temple is as *treyf* [non-kosher] as pork.

"But on the other hand," *khazn* Halpern continued, "a thought has occurred to me: there is a famous Orthodox synagogue here in Lemberg, called '*turi zahav*' [Tower of Gold], a synagogue in which there once stood such *khazonishe* giants as: Nisi Belzer, Zaydl Rovner, Borekh Shor, Borekh Konstantiner, Leyzerke the *khazn*, and others. And for several years, this synagogue has been seeking an appropriate *khazn* who might be worthy of its great predecessors. I believe you would be a fitting candidate for them if, you understand, you would pass all the examinations they will require. And this is a fine position that

will provide you with handsome earnings and you would have to chant only once a month; the other three Sabbaths you would be a free person, able to tour other cities.”

And Cantor Halpern concluded that, if I wished, he would arrange a meeting with the president of the “Tower of Gold” synagogue, a certain Polterayk [Polterreich?], with whom I would have to discuss all the particulars. It was, of course, very pleasant for me to hear all these good words from Cantor Halpern. I was still more filled with pride by the thought that I could stand at the Arc at which had stood such greats of *khazones*. And at the very end I recalled the poverty whistling through my pockets and that I must get to something at once. So it was with true delight that I agreed to meet with the cited president of the “Tower of Gold.”

The next day I arrived precisely at the appointed time at the home of Herr Polterayk. It seemed to me somehow that his welcome to me was not very friendly. He seemed to regard me from top to bottom and I already thought: perhaps he had noticed something about me that is not in order; perhaps my clothes are soiled. But no, I looked at myself and saw that I was quite neatly and properly dressed.

Finally he began to ask where such a Jew as I come from, where had I been a *khazn* until now and what were my plans for the future. I replied to everything in order. Then he says to me: “I understand, young man, that you plan to chant with us on a Sabbath as a tryout for the possible later assumption of the vacant position in our synagogue. So I want to tell you that, sadly, the position is not [suited] for you and you are not [suited] for the position.”

The verdict pronounced, he fell silent. I was seared by it, but I quickly understood that I do not please him because I am a bit too modernly dressed, too intelligent for the pious Galician Jews, because as to my voice he knows nothing of it, whether it is appropriate or not.

So I played dumb and asked: “Can you tell me, Herr Polterayk, why you think that I am not fit to be a *khazn* in your synagogue?”

“Yes, I will tell you openly: I believe that our community will not permit you to chant in our synagogue because you appear to me to be a too-modern young man and ours is a strictly Orthodox community. I simply cannot imagine that you would be capable to present a prayer according to the Orthodox manner, and, in general, how can we allow a place near the Arc for a young man in such dandified clothes and clean shaven, as well?”

My heart grew quite pitiful upon hearing these words. However, I did not lose myself but replied in a well-known saying of the *mishna* [Talmud]: “do not regard the jar (but what it contains).” “First, R’Warden,” I say, “if you look carefully at my face, you will see that I am not clean shaven, but simply that I do not have any sign of age, because I am still a young person, and as to my short-cut clothes, that is something that can be changed at any moment. No [marriage] match has ever dissolved over this. But the main thing is entirely different: you need a good *khazn*, not just a Jew in a beard and earlocks and a long *kapote* [coat]. So first test whether I am capable of anything and then we can talk about the other matters.”

That Jew began to regard me differently after this statement. He said that he did not want to decide by himself, so he will therefore invite to his home tomorrow evening some dozen major householders of his synagogue and what those Jews will decide will be it. The next day I came to Warden Polterayk’s house dressed in a long overcoat, but I wasn’t able to paste-on a beard and earlocks. I arrive just at supper time,

and the warden invited me to the table. As there was a blessing-group [three to nine men] at the table, he offered me the blessing. When I reached “may God preserve us,” I let go, especially as my heart was quite bitter; when I cantillated the words “not as a gift of flesh and blood” I thought: “this is really my prayer now: not to depend on other people,” and I launched into a heartfelt prayer that I might please the wardens, that I might not have to depend on anyone, and that I, too, might soon have my own home with my wife and children.

Soon Jews began to arrive in plush hats, with curly earlocks bent under their hats. Their long *talis kotns* [undershirt, four-cornered fringed prayer garments] fluttered and showed from behind their long *kapotes*. These Jews, too, began to check me out from head to toe, until finally the warden says to me:

“Well, young man, now you will sing something for the assembled householders from the Friday evening prayers.”

I began with “lay us down,” then chanted “seeds live and endure.” When I saw that the Jews were beginning to sway and whisper among themselves, I finished with a mighty “may the One who blessed.”

Then a Jew stood up, whose appearance made it known that he was a rich man, strong-willed, who thinks highly of himself and believes that he knows everything about everything, even *khazones*. Later I learned that he is very wealthy and a major influence in the Lemberg community. He says to me:

“Yes, young man, this is quite fine, but we know that there are *khazonim* who do know the Sabbath prayers, but when a sacred day arrives, especially the Days of Awe, they stick out their tongues and don’t know where to begin or end. Therefore we would like to hear from you some Days of Awe prayers before we can allow you to chant a Sabbath audition at our synagogue.”

I replied that they themselves might select whichever prayers they want from the Days of Awe ritual. It is understood that each one of them chose something else. Finally they agreed upon “it is our fault.” When I chanted the “it is our fault,” I could see that a few of my listeners stood up from their chairs; when I finished, another Jew requested that I chant a bit of the “worship”. So I chanted “king,” then “you are revealed”, “elevateds”, and this did still not suffice, so they requested a bit of “closing” and I ended with “you have been gifted” to the great satisfaction of the assembled Jews. They decided that I was qualified to be auditioned. Well, this was in itself a great accomplishment and I began to prepare for the Sabbath that was to decide my future fate.

## The Lemberg Rabbi Forbids My Sabbath Chanting

When the prominent Jews of Lemberg agreed to permit me to audition in their Orthodox synagogue “Tower of Gold,” they immediately made clear to me that they were not promising, heaven forfend, any payment for the Sabbath chanting. They only hope that my chanting will be approved by the congregants; then the wealthy householders who will be called up to read from the Torah will pledge something or other for the *khazn* and on Sunday, if The Name be willing, I will go into town with the sexton to make the collection.

That is, I sang a drum-full, and had to endure all sorts of capriciousness by rich Jews until they agreed to let me audition, and now I would have to chant on Friday night and Sabbath morning and plead to God that I please [them] and that the Jews would have the desire to contribute something, and after all that, to set out with my [collection] scarf across the city to gather up the few pennies. It cannot be said that there was anything to be enthused about. So I sat there, broken [in spirit].

At the moment at which the warden shoved the fiver into my hand I realized the great change that had come into my life, that I was no longer the rich young fellow from Ekaterinoslav; that I am becoming dependent on people, and that filled me with deep sorrow.

On the other hand, I thought: such a Jew might be insulted if I were to refuse to accept this, especially as he had at once declared that this was in the form of a loan in case I was in need, and that I would be able to repay him from the first income that I’d earn from the Sabbath chanting. I took the gold coin and it remains with me to this very day as a commemoration of that time when I went out into the world in search of joy. I did not exchange it then in Lemberg though poverty was whistling quite well through my pockets. No matter how inexperienced I was then, I quickly realized that I do not see any bright future in Galician *khazones*. But, on the other hand, I well remembered that I had a wife and four children to support and that until something better comes along I must see to it with all my strength that I please [them] on that Sabbath in order to take over the position, even if for only a short time.

As I sit there in my hotel room, lost in thought, someone knocks at my door. There enters a short, twisted little Jew with a thick, tangled beard, wearing a lambskin coat and a fur cap. He does not say “good morning,” does not say *sholem aleykhem* [peace be with you], but at once asks me:

“Are you the young man who is to chant this Sabbath at the Tower of Gold synagogue?”

I suspected nothing and replied:

“Yes, that is I.”

“If you’re the one,” the little Jew then muttered through his beard, “I have come to tell you in the name of the Lemberg rabbi, R’Shmelkes, as his beadle, that he forbids you to chant on the Sabbath.”

I was struck dead. My hands and feet started to shake. Why a ban on my chanting? Am I then, heaven forbid, a convert? And the beadle then explained that people had come to the rabbi and had told him that I violate the Sabbath, that I rode on a Sabbath. Therefore the ban was issued.

I still wanted to argue with the beadle. “How can a ban be issued before the accused is heard?” But the beadle said that he is only a messenger carrying out his task, and left without a “good-day.”

I sat thus alone with the new calamity that had befallen me. What does one begin to do? To whom does one turn?

Instinctively my first thought was: the Chief Cantor Halpern. It was he who had given me the idea to try to obtain that position. So he would certainly now help me to escape the frame-up that evil people have put upon me.

I began to calculate what this ban might mean for me. It is not only that I am being driven from the city of Lemberg, but that my foot would be unable to land in any other city in Galicia. Fingers would be pointed at me everywhere: the Lemberg rabbi did not let this young man approach the Arc. That was enough to bury me in this pious province, where all the power in Jewish life was then in the hands of the rabbinate.

I did not find Halpern at home, so I immediately went to see the warden Polterayk, told him the whole story and asked him to come with me at once to the rabbi to explain the frame-up that had been made against me. The warden noticed how wrought up I was, so he calmed me and admitted that, also in his opinion the rabbi did not have the right to do such a thing until he had heard my side and before he had determined through witnesses that what someone had told him about me was factual.

Polterayk took along the treasurer of the Tower of Gold synagogue, Herr Rapoport, and our trio went off to the Lemberg rabbi, R' Shmelkes. When we entered there were two prayer quorums of Jews at the quiet afternoon prayers. The Jews thrashed about during the prayers, which made a strange impression on me. In our *shtetl*, as well, there were many pious Jews, truly God-fearing in observance, but something like this was not to be seen, making all sorts of wild grimaces during prayers.

I could hardly wait for the prayers to end. Then Polterayk sent word to the rabbi by the beadle that he needs to see him on an urgent matter. All three of us were immediately called into his juridical office. Polterayk introduced me as the young man who is to chant on the coming Sabbath at the Tower of Gold synagogue. The rabbi put out his hand to those two Jews and left me standing, not offering me a *sholem aleykhem*. This pained me greatly, but I swallowed it.

First to speak was Polterayk, asking on what basis the rabbi had banned my chanting on the coming Sabbath. "It'd very simple," the rabbi replied. "People came to me and told me that he is a Sabbath-violator, that he rode and smoked openly on the Sabbath."

I could barely contain my upset, but I still exerted myself to speak calmly: "Rabbi," I said, "how can a ban be issued against a person only on the grounds that someone, a liar and an informer, came and informed upon me? Why did you not call me and why did you not demand to hear witnesses in my presence and why did you not give me any opportunity to defend myself? D'you know, rabbi, what such a frame-up means to a young person as myself, who is a responsible parent of children? This would throw me into misfortune for the rest of my life! How could you have taken such a careless step?"

To this R' Shmelkes replied: "Just see the insolence [of him] who teaches me the laws!"

"God forbid," I said, "I do not have in mind to argue with you about the laws. All I ask is justice for me! I am a stranger here in town and at my very first steps, someone wants to stab me with a knife in my back. It is Jewish and it is human for you to give me an opportunity to defend myself so that the full truth be known. I request, rabbi, that you should in the presence of these two honorable Jews, Polterayk and

Rapoport, name the informer who cast such a bad name on me. And secondly, I ask that you immediately call in that person so that he may face me and confirm that he saw me violating the Sabbath.”

“I will not do that,” the rabbi replied. At this point the two wardens could not hold back and insisted that, according to the law, I have the right to demand a public confirmation by witnesses that I had actually committed a sin, otherwise I should be cleared. The rabbi, however, was stubborn and argued that he was informed by a learned Jew whose every word is to be believed, but he does not wish to call his name.

I still did not retreat and argued that human lives were in danger here and I will not allow myself to be finished off without law and without trial and to watch calmly as I am destroyed. I will not leave until the person who made the frame-up against me will stand face-to-face with me and confirm his evil lie.

The rabbi felt this matter would not go smoothly, so he called the beadle and told him: “Call in Ruben the Judge.” When the evening prayers were done, the beadle was back with Ruben the Judge. When I saw that legal person the thought immediately occurred to me that I had seen this Jew at the home of the Chief Cantor Halpern on the first Sabbath I had arrived.

And rabbi Shmelkes then turned to the judge with the following words: “Tell me, R’ Ruben, this morning you came to me and told me that you know that the young man that is to chant on the Sabbath at the ‘Tower of Gold’ synagogue is a Sabbath-violator, so I ask you to tell me how you know this; did you see this yourself?”

“No, rabbi,” the judge answered. “I did not see it myself, but an honored Jew in town, who may be believed, reported this to me and my duty was to report it to you so that, God forbid, no blasphemy of The Name might occur.”

When I heard this I shuddered and firmly decided that I would not let the judge off so easily. I would determine who it was that wanted to dig a grave for me.

## A Competing Cantor Who Wanted to Bury Me Alive

It is a sorrowful picture of Jewish life a half-century ago, when individuals exercised authority, exerted their will on the basis of their wealth or of the learned positions they held. At my first venture into the wide world I encountered this awful power and I must admit that were it not for my stubbornness and my implacable intent to beat my own path through all difficulties — there would not have been a remnant of me for a long time; I would have disappeared into the sea of frame-ups and slander that began to be spread around me as soon as I took my first steps.

The Lemberg story is a real dark tale. A rabbi of such a great city issues a ban upon me on the basis of what the town judge had heard that someone related, that someone else had supposedly said, that a third person, finally, had seen himself: that I rode on the Sabbath. And the bottom line of this long tale was — simple competitive motives on the part of a noted *khazn* who had, upon hearing my voice, simply grown frightened over my youth and had, while saying sweet little words to my face and much flattery, sought behind my back to bury me in my youth.

But let us follow our story, as it is informative about that, hopefully, eternally past time. I did not desist from Ruben the Judge and insisted forcefully that he name the person who had reported to him that he had seen me violating the Sabbath. Instead of replying at once, the judge made a move to escape from the legal chamber. There were now really major matters involved and were it not for the interference of the two wardens who had accompanied me. who knows what the end might have been? Finally, under his influence and seeing that he dare not any longer play upon my tense nerves, the judge found his tongue and grunted that it was Chief Cantor Halpern who'd sent him to the rabbi to say that the young man who wants to become a Lemberg *khazn* openly violated the Sabbath, and since he believed Halpern, he went off and told it to the rabbi.

The picture was now perfectly clear: When I had come to Halpern's house on Sabbath, I found Ruben the Judge; other than that I had met the judge a few times in midweek at Halpern's house, and each time he shoved coins into his hand. Now I understood it all. Well, wasn't it Halpern himself who was the first to advise me to exert myself for the position at the "Tower of Gold" synagogue and it was he himself who helped me arrange the first meeting with the wardens of that synagogue? He had actually reconsidered the matter and had reached the conclusion that, after having heard my voice, it was not to his benefit to have me in the same city, in which he occupies such an honored position, and he convinced himself to adopt such a terrible means as inventing such a blood-libel against me, aimed at destroying me.

Rabbi Shmelkes himself could no longer persist and he said to the judge: "Why, R' Ruben, didn't you tell me at once that it was Halpern who sent you to me, but that you just happened to come and say that the young man had violated the Sabbath, and when a judge tells me this it is enough for me, on that basis, to ban the young man."

I noticed that the mood was improving for me, so I urged Rabbi Shmelkes to call the Chief Cantor Halpern so that he might in my presence confirm the frame-up that he had made on me. The rabbi sent the beadle at once to call Halpern. But the latter sent back a message via the beadle that if the rabbi had some



issue with him, he should, begging his pardon, come to him. This was the behavior of a Gentile and did not uphold the aura of piety that Halpern always assumed.

I, however, did not retreat and demanded of the rabbi that there be sent to him [Halpern] three trustworthy Jews who should, on the spot, interrogate him as to when and where he saw me violating the holy Sabbath. Rabbi Shmelkes granted this request, as well, and calling in from the entrance room three under-wardens, he sent them to Halpern's to obtain his testimony against me.

In less than an hour, the three under-wardens returned and declared in Halpern's name that he had himself heard from a third person that I am a Sabbath violator. He refused their demand that he come to Rabbi Shmelkes to confirm this.

Rabbi Shmelkes did not feel at all uplifted by this testimony by the main frame-up maker against me. The unclean intent behind the libel apparently became clear to him, and he began to seek an escape from the uncomfortable situation. My two wardens, who truly radiated [seeing that] the truth emerged like oil on water, came to his aid; they proposed that Rabbi Shmelkes should immediately order notices to be posted on the doors of all the synagogues and Houses of Study throughout the city, that the frame-up that evil tongues had invented against the young man, Zebulon Ben Sholem, a famous *khazn* from Russia, that he is a Sabbath violator, are lies and falsehoods, and that the ban on my chanting at the "Tower of Gold" synagogue is hereby lifted.

It was around one o'clock in the morning when I, dead-tired and broken, left the Lemberg rabbi's legal chamber. I was fully aware that I had won a difficult battle, but at the same time, I was ashamed to the depths of my heart that such a thing could have occurred. A person who had smiled at me and found so many good words for me and for my future as a leader of Jewish prayer; a person, himself a leader of Jewish prayer, should have used such awful means to kill a young colleague without a knife, one helpless and unprotected, who has just left his youthful nest and taking his first steps to obtain a position in life.

I was so sunken into my sorrowful thoughts and under the impression of that difficult evening which I had undergone, that I did notice at all that I am soaked in sweat and the night was humid and cold, so it is no wonder that I fell ill. For a few days I lay in a high fever, and the only person who attended me was the Jewish owner of the inn in which I was living. Were it not for her, I would have been totally extinguished like a light.

When Friday arrived, when I was to chant at the "Tower of Gold" synagogue, I saw that my strength did not serve me; I felt like a broken potsherd. So, via my inn-owner, I sent word to warden Polterayk that I would not, sadly, be able to chant on this Sabbath. A half-hour later Polterayk was at my bedside. He made me swear not to dare to go outdoors, especially in such bad weather. He also told me that all the synagogues and Houses of Study displayed Rabbi Shmelkes' announcement in which he washed me clean of the frame-up that had been spread about me, and that the congregants of the synagogue await my chanting impatiently. However, apparently it was not fated that I should chant before the Jews of Lemberg.

Warden Polterayk was so sensitive that upon leaving he left a ten *krona* piece on the table for my expenses, to be returned from my first earnings. I sent the money back to him, though not from Lemberg earnings. At the moment he gave me the loan it was truly a rescue, because my head was devoid of thoughts as to how I might settle with the innkeeper.

When I recovered somewhat and went into the street, I happened to come across the second cantor of Halpern's temple, Kerner, a decent person who also dealt with Halpern's [evil] heart and knew of all the "good deeds" of which that Jew was capable. He related the impression made in town over the story of Halpern's frame-up and that the whole city talked about my falling sick through grief, because of which I was unable to chant on the Sabbath.

On this occasion Kerner related that, according to his sources, the post of cantor in Pshemishl was open in the fine half-modern [Conservative] temple there, and he believes that the post would be a perfect match for me. He knows the local president there very well, a certain Reyzner, and if I wish he is ready to provide me with a letter of recommendation to him.

I thanked him for friendliness and, as my heart was so embittered against Lemberg and its *khazonim* and rabbis who are ready, without law or trial, to throw a person into excommunication, I gladly seized upon the proposal. I packed my things and with capital of four *krona* and twenty *kreuzer* I left for Pshemishl in the hope that I would have better fortune there.

## I Wander Through Galician Cities and Find Surcease in Yaroslav

The second Galician city into which I fell, Pshemishl, was also not especially fortunate for me. When I found the [temple] president Rayzner and gave him the recommendation-letter from Lemberg, he responded to me with a smile: “Young man, sadly you have not come at the right time. I cannot even promise you that you’ll be allowed to chant on a Sabbath as an audition, because we have not yet emerged from the troubles with our former *khazn*.”

I later learned what those troubles were. The town had hired a *khazn* named Kenig [Koenig?]. He was quite a good *khazn* with a very fine voice, but he made troubles for the town’s big-shots. And in order to get rid of him, the town broke its contract with him and paid him his salary for a year and a half. Thanks to this the synagogue went into deep debt and now there cannot be any talk about hiring a fresh *khazn*, even the best in the world.

When I saw that things were bad, I asked that I be permitted to chant for just one Sabbath so that I might gather enough money for expenses in traveling on. And in order to show the president that I am not just anybody seeking to exploit them, I proposed to him that I sing something to him so that he would know with whom he is dealing. Finally he agreed to this and on an ordinary day we went off to the Pshemishl Temple.

This was truly a holy thing and, besides, there were only the two of us, so my singing obtained a magnificent sound. Something occurred to me and I sang “and all of us welcome the Lord.” I saw a bright smile on the face of my president and was in seventh heaven, being certain that I had caught him — now he could not refuse me. But to no avail. He addresses me: “Just because you have sung so magnificently, it is beyond possibility that I allow you to chant at our temple.”

“How can it be, president Rayzner?” I asked. So he explained that he is certain that as soon as I open my mouth at the Sabbath chanting, the congregants would with one voice demand that I be taken on as *khazn*, and the community cannot allow this because they are over their heads in debts because of the previous *khazn*. The key responsibility rests on him, so he doesn’t want to allow me to audition so as to avoid facing the danger.

All these fine words did not serve to make my soul more joyful. At that moment I was more eager for a few Austrian *kreuzer* than for the finest of compliments. And I left the temple in a very depressed mood. Noticing this, the Jew says to me: “Do not despair. Right here nearby is the city of Yaroslav and I have heard that there is an open position for a *khazn*. The president there, Community Counsel Strishever is a close friend of mine; I will send along with you a letter to him and he will welcome you in good manner. You will chant there on Sabbath and it is quite possible that they will provide you with a permanent position.”

What other choice did I have at that moment? So I agreed to test my luck again in another Galician town. The trip lasted only two hours and I was in Yaroslav. Here I fell into the very depths of Orthodox Jewish life in Galicia. As soon as I entered the inn I noticed two women in their mid-thirties saying the Eighteen Benedictions and not wanting to pause even when an unknown man entered the house. I waited

for the end of the Eighteen Benedictions, but that isn't the end of it, they still don't speak to me. I had to wait until they finished the evening prayers.

The next morning I went to see the Community Counsel of the Kaiser and King Franz Joseph, von Strishever. He really did have a royal title, but he was a homey Jew who spoke Germanic Yiddish and was interested in having his community and his temple be assured all the good things that distinguish every other Jewish community in the world.

He read the letter and quickly poured a pailful of cold water over me. "*Mein Herr*," he says to me, "I deeply regret that I cannot be of any help to you. We just happen to have engaged a *khazn* and his singers for the coming Sabbath; he is now in town and we cannot send him away. If you would want to wait for the next Sabbath, we could talk."

I again turned hot and cold. Somehow I have bad luck in these Galician towns, I thought. But I didn't resign myself so easily. I gently told my history, that I find myself en route to Vienna and I lack [money] for expenses to travel farther, so that I was recommended to chant that Sabbath. "And lest you be concerned with the *khazn* and his singers," I continued, "I have an idea: let the Sabbath be divided between us, one of us should chant on Friday evening and the other, at Sabbath morning."

The idea pleased him and sent for the beadle to see what could be done for me in my difficult situation. The beadle held that the *khazn* and his singers should chant in the synagogue and I, the young fellow, should be satisfied with the House of Study. As I was a depressed person, I agreed to this, as well: let it be in the House of Study as long as something moves and let us crawl out of the metropolis called Galicia. There could be no talk of payment for the Sabbath chanting because the custom here was: the *khazn* chants, and if he pleases, the rich folks pledge when they're called up to read the Torah, and on Sunday the *khazn*, accompanied by the beadle, goes out in town to collect the pledges.

There were a few days left before the Sabbath and I knew no one in the *shtetl*, so I spent my free time at the inn where I was staying. Here I had an opportunity to observe more closely the peculiar life style of the Galician Jews at that time. First of all, the owner of the inn. This was a Jew with a big belly, lusty and joyful, and it appears that he did not at all take to heart that his house contained two elderly virgins, both of whom were seventy-five years old. These were actually the two women whom I had seen as they said the Eighteen Benedictions when I arrived there.

This was a Jew with a plush hat on his head, and behind the hat were shoved two thick, curled earlocks. The coattails of his yellow fur-lined coat spread widely apart and one might see the thick undershirt prayer shawl fluttering on all sides, wherever he took a step. From his heavy boots rose the odor of the tar with which he smeared them.

Most interesting were the two virgins whose lips did not cease moving all day long, whispering prayers that no one understood. In the evenings the inn filled up with arriving travelers, mostly Jews from surrounding towns, as well as local *shtetl* Jews who considered the inn as a kind of club where one might encounter interesting people and hear about what is going on in the wide world.

The main conversation during the evenings was about pious Jews and whose rabbi is the best and wisest and can perform the best miracles. The shouting and hollering on this subject often reached to the heavens, and more than once it almost led to slaps. I recall an event [involving] a Litvak [doubter of the

Hasidic faith], a traveling salesman who lost his way into this muddled *shtetl* and who stayed at the same inn and who had a whim to make fun of faith-bound Jews and who almost paid dearly for this joke.

When Jews were in the midst of telling various stories about their rabbis, our Litvak interjects that he, too, has [a story] to tell about a miracle by his rabbi. Jews pricked up their ears and the Litvak began to tell that once the rabbi was visited by a *shtetl* rich man, very pious, who had an only son who had, may we be preserved, crippled legs. The father had taken him to the best doctors who were unable to prescribe a cure, and he had to walk on crutches.

After all those doctors and professors, the father decided to go to see the rabbi. He handed the rabbi a note with a sacred donation and cried with bitter tears: “Holy rabbi, if you can’t help me then no one can help me!” The rabbi closely regarded the [English] *cripple*, closed his eyes and creased his brow; then he shouted at the young man on his crutches: “You, Avrom Ben Nusn [Abraham son of Nathan], don’t be stubborn and impudent and throw those two crutches out of your hands!”

The young man obeyed the rabbi, and at that point the Litvak, the traveling salesman and crucifix-head [convert-like], fell silent, leaving all his listeners in suspense over what happened next to the cripple. When the assembled super-pious Jews began to ask the Litvak in great wonderment: “*Nu, nu*, what happened then?” the Litvak quite cold-bloodedly replied “Nothing happened! The young man who obeyed the rabbi and threw away his crutches sadly fell to the ground and crashed his head and almost lost all his teeth!”

The intent of the Litvak’s story was quite clear and the assembled Jews almost tore him limb from limb on the spot. To calm down their mood, I said that I would tell them something. It grew quiet and I sang for them “lay us down” which meant that it was late at night and time for the Yaroslav Jews to leave their ultra-pious Jews and go lay down in bed because tomorrow is another day with new income worries. My singing calmed the crowd and the Jews went off home and to the rooms of the inn.

## Hearty Yaroslav Jews Retain Me By Force for Passover

Finally there arrived the Friday evening on which I was to welcome the Sabbath in the Yaroslav House of Study, because the main synagogue was occupied by another *khazn* and his singers who was also wandering around the country and wanted to please the Yaroslav rich folk. When I entered the House of Study the beadle handed me a large *talis* embroidered with silver on its upper edge, and a Hasidic *yarmulke* [skull cap]. When I placed the *talis* on my shoulders the beadle protested, saying that I had to cover my head with the *talis*.

I was in a good mood and chanted “let us sing,” pausing at “let your heart not be troubled.” I chanted almost every proclamation [s/b “verse”] of every chapter with much heart and I could notice that Jews were bending toward each other, whispering quietly. I began to chant “the mystery of Sabbath” in the genuine Hasidic spirit, as though I myself was descended from ultra-pious Jews. I noticed that the House of Study was becoming more filled by congregants.

When I came to “eternal love” and “help us lie down” there was such crowding and pushing in the House of Study that the beadle asked me to hold off and beat on the lectern for quiet. Meanwhile I became aware that all the congregants of the main synagogue, where the *khazn* and his singers were chanting, had come over to the House of Study and soon after the *khazn* himself, who didn’t want to chant before an empty synagogue, came over with his assistants.

When I finished and the Jews began to encircle me to express their thanks, the *khazn* also approached me, saying to me that there was no sense for him to chant in the main synagogue the next morning, so he would rather stand alongside me with the choir to assist me, because he hopes that he might be able to learn something from my chanting. I was moved by these honorable words from an ordinary Jew who caught on at once that this young man from Russia had brought some new rite with which it would be good to acquaint oneself.

The next morning on the Sabbath I was chanting in the main synagogue that was packed with Jews even before I stood up to chant. Since I had a choir at my side there awakened in me a desire to chant with great taste, especially as I had not stood at the Torah pulpit, and I wanted to see for myself if I could still really chant as one should with a choir.

I did not omit a single bit until arriving at the Eighteen Benedictions and improvised on all that might be in the chanting. I went into a trance of wanting to show all my wonders, and took pleasure in myself. I felt that I am giving all of which I’m capable. The synagogue could not accommodate so many people, so they opened the anteroom, and that, too, was jammed. Right after the morning prayers one could hear among the Jews that the city of Yaroslav had never heard such a *khazn* and that it would be the greatest sin if I were not to be kept there forever.

In the calling to Torah reading they divided [the chapters into] verses so as to afford everyone the opportunity to contribute to the *khazn*. At the supplementary Sabbath prayers I was so enthused by the good words I’d heard that I cantillated in true ecstasy. Almost all the congregants awaited me outdoors at the exit of the synagogue and I was let through an opening between two lines and blessings poured down on me from all sides. I was not an ugly young man then, so the women joked on my account that all I was

missing was a [Hasidic] fur-rimmed hat and a silk jacket with a fur collar, so that I would look like a true little Galician rabbi...

For the Sabbath meal I was invited to the Chief Counselor Von Strishever himself, which was no small thing, and right after the *havdole* [Sabbath-ending blessing], the first messengers of the community arrived at my inn to negotiate with me about remaining there with them all year long. The first condition they placed was that must allow a beard and earlocks to grow and to don a tall fur hat and a long fur-lined coat. I replied that as to the tall fur hat and long fur-lined coat, we might yet talk, but the beard and earlocks — that is up to God; they cannot be bought, so it must be left to the Master of the Universe [to determine] that in time, I would grow a beard.

As to my conditions for chanting for a year's time, I told them not to be in a rush. My pleasing them on a single Sabbath is no proof, and I gave them the idea that, since there were only three weeks left until Passover, they should set one more audition and engage me for Passover, and if I please them then, we can then talk about a full year. And sitting there that way with a few of the wardens, there arrived some young people of the [secular, Zionist] Lovers of Zion Society who wanted to arrange a concert on the coming Tuesday. I agreed with pleasure and grew even greater in the eyes of the wardens: just see how they're competing for me.

When I told the wardens that I require two hundred *krona* for chanting on Passover they grabbed their heads and almost fell off their chairs. When had it ever been heard in Yaroslav of paying a *khazn* such huge sums for a single Passover chanting? They had just had a *khazn*, Faynzinger [fine-singer], and the great *khazn* Leyzerke had chanted for them with a choir, and they took six hundred *krona* for a whole year. The highest they can pay is fifty *krona* plus the cost of my inn. I felt that I could stay my course and said nothing to their offer.

The next morning the beadle came to me and we both headed out with the [collection] scarf across the town to collect the pledges that Jews had pledged on the Sabbath in the synagogue for the *khazn*. We went from house to house and from store to store. This was my first begging excursion [*lit.*: "going among the houses"] in my new occupation and it made my heart quite bitter, especially when I remembered my joy at home, in Ekaterinoslav, where I was king and the community sent my earnings into my home and I didn't have to lower myself.

But I must say that the Yaroslav Jews put forth their *kreuzer* [cents] with friendly faces. I gathered, in addition to the twelve *krona* and sixty *kreuzer*, many heartfelt words of thanks and hope that I would not be a temporary guest in this town. The beadle himself was amazed over how quickly we cashed in those few cents. Usually a *khazn* would lose the whole week gathering in the pledges, and during that time he spent the money on food and usually they had to go out again to collect enough money for his expenses in leaving...

The bargaining over the Passover chanting lasted for many days. Every day the wardens came and informed me that after long and torturous exertions they managed to supplement for me another twenty-five *krona* piece. But I held firmly to my [position] that I would not accept less than two hundred *krona*. Meanwhile the benefit concert for the Lovers of Zion arrived, providing me with a rich income of [all of] eighteen *krona*, so that I had, that is, secured enough for expenses to Vienna, so that I could maintain [my position] with the wardens of the town.

I was ready to leave for Vienna the next morning, but the major followers that I had won in Yaroslav with my single Sabbath chanting would absolutely not allow it. The communal authority finally agreed to contribute from its treasury one hundred fifty *krona*; some rich men offered to collect the remaining fifty *krona* in town. For me, the whole business of going door-to-door had become disgusting, and I packed my things, paid my bill at the inn and went off to the railroad station.

As I stood at the station, preparing to buy a ticket to Vienna, two Jews run up in their long coats and plush caps and start to tear the valises from my hands. A crowd of people came running, thinking that a thief had been caught. Even an Austrian gendarme became interested in learning what had happened here. Then Jews start crying to me breathlessly:

“*Khazn Kwartin, Khazn Kwartin*, you will get your two hundred *krona* and come with us.”

And not waiting for my reply, they dragged me out of the station, shoved me into a *fiacre* (sort of a horse-drawn carriage in Austria) and took me back to the inn. I had no other alternative than to unpack my things and begin to prepare to remain for Passover in that hearty Jewish city.

During the few weeks that I had at my command, I rested well and truly cantillated a Passover for God and for people. I was in the best voice and besides that I fell in love with the Jews for their stubbornness in keeping me there for the holiday and I repaid them with all I had. They still wanted to talk about an annual contract, but I kept turning away [saying that] I must first consult with my wife whether she would agree to settle in this Galician city.

That Passover chanting remains unforgettable in my mind to this very day. A truly sacred mood ruled the synagogue, they swallowed every word that my mouth uttered. I drew the greatest exaltation with my “blessed my beloveds” and wherever, in later years, I happened to meet a Yaroslav Jew, whether here in America or in the Land of Israel, he would always remind me: “*Oy*, were those ‘blessed my beloveds;’ their sweetness melted in one’s mouth...”



## Back To Old, Beautiful Vienna

In this manner the city of Yaroslav kept me alive and made it possible for me to travel to Vienna as a very rich man: with over two hundred *krona* in my pocket. I have dwelt a bit longer on this episode in the city of Yaroslav, in Galicia, because in the course of my entire later life I was unable to forget that episode. I can say with a clear conscience that Yaroslav gave me the greatest inspiration, the strongest thrust toward my later *khazonish* career.

It was in that small, dirty *shtetl* that I realized what being a *khazn* means for Jews. It was there that I first perceived the tremendous figure that a *khazn* is and the kind of position he occupies in Jewish life. Worry-laden Jews, who fight tooth and nail all week long for a bit of income, gather together on Sabbath and holidays in the synagogues, and it is the *khazn* who helps them throw off the weekday concerns and carry themselves into a cleaner, higher world of spirituality, of cleansing, of binding to the higher powers that rule over humans.

I will never forget the scene when, on a winter's night, hundreds of small-town Jews were assembled around the communal building where the question of hiring me, the immigrant from Russia, for Passover was to be decided after I had especially impressed them after chanting on a single Sabbath. The Jews threatened the communal officials with destruction of the building if the decision did not accord with what they wished for themselves.

This connected to a self sacrificial determination to attain something higher and finer. They considered the *khazn* to be truly a spokesperson for their most deeply hidden feelings, as one who brings out in his prayers their own longings for a better future.

They were poor and bargained over every *kreuzer*, but when they finally stood in the synagogue they no longer recalled all those little reckonings; they worshipped the *khazn* who, through his deep bonding with the congregants, had become a true community spokesman who sang out the woe and pain of the community as well as its eternal hopes that Jews will finally be liberated from the isolation and poverty in which they live.

This also had its counter influence on the *khazn* himself, who felt tremendous responsibility toward his congregants; he felt indebted to them. Naturally, he was devoted to his calling, exerted the greatest effort to reach the greatest completeness. By day and by night, at home or en route, he did not cease to think deeply and to immerse himself in his sacred labor of being the intermediary between the people and the Almighty.

I can say this about myself, that in my over fifty-year practice as a *khazn* I did not cease, day or night, to think, to improvise, to study and to dig deeper into the inexhaustible well of song. I tried to live within every word of the prayers so as to better interpret them for my listeners; all the 248 [Hebrew abbrev.] organs [of the human body] became slaves of the flame that ignited within me as soon as I approached the pulpit.

And the community welcomed that flame and knew how to value it. The *khazn* in Jewish life fifty or sixty years ago in the towns and *shtetlekh* of Russia, Poland, Galicia and Romania was venerated and dearly held. There was, of course, bargaining down to the last cent because life was poverty-stricken and

pitiful, but the community did not seek to deprive the *khazn*, they did not count how much the *khazn* would bring in during the Days of Awe, as is now the case with the current “*kongregeyshuns*.” [sic].

The *khazn* properly regarded himself with a certain pride; he somehow brings an inestimable gift, sent by God himself — that is not a small thing! He strove with all his might to guard and improve that gift. He became engrossed in the old traditional styles and he was overjoyed when he was able to unearth something from the old treasure and to warm Jewish hearts with it.

That was what they were, the old *khazonim*, the Abrayses, the Gurevitshes, Shestapols, Blumentals, Vayntroybs, Rozavskis, Birenboyms, Nisi Belzers, Rovners, Shors and the rest whom I do not name! These were creators of genuine Jewish compositions, styles and prayers. And the greatest improvisors of the Jewish style — Tsalel, Yerukhem Hakotn, Moyshe Balter, Moyshe Krivozor, Razumni — whose outpouring of soul caused the soul of every Jewish person to shiver and be enflamed! And the very last, talented *khazonim* who left before their time: Yosele Rosenblat [Rosenblatt], Shtaynberg [Steinberg], Roytman [Rothman] and Hershman, who brought so much joy into the downtrodden Jewish heart.

The golden epoch of Jewish *khazones* has ended. New times have arrived and new songs are sung. As time goes on we see that the *khazn* is less the community’s messenger [voice] and more a craftsman. It may be said that the modern *khazn* is more of a lumberjack than a *khazn* in the good old meaning of the term. He chops wood with his throat and the longer his arms, the greater the “span” he reaches. The modern *khazn* has fallen victim to the modern rabbi, with his *kongregeyshun* and “*soyrmens*,” of the fabricated rabbis who have built upon the great recognition that *khazonim* had in the Old Home, and decided to take the success for themselves and to turn the *khazn* into a mannequin of the opera. The *khazn* allowed himself to be degraded from the high role that he once occupied in Jewish life, and that is a great loss.

All these comments come to my mind when I think of the Yaroslav episode, when, for the first time in my life, I encountered the veneration that the people feel for the *khazn*. I have not seen more of this in my life. This honor and lofty regard for the community’s messenger went under along with those dear Jewish towns and *shtetlekh*.

And now we return to Vienna where I returned for the second time in spring of the year 1903. The beautiful city quickly breathed upon me with its breadth and joyfulness. I felt that after a long and thirsty journey I am again at a fresh, delightful well that will quench me and provide new strengths for the struggle that awaits me in life.

My first visit, it is understood, was to my old friend *khazn* Smotritski, who welcomed me as one of his own. I remained living with him and he was quickly informed of the two goals that bring me this time to the Austrian capital: First, bless The Name, I am a Jewish parent and one has to worry about income; and, second, I want to continue the voice training that I interrupted some years back.

First of all I went to the post office and sent one hundred of my Yaroslav earnings to my wife and children; I left the other hundred for myself until I manage to obtain something. Then I did not wait for long and went off to my old friend, Professor Shteynshnayder. His joy over me was out of the ordinary. He quickly seized and heard out my voice to determine whether it has, heaven preserve us, been damaged during all the years that I was not under his direction. Beaming with joy, he confirmed that I had followed

all the rules that he had given me upon our parting, and that my voice is fresh and clear, and that nothing stands in the way of my reaching the greatest achievement that may be possible.

When he heard that I had been doing *khazones* in the course of several years, he was very curious to hear some of my prayers. After I sang them he remarked that since the great master, Chief Cantor Zultser, he had not heard such an excellent presentation by anyone and he assured me of a great career in the field that I had chosen. I then told him, back then, with all my heart that if I were to attain something in my life I would, in large degree, have to be thankful for his teaching and his paternal devotion to me. We decided that I would come to him three times a week for an hour to continue my voice-training.

Smotritski had come along with me at the professor's and he heard my voice for the first time in so many years. When we left, he says to me that he no longer worries about my future nor for my earnings. He is certain that it will not take long for me to be filling one of the most prominent cantorial positions in the city of Vienna. Well, I thought, from his mouth to God's ears. But one couldn't depend on only good talk; one had to begin truly seeking out a result.

Once Smotritski says to me that he had somehow noticed an announcement in the weekly newspaper of the "*Warheit*" [Truth] Association that in the Eighth District, Jozefstadt, they were seeking a cantor. True, this is a small temple of the Association, but quite fine people pray there, and if only they permit me to audition, the position wouldn't be too bad. We decided that he would accompany me to the president, a certain Herman Bek [Hermann Beck] of the firm "Wilhelm Beck and Sons," a supplier to the royal house of military and civilian clothes, and we would have a few words [with him].

In Herr Bek's waiting room we encountered a few other young men who, it appeared, were also aiming for that position. I looked over my competitors and quickly saw that I was lost. These were elegant, modernly-dressed young men with freshly-shaven little faces, their hair smoothly combed with a part in the middle, some with sharp, pointed little mustaches. They all wore the stiff, over-starched collars with finely tied cravats, and lacquered shoes and pants creased razor-sharp. All of them looked as though they'd just come from the barber; they reeked of cologne.

And I took a look at myself — on my head the tall Russian, thickly curled tufts of hair that absolutely refuse to lay down, my face unshaven with its limited number of little hairs that protruded in place of a beard, my suit wrinkled since I'd wandered about in the train car, my pants drooped down in round sacks on my not very fine shoes, and I was quite far from elegantly tying a cravat. So how can I please the Vienna royal house supplier? I was lacking quite a bit toward the well-known Viennese "elegance." It was with a heavy heart that we therefore entered the office of Herr Herman Bek.

## The First Bright Hope Lit Up For Me in Vienna

And it was as my heart had predicted: I did not make a tremendous impression on the president, Herr Bek, who was to decide my future fate in the city of Vienna. While still in the waiting room I, in comparison with the elegant young men who were [also] waiting, felt like a...village Gentile coming to the big city. In addition, they all spoke such perfect German! So how do I fit in with my Khonorod Yiddish? How will I be able to speak a single word to the aristocratic president?

So I was sitting on pins and needles, my heart began to beat and I pleaded to God that this visit might come to an end soonest. When we entered the office it was a miracle that Smotritski was with me and it was he who did the talking. I noticed Herr Bek regarding me from head to toe. Finally he asked from where I come. When he heard the word "Russia" he leapt up as though burnt: [in German] "We don't want any Russians, any outlanders, we want only Austrians!" That was what he shouted and quickly stood up from the large directorial chair as a sign that we can head out of there.

When Smotritski tried to explain to him that the place of origin of a *khazn* is not important, that the main thing is: what he knows, and that seventy-five percent of the Vienna cantors originate from Russia, and that he, himself also comes from Russia while, nevertheless, occupying the position of Second Cantor of the Jewish community, and that he asks only that I be admitted to auditions along with the dozens of others who are admitted — all this talk went down the drain. The royal house supplier Herr Bek was stubborn and cited a decision by his committee that only Austrian citizens might be admitted to auditions in his synagogue.

Heartbroken, we stood up to leave. But before saying 'good day,' it occurred to Smotritski to leave Herr Bek his calling card with his address, so that in case he might reconsider and admit me to an audition, he could contact that address.

So, that is, nothing came of that first attempt. I threw myself into my studies and every visit with my professor gave me tremendous satisfaction. I swallowed his every word and every note that he sang to me rang sweetly in my ears. He rehearsed me in unlimited songs and arias, and I was overfilled with joy, except for one thing: my concerns for my family and for the morrow. Because the Yaroslav "capital" had begun to run out and I faced the danger that I might, on one fine day, be left on the street in this foreign city.

I consulted with my friend Smotritski and told him that, in great despair I am prepared to accept a job as a choir singer, but he advised me not to do that. Also advising against it was my professor who held that it might do harm to my voice as well as to my future career, because who would want to hire as *khazn* someone who was a choir-singer yesterday?

So I suppressed the pain of the uncertainty of my next day and meanwhile kept going to hear Vienna *khazonim*. I went to the Association Temple on Jozefstadt, where I was to have auditioned. I was interested in seeing my competitors, those elegant young men who had had more good fortune than I because they do not originate from Russia. When I heard them at the Friday nights and the Sabbath mornings, I was consumed with the feeling of shame: these are also called *khazonim*? No sign of prayer

style or even of appropriate voice was to be found among them; however, they were correctly dressed-up and accoutered young men with pointed little mustaches and smoothly barbered heads.

And it was a great pity on myself. I regarded myself as a great fool. Why had I come here, I thought, regarding the gangling, awkward guys standing at the pulpit while, not long ago, in Yaroslav, I was almost carried aloft on shoulders and begged to sign a contract for a year's time, while here, in great Vienna, not only does no one notice me, but I'm not even allowed to audition; that is, in other words, no one wants even to know me.

My mood was bitter and dark. I even thought about becoming a chorister in one of Vienna's theaters, having read announcements that such were being sought. So my friend Smotritski again came along, cheering me that my day will yet arrive and that I should not commit a desperate act that I would certainly regret in the future. And as to the *kreuzer* and the *krona* that were beginning to disappear, he also calmed me [saying] that I could live with him as long as I want and will pay him when I begin to earn something.

So the weeks went by and no ray of hope was to be seen that my situation might get better. The attractive city of Vienna did not appeal to me, because how could I enjoy its beauty and breadth while back home my wife and little children wait to hear from me what I have achieved in the great world, and I have nothing to share with them. I could not even write to them of all my pain and sorrow.

But a person must never lose faith. For me, too, the sun broke through on a clear, pre-*shvues* [Shavuot] day. The water had almost reached to my lips as, with few pennies in my pocket, I prepared for the holiday, to observe it at a foreign table, as a guest, on loan. But even more than the material concerns, I was gnawed at and tortured by the thought that I had become a superfluous person, no one anymore needs me or my talent. Just recently, seven weeks earlier at Passover, in the *shtetl* of Yaroslav, I was still of some worth to people, they fawned upon me, and here, in far-off Vienna, I am nothing more than a beaten branch, but the wheel quickly turned.

Four days before *shvues* a telephone call came to *khazn* Smotritski, and actually from him himself, the royal supplier, president Hermann Bek. The telephone said that the young man from Russia with whom he had been at the office a few weeks earlier, should come quickly; he would be admitted to an audition on *shvues* at the Association Temple, on Jozefstadt.

I was overjoyed, this was what I had asked for: let me come to the main thing, hear me and then you may even say that I am not worth anything. Smotritski and his wife took me to be dressed up masterfully so that I might not appear as small-townish and take on a more-or-less Vienna appearance. They really urged me to shave off the few little hairs that barely sprouted on my chin. I was very reluctant to do this, I somehow recalled my father, the entire pious environment in our home, and really, how can there be a *khazn* with a shaved beard?

But since my few little hairs were hardly visible anyway, I conceded to them. I had my holiday suit pressed out, obtained a highly-starched, tall collar with the pretty white cravat and appeared more or less respectable, though I was quite far from the famous Vienna "elegance."

When, a day before the holiday, I came to Herr Bek's office, he received me in a quite more friendly manner than at the first time, but thus time, too, he did not refrain from a bitter pill. "You know, young man," he says, "I hadn't planned to admit you to an audition, but an accident occurred, a certain *khazn* Eydelman [Edelmann] who was to chant with us on *shvues* with a choir as an audition, could somehow

not come to agreement with the choir and alone, without a choir, he is not able to chant. And if you can chant all through *shvues* all alone, without a choir, we are prepared to give you the opportunity to show what you're able to do."

I felt somewhat more secure because I knew that, without a choir, I would not shame them, by comparison with those who must have a choir at their side. But I decided to make a certain remark to Herr Bek: "Since you do not plan to hire me for a steady job, because I am a Russian citizen, it would be no more than right to pay me for chanting over the holiday, and if you do not object, I would ask one hundred *krona*."

Contrary to my expectations, Herr Bek immediately agreed because — did he have any alternative? Where would he find another *khazn* four days before the holiday? And I began to prepare for this, my first appearance in a Vienna temple. I thought, in case, God forbid, I fail, let me at least secure my expenses for a little while.

During the few days that were left before my appearance, I strove to study a certain middle-road [style] that would not be too Orthodox and not too choral [*i.e.*, Reform] but that would be understandable to every class of Jew. And when, on the first night of *shvues*, I approached the pulpit, I walked with a firm step, holding my head high. As soon as I cantillated "He is blessed" and "Love for the world" I sensed the mood among the crowd and my inner certainty rose even higher. When I sang "lay us down" I felt the enthusiasm around myself and even the president, Bek himself, who stood not far from me, had a broad smile on his face.

When, at the wine blessing, I turned to face the congregation, I could see unlimited enthused faces and eyes shining with appreciation. When I finished, there was no end to the "congratulations," but there was no applause, such as I observed years later in America. President Bek was the first to congratulate me on behalf of all the [Community Council] representatives and of the entire community.

The synagogue was quite small, barely a hundred-fifty seats, and there was actually no possibility of developing my voice to its full depth. But I grasped with all my senses from the first minute on that these Jews are on my side, despite the fact that I am not an Austrian citizen.

[Photo page between 257-258. Caption: *Khazn* Kwartin with wife and children in Vienna, 1903]

## **I Become Chief-Cantor of the “Empress Elizabeth [Reform] Temple” in Vienna**

The next day, *shvues*, at the morning and supplemental prayer, I let my voice be heard in all its splendor and glory, sparing nothing nor skimping on any exertion to bring forth the most beautiful and strongest of which I was capable. There were many more Jews in the synagogue than yesterday at evening prayers and the enthusiasm began to remind me of the reception I had received at Passover in Yaroslav.

The president, Herr Bek, was so beside himself that after the services he invited me, the “Russian” whom he had so recently met in his office with such a hostile stare, to his home for the holiday midday meal. After the meal he says to me that, at evening (that is, on the second night of *shvues*) he had invited to his home the entire leadership of his synagogue, as well as his secretary, and he asks me, too, to come and they will write out the conditions under which I will take over the position of permanent cantor in the synagogue.

I had to remind the Herr “court supplier” that it is *shvues* this evening and it is not my habit to close contracts on the Sabbath or holy days. He apologized and postponed it until after the holiday. On the second day of the holiday, the synagogue — already jammed with Jews from other synagogues — witnessed a repetition of the same spectacle. I won everyone’s hearts with but a single shot. My president was totally beaming with joyful pride because he considered it his reward for having recruited me for the synagogue. At the moment he certainly forgot how he had bled me dry a few weeks ago, refusing to accept me even for an audition.

The day after the holiday all the big shots of the synagogue gathered at the president’s home, along with his secretary and even an attorney who was to work out all the points of the contract. Walking to the president’s, I thought to himself along the way: how much payment to ask and what other things to require? I knew that the salary of a cantor in Vienna back then varied from sixteen hundred to two thousand, four hundred *krona* per year. But this was said about cantors who had been in their positions for over ten years. How could I, actually a beginner, ask for the same amount?

At the bottom line we agreed on fifteen hundred *krona* in addition to three hundred *krona* with which to bring my family, and that the hundred *krona* for *shvues* is separate. However, I was so sober as to express one important point: At the moment when the new, much larger Temple is built, when the number of congregants would grow significantly larger, I have a right to request a review of the contract. The attorney strongly objected to that point, but at that moment I felt myself so firm that they would agree to whichever conditions I might require.

Right at that same meeting when my contract was confirmed, it was decided that the new Temple must be ready two weeks before the Days of Awe so that the proper Building Dedication might be celebrated with great pomp and circumstance. The Jews lacked no money, so they undertook to speed up the construction work. In the interim, before the new Temple was ready, they engaged Professor Zultser, the son of the famous creator of so many liturgical prayers and Main Cantor Shloyme [Solomon] Zultser, to rehearse and conduct a special choir in honor of the Building Dedication, with me as Chief Cantor.



Professor Zultser was an exceptional cello virtuoso, the first soloist [chair] of the Vienna Royal Opera; in addition, he was a great accompanist and he later adapted the two great musical works of his father, “Songs of Zion,” giving them a marvelous conclusion and polish.

Professor Zultser was invited to create a special Building Dedication celebration, but they also had to think about a choir and a director for the entire year. They advertised in the special *khazonim* newspaper as well as in the general community weeklies; and male and female singers responded from everywhere. Among those who responded was the baritone Eydelman [Edelman], the same to whom I owed thanks for the position at the temple on Jozefstadt. Had he not fallen out with his choir before *shvues*, I wouldn’t have been called and who knows what other direction my entire future career might then have taken?

This Eydelman made the best impression upon me, and he agreed to take over the position of Second Cantor and simultaneously as director of the choir. He had a good baritone voice and Professor Zultser regarded him very warmly. However, we encountered the greatest resistance on the part of the president, Herr Bek, who could still not forgive him for having broken with the choir and creating difficulties for him right before the holiday. But I argued with the president: “To the contrary, you should be thankful to *khazn* Eydelman for that incident; if not for that, you would not have me...”

Finally, Herr Bek let himself be persuaded and *khazn* Eydelman took over the functions of Second Cantor in the Great Temple that was to be completed at any day, and he also had to put together a choir of men and women and to be its conductor.

We began to prepare for the celebratory Building Dedication of the new Temple. Since Herr Bek was, as previously noted, a court supplier to Emperor and King Franz Joseph, he strove at the royal court that it agree to name the new Temple for Queen Elizabeth. I recall the president beaming with joy when he arrived one fine day and said: “*Mazltov!* The court has given its gracious permission for the Jewish Temple to be named for the late Queen.” There was true delight among the representatives, as though great joy had befallen the People of Israel.

From that day forward, the temple on Jozefstadt where I had my first formal job as Chief Cantor, was called “Queen Elizabeth Temple.” The president and the representatives, from that day forward, threw themselves still more into the work of organizing the celebration of the Building Dedication [to be] still more imposing and with even greater pomp. From ear to ear it was reported that a representative from the court itself would appear at the celebration, in addition to the Bürgermeister [mayor] of Vienna and other noted personalities of the diplomatic and financial worlds.

Since the Vienna bankers and industrialists did not spare any money, Professor Zultser decided to hire for the Building Dedication the best voices of the lords and ladies choir at the Vienna Opera. A wonderful harmony was established that sounded truly like an organ. And the rehearsals began.

It was beyond me to begrudge anything since so much work came my way. Only a few weeks earlier I had been going about jobless and seeking any sort of employment and now suddenly my days were not long enough. Rehearsals with Professor Zultser and his choir for the Building Dedication took up almost three hours per day, and in the evenings I had to be involved with the temple’s choir for the [upcoming] Days of Awe; and in the midst of all this I never once neglected my hours with the dear Professor Shteynshnayder. His lectures day by day enriched my presentations both in song and in text.

These few months between *shvues* and the Days of Awe were, without exaggeration, the most difficult and most responsible of my life. I knew that dependent upon them was my entire future and career as a cantor. Should I fail at the Building Dedication and the Days of Awe chanting I might say goodbye to Vienna; if not, and I succeed, I was certain that I would then climb farther and farther, as high as a *khazn* might climb among Jews.

I worked with unusual energy that I don't know how it came to me. I thought at the time: I am exerting myself for the joy of my wife and children, for the pride and esteem of my dear parents who did not spare any effort and who made it possible for me to go to my intended purpose despite all the pitfalls.

The Building Dedication program consisted almost entirely of Zultserian compositions: "How Good Are," "We Sing the Song of Dedication," "Open the Gates of Righteousness," "Hallelujah," "Lord of Creation," then two prayers in German and at the very end, the Austrian anthem: "God receive, God protect..." Professor Zultser provided me with all the recitatives of the compositions for the Building Dedication program. I began to study the recitatives day and night. I must admit here that my professor helped me to bring forth all the fineness and nuances, the breath separations, the parts, crescendos, decrescendos and pianos, and most significantly he helped me to bring forth the *farlando-fortrag* [musical term unknown]. I did not only follow his every suggestion, but I swallowed his every word, as a devoted *khosid* [Hasid] listens to the Torah teachings, may they not be compared, of his *rebe* [rabbi].

As a result, not one hundredth of one hundredth of one percent was lacking in the completeness in which the recitatives were performed. The most precise harmony ruled between me and the choir. Professor Zultser, upon hearing this, was deeply astounded by how I had in so short a time, actually lacking formal musical education, achieved such perfect results. I still remember his words: "If my sainted father had lived to see this...he certainly did not have the privilege in his lifetime to hear his own compositions in such a completely masterful performance." I was embarrassed upon hearing these words, but within I was filled with pride and joy at having lived unto that day.

## The Celebratory Building Dedication of My New Temple in Vienna

Finally there arrived the great day of the Building Dedication of the new Temple that bore the name of the Austrian Queen. I will not here go into describing the illuminations and the flower garlands and all of the rest of the outer splendor that encompassed the outer aspect of the celebration. The musical part of the celebration was truly a rare event, even in Vienna which was famed for its rich musical and theatrical life.

On the expensive Persian rugs that led to the temple's entrance, around mid-day there began to gather the president and all the leading members, all dressed in formal clothes and shiny top-hats. The rabbi, Dr. Bauer, and I were dressed, understandably, in ritual clothes, fresh from the sewing needle.

The first of the celebratory guests to arrive was the Bürgermeister [mayor] of Vienna, accompanied by his suite in a row of automobiles. The synagogue was by then over-filled, but they awaited the representative of the Kaiser and the royal court. When he arrived I was given a signal and, with a prelude song of the organ, I marched in singing "How Great You Are." After completing the singing of "May He That Dispenses" in honor of Kaiser Franz Joseph, that had been translated into German by Rabbi Dr. Bauer, I and the choir sang "Open the Gates of Righteousness" as the president and all the other leading members carried the Torah scrolls into the temple and placed them in the Holy Ark.

I thought to myself then that, at the bottom line, Jews are one people wherever fate had determined them to live. It seems that an assimilated crowd of bankers, government employees and major businessmen had all torn themselves away from their occupations on an ordinary afternoon and came to pay homage to God's house that has been so beautifully and joyfully decorated in honor of its opening. Especially moving was the moment when the wardens, or as they called themselves in Vienna-speak, "leading people," carried the old Torah scrolls down the length of the temple to the Holy Ark. Among us, in Khonorod, Jews will throw themselves upon the scrolls and kissed them with the hem of their prayer shawls. Here, in Vienna, the Jews stood quietly, but in their eyes one could notice a dampness of inner arousal at this elevated scene.

After "A Song for the Dedication" came the sermon of the Rabbi, Dr. Bauer, after which the choir and I sang "Hallelujah" and "Lord of the Universe" by Zultser in [*?es-dor*] and closed with the Austrian hymn. The choral singing of more than thirty men and women of the Vienna Opera, accompanied by organ and harp, was truly something extraordinary, heavenly singing that deeply enchanted all attendees. Much of the honor for this celebratory event also fell to me and from that day forward I became popular and known in all the Vienna Jewish circles, despite the fact that I had not yet reached the age of thirty.

At the Days of Awe, some two weeks after the celebratory opening of the Temple, the crush of congregants was so great that the president, Herr Bek, expressed to me his regret that the temple had been built with only one thousand seats, rather than fifteen hundred. There was a flood of new members to the temple and the leadership began, from a purely economic standpoint, to take in large sums, besides the moral prestige that it earned from the very first day. My prestige grew alongside it; I felt hopeful and joyful that by my stubbornness and perseverance I had fought my way to such a position.

When, after the Days of Awe, I was called to the president who handed me the agreed-upon three hundred *krona* for bringing my family, I allowed myself to make him aware that we have one point in our

agreement waiting to be fulfilled. That was the point that in the new temple, should my chanting succeed, I have the right to have our conditions reviewed. *Nu*, as to the success, the president must know better than I. And as to the matter of whether I and my family of four children could manage on the fifteen hundred *krona* that was originally determined, it is not proper that such a great temple with its tremendous number of congregants, should have its Chief Cantor suffer, should not live as is proper for his role and not have everything he needs.

The president, as all presidents when faced with such demands, had a very sour appearance on his face. Still, he asked me quite gently what my present demand was. I was in no way ashamed and said that in order for their Chief Cantor to live a respectable existence, as proper to his position, he must receive a minimum of three thousand *krona* per year.

When Herr Bek heard that figure he almost fell out of his chair. That is by now the habit of all those folks who run communities: it is very difficult for them to appreciate the situation of the people who provide so much to the success of their institutions. They would all like to have them get by on empty air and then to boast that they run a thrifty economy. I, however, from my very first steps into my career, felt that I must stand on guard over my honor and my profession and not permit myself to be exploited by various wardens and presidents.

Weeks went by and the president did not reply to my demand. An occurrence took place when I ended the supplementary Sabbath prayers at the temple. A Jew comes over to me and broadly offers me congratulations. He introduces himself to me: he is a major trader from Bucharest, the capital of Rumania, and having come to Vienna on business, he dropped in at the temple. And he begins to tell of the joys that would await me if I were to agree to come to Bucharest. It would be their great fortune to have a cantor such as myself.

The cantor's position just happens to be free and the salary would be in Austrian currency four thousand *krona* a year, plus a community-owned home with six rooms. What trader does not want to obtain the greatest sum for his merchandise? — that's how the Bucharest Jew's story came into my head. But I decided to wait until I hear clear words from my president about the demands I had presented.

I told the story about the Bucharest Jew to my Second Cantor, Eydelman, because he was a close friend. But entirely against my will the story reached the leadership. The best evidence is that a few days later I was called and dickering began. At first they offered me eighteen hundred *krona* per year, but when they saw that I am holding fast to my demands, a quite different proposal came to the fore: they conclude a contract with me for five years. For the first year I receive two thousand *krona*, and in each succeeding year the salary is raised by two hundred *krona* so that by the end of the fifth year my salary would amount to two thousand and eight hundred *krona*.

This was a certain step forward, but that Bucharest Jew with the Rumanian joys that he had promised me completely spoiled me and I decided to continue holding fast to my demands for three thousand *krona*, starting with the present year. I actually consulted with my father about the Bucharest matter, as was my custom in all the important decisions I had to make in my life. My father replied that he was in favor of my remaining in Vienna at half pay rather than heading to Rumania in search of joy, mainly because Rumania is a land of Amelikites [ancient enemies of the Hebrew tribes] and it is too bad that Jews live there.

In the meantime I felt that it was the highest time for me to reunite with my family. I yearned terribly for my children and I was sick of my lonely life. I still held off bringing them until I would finally solidify my position and earn enough to give my children appropriate education and to obtain an appropriate dwelling. All of this could not be obtained at the current salary.

Finally, at the start of 1904, I was again called to the leadership that joyfully advised me that, upon evaluating my great achievements for the temple, they had decided to set a salary of two thousand five hundred *krona* for the first year, with an increase of one hundred *krona* for each year and the final, fifth year it would amount to three thousand *krona*, as I demand. The dickering disgusted me and I signed that contract for five years.

On the very next day I sent money telegraphically to my wife and children and I rode to the Austrian-Russian border to await them. My friends, the *khazonim* Smotritski and Eydelman and their wives did everything to help establish a home for my family with all necessities. And finally, after almost a year of separation, I could again unite with my household. There were no bounds to my happiness and joy, especially as I could boast during the first year of such above-average success: an honorable position in one of the most beautiful temples in Vienna with every prospect for further growth and development.

The leadership was so friendly toward me that they freed me for a Sabbath to travel to Bucharest and “conquer Rumania.” Before I stepped to the pulpit one of the wardens in the handsome Bucharest temple addressed me: “We are really a modern temple, but all of us enjoy having our souls brightened by a ‘Jewish bit,’ so don’t spare us still more of the hearty Jewish prayers.”

Hearing such words, I felt at home and presented them with the finest improvisations. I “chanted” for them so that they almost melted away in joy and happiness. They tried to have words with me about taking over the cantor’s position permanently. They were ready to offer me twice and perhaps a bit more over what I had agreed to in Vienna. The evil inclination was truly great, but I had kept my word from the very beginning of my career, and after receiving from them two hundred *krona* for the Sabbath’s chanting, I went home to Vienna, to my wife and little children.

## Business-Trading Plagues Me Again

In this way a normal way of life was established for me in Vienna.

I loved the city and when I made a plan for my free time I came to the realization that mornings are completely free for me and one must seek something with which to fill them. The temple occupied only two days — Friday and the Sabbath. Rehearsals with the choir took place several times a week during evening hours. I was occupied with my professor a few afternoons so that the first half day was entirely free.

So I am, after all, a trader's son who had also tried the taste of trading and business-making, one might say, was in my blood, so I had a thought: why should I not use these free mornings to accomplish something by way of business? The first thing that occurred to me was to write to my two brothers-in-law in Ekaterinoslav who carried on major trading, one in men's clothing and custom wear and the other in leather, to ask them whether they might want to take advantage of my presence in the Austrian capital to make some foreign business arrangements.

The brother-in-law in the men's wear and custom wear line of business replied that he had not the slightest interest in my offer. Contrariwise, my other brother-in-law, Lyova Urin, of the leather line, replied that his firm carries on major trade with Berlin, where they buy a sort of white chrome-tanned leather for making soles used in canvas shoes and sandals. But the price is very high so nothing can be made on the Berlin product. If I can be an expert and turn up the same product in Vienna at a cheaper price, we could then profit well.

I was not slothful and did not like to spend my free time in Vienna's cafes playing cards or reading newspapers or gabbing, as was the habit of some other *khazonim*, so I quickly set to work. First I asked my brother-in-law to send me a sample of the desired chromed soles so that I would know the kind of product to seek. And when I received such a sample, I took the Vienna telephone directory in hand and began to search among the various leather factories.

All of them replied in a single voice that they don't even know how to make such an article. Only one small tannery replied that it would be best if I were to come to them and show them what I was seeking. I went off to the small tanner, he perused the sample on all sides, turning it to and fro, and finally said that he cannot make it. But if I wish, he can make an experiment at my expense. I will cover the cost of the material. He will not charge for labor time.

So I was curious to hear what the cost of such an experiment might be. He says to me: "from forty to fifty *krona*." *Nu*, I thought, nothing ventured, nothing gained. And I agreed to cover the expenses of the experiment. He promised that in a week he would show me the results of his experiment.

When I returned a week later I saw that the result was not first-class; instead of being white, the sole-leather came out white-green (actually more green than white), but the master [craftsman] assured me that more work was required and the later results will be better. And truly, a week later the master showed me a sample that was now ninety percent white on both sides; only inside was the leather somewhat greenish, but the quality was incomparably better, thicker, than the Berlin sample; when bent, no creases appeared as in the Berlin leather.

When I raised the question of the price for producing the article it turned out that even in a small quantity the price would be twenty to thirty percent cheaper. And at a higher rate of production the difference would reach to even thirty-five percent. I quickly calculated that if the sample would please my brother-in-law we would have not too bad a business in hand and I hastened to send off the samples of the new production and their prices to Ekaterinoslav.

Before I returned there was a reply from Ekaterinoslav and the first order worth five hundred *krona*. My brother-in-law wrote me that if they were pleased by the first delivery there would be further orders for many more thousands of *krona*. I went off to my manufacturer. He was a bald-headed Gentile who was not used to larger business deals, so he did not want to accept the order unless I paid the full amount in advance.

I also overcame this difficulty and, three days later, paid him the full sum — just do it. It was successful and the ordered [goods] came out even better than the sample that he had shown me. For the future, too, the manufacturer asked for payment in advance. I wrote about this to my brother-in-law, [explaining] that I am not yet a wealthy man and should he wish further orders he should be so kind as to send cash. He did not dilly-dally at all and immediately sent two thousand *krona* for the second order.

The manufacturer, seeing so much cash on the table, threw himself into production with full impetus at an even faster pace. My brother-in-law was enraptured by the finished leather and he wrote that he would send me as much money as I might need as long as the manufacturer produced ever more [quantities] of the article, that had turned out to have truly struck it rich [and] from which we might profit wonderfully. But my brother-in-law also requested that I get the manufacturer to agree not to sell the same merchandise to any other trader in the Ekaterinoslav region.

Sadly, the manufacturer did not possess the required machinery for real mass production. So he says to me once that if I were to lend him a thousand *krona* he would buy the needed machines and production would increase significantly. He would repay the money through every order in the course of a year. I agreed to this as well, and wrote into the agreement that his entire production from the new machines that I had helped him establish belongs to me and he has no right to sell it to anyone else.

When I had this agreement in my pocket I lost no time and knowing that I had a good article in hand, I established contact with leather dealers in Kharkov, Moscow and Warsaw. I learned their addresses, sent them samples and added that I could sell the article for twenty-five percent less than the Berlin manufacturers. I made sure that the sale could only be on a cash basis, that is — cash on delivery.

No more than ten days went by before orders came pouring in from Great Russia, so that I was unable to deal with it all on my own. I thought by then: It is almost worth not being a cantor, as I've discovered such a goldmine here. But I must add here that I guarded my cantorial responsibility as I would my own eyes. It was the holiday that illuminated my life. In the same way I followed with the greatest punctuality my classes with my professor, not missing a single day, and having deep joy in the further successes I had with him.

In this way the leather trade went on for over a year's time. People became aware that I was making fortunes of money at the trade, and certain manufacturers threw themselves into trying to match that sort of leather and to send it on their own to Russia. True, their leather was far worse in quality and it also did

not have the required color, but competition had been established and the [my] article began to lose its luster. One could not earn as much on it.

When, after a year-and-a-half, I calculated what this leather trading had brought me, I saw that I had become richer by no more and no less than twenty thousand *krona*. That is, I would have had to be Chief Cantor for seven years at the Temple named for Empress Elizabeth to have obtained such a sum of money. Why deny it here: I felt quite elated. Just so — without rhyme nor reason — [I] became somewhat of a wealthy man, actually ran a luxurious home, gave my children fine education and thanked the Ruler of the Universe for not abandoning me, and at the same time as I can live spiritually at the pulpit, he arranges that I can be independent of the community, of the presidents and of all the various types of wardens. I wish all my good friends the taste of such independence! It is truly a joy to the soul and makes life sweet.



## **After One Good Deal A Second Comes Along, Where I Bury All My Money**

The connection between *khazones* and business had so deeply invaded my very bones that I considered it to be a normal thing without which I might not live at all. And when the time arrived that the leather trading came to an end, I simply could not find a place to rest. I went about uselessly and felt that I was lacking some important function to complete my normal life activity.

I took to my studies diligently. With my professor I learned a large repertoire of songs and arias so that I might appear in a modern concert on my own. I hired a teacher to teach me good German, but there was still left enough free time, and I felt that one had to start seeking out a new business.

And not waiting for long, it arrived on its own, but with a much worse result, as I will here relate in detail. My assistant conductor Nieshvezhski was once visited from Warsaw by his father-in-law named Mezhibovski. He was an Enlightened Jew, a book-learned Jüde, who also carried on great dealings in lumber and who had innumerable connections with Polish lumber firms.

Once, as we sat drinking glasses of tea, the Warsaw trader makes me a proposal that, as during his time spent in Vienna he had learned that there is a great shortage here of oak *friezes*, a kind of parquet wood that covers the floor of fine houses, and since he is in contact with a factory in Alexandrov, near Warsaw, that produces these oaken *friezes*, he proposes that I locate here in Vienna customers for this item.

After textile manufacture and leather, the time now has arrived for me to become a lumber merchant. But I have always had the habit of never rejecting a proposal until I convince myself by my own eyes that it is worth nothing. I began studying the newspapers of the lumber trade and quickly learned to whom one might offer this new product. Together with Mezhibovski I visited these merchants, learned all the prices and all the qualities [grades] of the new merchandise in which I was to begin dealing.

We demanded samples from the Alexandrov sawmills and compared them to the Vienna samples. We also compared the prices and saw that there was a difference of twenty-five percent. So it seems that the work is worth it, as we will earn well. When we brought an offer to the Vienna merchants, two of them ordered one freight car each of *friezes* as a trial. The merchandise arrived three weeks later. The merchants paid in cash and were very satisfied. We, too, had grounds for satisfaction: net profit, after reckoning all the expenses of freight, tolls and taxes, came to six hundred *krona*. As a beginning, this was not too bad.

But appetite grew with eating and we wanted to go higher and higher. So we took an order from the same merchants for fifteen cars of *friezes*, matching the same samples and grades as the first order. And in order to be sure that the order would be filled honestly and that the merchandise to be loaded into the freight cars would be perfect, without flaws — we, the two partners, determined that Mezhibovski would immediately travel to Alexandrov to give care on the spot that everything would be in the best of order.

As soon as Mezhibovski arrived there, I receive a letter from him that the sawmill owners demand an advance of two hundred *krona* per freight car, coming to a total of three thousand *krona*. The story didn't

appeal to me at once. Go deal with the Poles, especially as they are in another country, and should some conflict arise, you could sue them until the Day of Judgement arrived.

But there was nothing for it, because the order had to be delivered or, by agreement, damages would have to be paid. So, with a heavy heart, I arranged a bank transfer of the three thousand *krona* to my partner Mezhibovski, in the process feeling as though I was throwing them into the sea. At the same time I wrote my partner that, before paying out the money, he should make a notarized agreement with the sawmills that the delivered merchandise must strictly be in accordance with the samples, or else they would be responsible for all unpleasantness that might arise from this business deal.

Meanwhile my partner wrote me that it had been very clever on my part that I had sent him there personally to pay attention at the site that everything might go through in order, without any stink. The freight cars left in good fortune and my partner wrote me that he is remaining in Alexandrov in order to hear of the good results of this transaction and to await further orders.

It was some two weeks before Passover when the fifteen freight cars arrived in Vienna. It was an ugly winter's day, with snow mixed with rain and cold that penetrated one's bones. I paid for the freight and the appropriate toll and brought my customers to the freight station so that they could examine and take over the delivered merchandise. As soon as the first wagon was opened, everything turned dark before my eyes. The merchandise in no way resembled the samples against which the order was placed.

A second and a third car is opened, it gets worse and worse. The Vienna merchants quite simply refused to accept the merchandise because it wasn't what they had ordered. It was bitter and dark for me and I stood there as though I'd been beaten up. In addition, the manager of the freight station informed [me] that within three days I must unload the merchandise from the cars or I would have to pay five *krona* per day rent for each car, and after ten days he would simply throw the merchandise out of the wagons.

My despair was truly beyond normal. I began to seek out smaller lumber merchants to take the merchandise from me, so they offered me half-price. When I went to seek out others, they offered even less. In that manner I ran about from one merchant to another in that snowy rain. At the station meanwhile, they threw the merchandise out of the cars and it was totally ruined in the wet and no price at all was offered.

I myself was so preoccupied and bustling over this terrible business that I almost entirely forgot about my honorable calling and about the great responsibility lying upon me in connection with the soon-approaching Passover holiday. I caught cold and coughed badly and feared that I might fall away in grief.

When I realized that it was a devil's game, I quickly called the merchants who had offered half [price] and sold them the *friezes*, putting out eleven thousand *krona* from my own pocket. I began to seek out my partner, the Warsaw Jew who was the most guilty, since he had assured me, after all, that he is standing guard and paying attention with his own eyes that everything might be in order — but what good would it do? The Jew disappeared, as though into the ocean, and he did not appear in Vienna.

In this manner my business dealing in Vienna came to an end: earned at one, lost at another. But it was not so much the money but the vexation and preoccupation and the danger that I might lose both worlds: I barely regained my strength to chant on Passover, as demanded of me by my responsible position.

However, there was a development that allowed me to quickly forget the sorrows of the *friezes*, because a new pack of sorrows was awaiting me. This was the year of the Russian-Japanese War and my brother Boris was drafted as a soldier. My father turned the world upside down to prevent his son from going off to war for [Czar] Nicholas II, but the young man insisted that he did have to go. Not, heaven preserve us, because of strong patriotic feelings for Russia. Just the opposite: since he had had a sniff of the grouping of *tsitsilistn* [hum: socialists] they had manipulated him [into believing] that he had to go into the army in order to organize the Russian Army against the czar.

His company was quartered in Baku and before it was to leave for the Japanese front, my little brother started up [secret] organizing among the soldiers and officers. The end was that he was arrested and taken to appear before a military court. By a miracle he managed to escape from the convoy and to run off. For months on end he hid under an assumed name but the military powers put out wanted posters with his picture and it was a great danger for him to remain in Russia.

With great difficulty it was managed to bring him to the Austrian border and from there I had him transported to Vienna, so that I might suffer new huge problems as a result. The Austrian secret police received an extradition demand from the Russian police for the delivery of the “criminal” Boris Kwartin. And I did not have a single day’s rest due to him. The Austrian government agreed that it would not send him back to Russia, but that, therefore, he had to leave the country.

We sent this young fellow to Switzerland where he earned a little as a locksmith-electrician. However, every month I had to send him the rest of his living expenses. But these were not all the problems that awaited me in that critical period of my life.

## I Perform Sabbath Prayers At the Great Warsaw Synagogue on Tlomacka Street

I was struck very badly at that time by the illness of my wife and the fact that she absolutely refused to be cured. She had been raised so piously that she had no belief at all in modern medicine nor in what the doctors and professors say. I had to endure bitter struggles with her before she allowed a doctor near her and then, to get her to take the medicine that the doctor prescribed.

She believed in perfect faith that God Almighty is the only curer of the sick and that people, even if they were the greatest Vienna professors, had nothing to say in the matter. She went even further and thought little of my talent. She said that all this comes from God and I have nothing in which to take pride. She did not let the prayer book and the *tsene urene* [*lit.* Come and See; women's version of Bible and prayers] out of her hand all day long and it could be clearly seen that she was falling into religious melancholy, neglecting the home and her children.

It was very difficult for me to live through this sickness of my wife. It sucked the marrow out of my bones and had a profound effect on my work that demanded spiritual calm and concentration. Because of it, I, too, became apathetic and bedraggled and the children, too, suffered greatly. But I could see no means by which to rescue her from that condition. Our friends, the *khazonim* Smotritski and Eydelman and their wives, did everything possible to prevail upon my wife to want to dress like a person, or to go out somewhere, but all their exertions were of no avail and I went about with great pain in my heart.

When people would come to my home and congratulate me on my fine chanting, or when I received letters of praise from various people and I said to my wife: "You see, you have every basis to be happy and to raise the children comfortably," she would reply: "You do everything that is preordained from **Above**." She didn't think much of my own energy and exertions. This left me numb and drove me into terrible depression.

If this was not enough, a new tragedy arrived: on one fine day, when the governess took the two younger children for a walk, she met some friend, got lost in conversation with him, and a post office wagon drove over my elder little son, Berl, or Boris. I was called by telephone to the hospital where the child lay unconscious. A bone of his upper thigh had been entirely shattered and there was even the danger that his right leg might have to be amputated.

However, by great effort, they succeeded in saving the leg and after lying in a cast at the hospital for three months the child was brought home where attention had to be given to prevent him from becoming a cripple. For six months in a row, day and night, the child had to be attended to, hanging heavy weights on him, massaging, and all the other things that the doctors prescribed. When one considers the mother's illness and the difficult experiences due to the child, it is a great wonder that with all these troubles I was able to stand at the pulpit on Sabbath and still [be able] to achieve enthusiasm among my listeners.

In case this was not yet enough, new troubles arrived, this time again from Russia. Jews were fleeing from there due to the lost war and the outbreak of the [1905] revolution as well as the pogroms that the revolution had brought. Every mail delivery from Russia brought me fresh news that here one cousin, and there another cousin had emigrated to Austria, and since I am the only close relative in that country,

therefore I should be so kind as to await the family at the train, providing them with lodging, with income and with all other good things.

It is therefore no wonder that my house was not a house but a train station. Relatives came and relatives went and everyone had to be attended to, and because of my wife's illness all of it fell upon my head. I sympathized with all these refugees and exerted myself to help them as much as I could, but at the same time it took my head off and I went about as though I were in a madhouse.

The two seriously ill people in my house consumed great expenses and very soon I looked about [and saw that] not only was there nothing left of my savings but I am coming into debt and the salary that I receive from my temple does not cover my needs. So on top of everything else I had to look about as to how I might increase my income in order to cover all needs.

Once, leafing through the journal for *khazonim* that was published in Vienna, I came upon a notice from the great Warsaw synagogue on Tlomacka [Street] that there was vacant the position of Chief-Cantor and that they request Vienna *khazonim* to apply. Something struck my heart: Warsaw! The largest Jewish center! Hundreds of thousands of Jews living a characteristic, traditional life. I was drawn there. I didn't think for long and wrote them that if they are prepared to pay the sum of two hundred *krona* for travel costs, I will come there on a Sabbath. However, I did not mention the word "audition," because I thought that if they agree, I would then request leave from my post and when I will be in Warsaw I will survey the scene.

Incidentally I had in mind that being in Warsaw, I might also hop over to my Khonorod home because I had received not-good news about my mother's health condition. For several weeks I had no reply at all from Warsaw; perhaps during that time they inquired as to what sort of a *khazn* I am. Finally a reply arrived that they were prepared to pay hundred-fifty *krona* and that I should indicate the Sabbath on which I am ready to arrive.

It was very difficult for me to obtain leave from my presidents. I showed them the letters from my father about my mother's health condition and I also did not hide from them that I plan to stop over in Warsaw and to chant on a Sabbath in order to cover my expenses. But I did finally obtain permission and in the first days of January of the year 1906 arrived in Warsaw. The sexton of the Great Synagogue on Tlomacka awaited me at the train station and that very evening I was introduced to the Chief-Cantor Gritzhendler, who had to leave the post because of his advanced age, and to his conductor who, if I am not mistaken, was a Polack named Sterling or Shmerling.

A rehearsal was arranged and the conductor proved himself to be a true Polack, who [*unclearly transcribed Polish phrase*], in other words: he had unlimited honor, but as to conducting that choir, he was quite unversed in *ivri* [Hebrew, *i.e.*, Jewish learning]. When I returned home to my hotel after the rehearsal at about ten in the evening, I was awaited by a young man wearing blue eyeglasses who introduces himself, saying his name is Froman and he is a representative of the Jewish workers' "Bund." [General Jewish Workers' Alliance of Russia, Poland and Lithuania.]

The young man makes me aware that, since there is an ongoing conflict between the synagogue-choir that is part of a professional union affiliated with the "Bund" and the members of the council managing the synagogue, he advises me not to dare approach the pulpit for chanting until the disagreement is settled in favor of the choir. I tried to have him understand that I am a foreign person here and it is not my place

to be involved in the local situations of the Warsaw community; the young man did not let me get to my point and he began to threaten me that if I were to dare to go to chant without the agreement of the “Bund” I would be exposed to the greatest of scandals. They would quite simply tear down the prayer service. And the young man left without a farewell.

I thought, with what a fine “welcome” I’m greeted here in Warsaw. It was by then Thursday morning, that is two days before my planned chanting. I quickly telephoned the [Chief] Councillor and told him the story And that it would be impossible for me to chant under such circumstances. He calmed me and assured me that they hope to come to agreement with the choir before the Sabbath and that I should prepare for chanting without any fear.

The next day, Friday, a bomb exploded in the Warsaw Jewish cemetery while a large funeral was in progress. It was reported that this was a piece of work by the “Bund,” as a means of impressing on the community the need to settle the dispute. There was huge agitation in the city but nevertheless, when I arrived at the synagogue on Friday evening, all was quiet and calm. Russian mounted patrolmen guarded the entrance, the sextons carefully examined the entrance permits, but it was quiet and celebratory inside. My chanting was very pleasing, because right at [the oncoming of] Sabbath night I was invited to the [Chief] Councillor’s where other major householders had gathered and they began dealing with me about taking over the post.

That same evening I received a telegram from my wife [telling me] not to travel to Khonorod but to come right home to Vienna. My father also telegraphed me to return to Vienna and not to carry on any transactions with the Warsaw community. I was extremely concerned over what may have happened there. From my discussions with the Warsaw Jews I could ascertain that they are ready to accept all the conditions that I might propose, but my head was spinning so that I wanted to be on the train for home as quickly as possible. I explained politely that I would give them my answer after consulting the members of my [current] management and on the very next day I traveled home, not having had the opportunity to become properly acquainted with that great Jewish community.

## A New Income Turns Up — I Sing Into a Gramophone

Upon returning home from Warsaw I found my wife to be very sick. She was joyful that I had returned and that I had not undertaken anything in Warsaw. From Vienna I had informed the Warsaw community that due to certain situations I could not negotiate further about taking on a permanent post with them.

I again fell into the vise of deep concern. I felt that I had to undertake some fresh thing, because the salary of the Empress Elizabeth Temple does not cover the huge expenses that I have due to my wife's illness and because of my great responsibilities toward other members of my family.

One afternoon, when I had left my singing-hour with the professor, I went off in the direction of the Opera to see what they are performing this evening. As I passed by the aristocratic Kertner [Kärntner] Strasse, I saw people sitting in a salon, holding listening-tubes to their ears, hearing sounds coming from an apparatus.

I entered the salon and also threw a coin into the basket and put the two tubes on my ears. I heard a wonderful singer. For another coin I heard a marvelous female coloratura singer, and for a third coin I heard the most marvelous violinists, cellists and pianists. I sat there for an hour and a half and had great pleasure. I envied all these artists for whom modern technology made it possible for them to be accessible to the broad masses for simply loose change.

I gathered up my courage and asked the salon manager whether he also has Jewish music in his catalogue, perhaps some *khazn*. He put the entire catalogue into my hand, and leafing through it I came upon the names of two *khazonim*, who had already done the "trick" of singing into the gramophone, as it was then called. The *khazonim* were: Tsherini from Breslau and Gershon Sirota of Vilna [Vilnius].

It was then that I first heard Sirota's name, a name that later echoed so marvelously in the Jewish world and that so deeply became ingrained in the history of modern Jewish *khazones*. When I searched out these two names of Jewish [English] *rekords*, I asked the manager to put on these recordings for me, but he replied that if they actually do appear in the catalogue, he hasn't yet ordered them because there hasn't yet been any request for that sort of music. However, he promised me that he would order them especially on my behalf and, truly, two weeks later the recordings arrived.

When I first placed Sirota's recording on the gramophone, his voice simply enthralled me by its powerful range. Tsherini's voice revealed fine musical culture and good modern presentation. When I asked the salon manager to obtain the recordings for me, to be bought at any price, he replied to me that he cannot do that; he did not want to even show me the record so that I might see which company had made it.

From that day forward, when I had heard the two *khazonim* on the records, I could not rest. I felt that I would also have justification to have my voice spread over the waves of the world through the help of this newest invention. I began to ask and search. I went from one music store to another and everywhere asked whether they might have Sirota's and Tsherini's records. But everywhere I was told that they had never heard of such singers.

However, I did not give up hope. Quite quickly this new industry began to develop more broadly. Gramophone record factories began to open one after another. After the first Edison factory, that produced round cylinders, not records, came the French Pathé Disc [Record] Company, then “Odeon” and the German “Victor Company” [actually, the *American* Victor Talking Machine Company]. I went off to all of these four companies and offered them to do an audition singing for the gramophone. I offered to sing four things at absolutely no charge to make two records. Three companies totally rejected my proposal; only the Pathé Disc Company agreed to do such an audition with me.

I made the first audition with the above-cited company without any sort of piano or organ accompaniment. I sang “and guard us;” it came out not quite well but also not very bad, that is, passable. After the audition that same company offered me one hundred *krona* for singing five pieces with my piano accompanist. These were to be three-inch records.

Since I was still a greenhorn in these matters and had no experience in how to stand at the megaphone, and was also unable to figure out the precise three minutes of time that were given me for the singing, it came out for me either too long and could not be contained on the record, or too short so that empty space remained on the record. So for the measly hundred *krona* I had to sing and re-sing the same thing several times. I had to pay the accompanist ten *krona* for each attempt. This time the records came out far more respectably, but I had earned next to nothing [*lit.* “water for kashe” — buckwheat groats’ cooking water.]

A week later my records were available at all music stores. I myself received from the company two records of each recorded number. So I lost no time, took my “production” and went off with it to the competing companies and again offered my services. This time the attitude was different. If their competition had made them, it was a sign that there must be something to it. All offered me twenty *krona* for each number that I would record.

It was important for me to determine which of all these firms is best technically equipped and where my voice would come out clearest. So I offered them to sing as an audition and then we might see. All these auditions convinced me that my voice came out best in the German [*sic*] gramophone company, [English] “His Master’s Voice, which was called in America, “Victor Record”[*sic*]. After the audition every company offered forty *krona* per number with an order for ten numbers. Only the German company, technically the best, offered thirty *krona* per number with me paying for the accompaniment.

Despite the lower price I nevertheless signed with the German company because I was certain that they make the best introduction that would have certain success. And I was not mistaken. These first ten records came out marvelously and caused a great sensation. They were the first to spread my name across the Jewish world.

Less than two months went by before I received a letter from the manager of the Vienna division of the above-cited German company, Herr Grinfeld [Gruenfelt?], instructing me to report to his office. When I arrived, I was introduced to the Chief Director who had arrived from Berlin, a certain Herr Mikhelis [Michaels?]. He was a thorough businessman with two sharp eyes that measured me with his glance from top to bottom, as though saying: how can we ensnare this idiot here into the sack?

It did not take long before the General Director says to me: “Hear me, Herr Kwartin, your records that we produced made a good impression on the Jewish market. And then we have in our catalogue the



greatest Jewish cantor, Herr Sirota, and we are very pleased with his records, still as I just happen to find myself in Vienna on my way to Petersburg, I want to use the opportunity to engage you exclusively for our company on a contract for five years, at three thousand *krona* per year. You will have to record twenty numbers each year.”

My heart began to beat and my head began to spin for a while. No small thing, three thousand *krona*! this is, after all, what my community pays me for chanting all year long, and here I will only have to record over the course of six hours during the entire year. I felt that this was a tremendous offer. But it is the habit of a person, when he reaches much, he always thinks that he can reach still more. And, as my way was in such cases, I did not want to give my answer right there on the spot and said that I would reply tomorrow. And I wanted to say farewell.

Now Herr Mikhelis comes out to me with these words: “Before you leave, Herr Chief-Cantor, I want to draw to your attention that my presence here in Vienna is limited until tomorrow, and if you will, by tomorrow, at one in the afternoon, not provide me with a response, I will that same day (that is, tomorrow) extend the contract with Chief-Cantor Sirota.”

These last words appeared to me as a cunning [in English] *trik* by a clever businessman. What does it mean that he will extend the contract with *khazn* Sirota here in Vienna when everyone knows that Sirota is in Vilna, or, as it turned out later, he had already taken on the position of Chief-Cantor at the Tlomacka synagogue in Warsaw, replacing Chief-Cantor Gritzhendler? I deeply regretted that this clever negotiator wants to take me for granted and to frighten me into quickly accepting his conditions.

On the way home I thoroughly thought through the entire story: If he seriously plans to conclude a contract with me, then why does he need to place ultimatums before me, and, secondly, what relation does my contract have with *khazn* Sirota? Why should the contract with me mean harm to that most talented person whom I did not yet know personally, but to whom I already felt great sympathy for his wonderfully beautiful voice?

Something about this German did not please me; somehow he had approached me with too-cunning and unclean objectives, and I began to hesitate over closing a deal with that type of person.

## My First Meeting With the Chief-Cantor Gershon Sirota

But very soon it turned out that one must not judge a person too quickly. When I arrived home, greatly distressed by my conversation with the Director, it was noticed by my wife and brother who was then living with me and I had to tell them the whole story, that I had been offered such a valuable deal and that I had postponed my reply until tomorrow. So they began, as the custom is, to harass me: How come I dared to hesitate, and who knows whether tomorrow the Director himself might have regrets and the entire offer would turn to nothing.

No matter how much effort I put into explaining to my wife that it is not a tradesman's way to agree at once to the best offer that might be made to you, it was of no avail and they began filling me with as much gall as I could tolerate. The truth is that I could not forgive myself for not having accepted the offer at once, but I did not want to confess that.

As we sit there and argue, the door opens and the bass, named Bauman who had sung in my choir, enters. He had been for a certain time active in the choir of the Warsaw synagogue where Gershon Sirota was already chanting. I was strongly in love with his voice and was a close friend of this person. He felt very much at home in my house and my wife and my brother, it is understood, immediately told him the whole story, delivering a strongly accusative speech against me for having with my own hands pushed away the joy that had come knocking at my door.

Bauman, too, agreed that the story by the Director about Sirota in Vienna was deliberately invented to draw me in and exert pressure on me, so that I might at once agree to his conditions that must, therefore not be in my favor, because otherwise he would not have needed to use such not-nice means to achieve his goal.

And listen to a stunning story that, if it was told to me by someone else, I would consider to be fantasy. As we sit there and speak about the matter again and again, my doorbell chimes. My brother opened the door. Three persons entered. The first introduced himself: Chief-Cantor Zontag of Bucharest, and he quickly introduced the other two: Cantor Goldenberg from Marienbad, whom I had known earlier, and Chief-Cantor Sirota of Warsaw.

And I saw at once my bass Bauman embracing Sirota as two old friends. So it is really Sirota, about whom we have been talking all day long, and Director Mikhelis had not thought-up his name as only a *trik* to influence me, but that Sirota really is in Vienna. My head completely spun about, but a thought ran through like a red thread: And what will now happen to my contract?

But this persisted for only a short while. I was truly overjoyed with the three honored guests who had come to visit me; I was especially overjoyed with Sirota who was about my age, somewhat younger, a tall, finely-built man with a very pleasing timbre in his voice. When my wife served refreshments and we made the first *lekhyim* [toast] we became somewhat more favorably disposed and I told my talented colleague the whole truth: That when I first heard his voice through the gramophone tubes I was simply overwhelmed and it would be a tremendous pleasure for me to hear him in the "original." But since he is my guest I do not have the right to impose upon him but if he himself were to find it necessary to sing something for us we would with great pleasure listen to the greatest cantor of our time.

Sirota felt very pleased by my words, especially by the last, “the greatest cantor of our time,” which I had stated in complete consciousness, but he replied very politely that it is the general rule that first the host gratifies his guests. Both *khazonim*, Zontag and Goldenberg, supported him in this. So I did not wait to be asked for long and sang “And Our Petition” by Zultser and then “Eternal Love.” Cantor Zontag accompanied me on the piano.

Sirota then asked what we would like him to sing. Since the bass Bauman knew all Sirota’s “fortes,” he asked Sirota to sing Levandovski’s “How Great” with its famous “The Righteous Man Shall Flourish” in “D major.” I found Levandovski’s score for Zontag and Sirota began the “How Great.” When he completed the “He Is My Rock” with its high “re,” we were all trembling. He then sang his “Want” which gained him fame across the entire Jewish world and I again became convinced that we have, in Sirota, the greatest voice-giant of our time.

No matter how great was my joy at hearing Sirota, one is, however, no more than human, and one’s own skin is nearer, so I kept in mind that I have such a giant before me with whom it will be very hard to conduct warfare, and at that moment I decided that I would run faster to sign the contract with the German if, it is understood, the German had not regretted [the deal] in the meantime. I did not believe that my signing the contract could in any degree harm Sirota, heaven help us. And in order to be completely certain, I exerted myself to lead the conversation with Sirota onto the subject of his recordings.

He told me that, for both sides of each record, he receives one hundred rubles. The gramophone company had now offered him two hundred rubles but he had decided that he would not accept any less than five hundred rubles per record. Again I convinced myself that my contract could in no way be competitive with his; that Sirota would, bless The Name, hold his own, and that I can close the deal with a quite calm conscience. We bade each other farewell quite satisfactorily and decided to meet again the next day.

Right after they left I hired a *fiacre* and a quarter-hour later I was at the office of my Director. I declared my readiness to sign the contract with them for a five year term at three thousand *krona* per year, with the condition that the choir and piano or organ accompanist had to be covered by them. They agreed and quite quickly I was back home with the contract in my pocket. The people in my house became a bit calmer that I had not, with my own hands, driven off the good fortune that was rapping at my door, as they first thought.

That very same evening I phoned several cantors in Vienna and told them about the great guest that we have in the person of Sirota and that it is no more than right that we give him the appropriate welcome that he has earned. The *khazonim* Gutman, Matyash [Mathius], Dineman, Baser and Smotritski heartily agreed at once and we decided that on the next day we would have an official visit with him at his hotel.

When we arrived at his Hotel “Continental” there were assembled almost all the cantors who were chanting at that time in Vienna’s temples, amounting to eighteen individuals. Meeting everyone’s fervent desire, Sirota provided us in the hotel with two song numbers; then we all went off to the finest Jewish restaurant where we dined together and spent many very pleasant hours.

When I later spoke with Sirota, he explained to me the real reason for his current visit to Vienna. This had no connection whatever with the gramophone company, but was actually related to the above-mentioned strike of his choir in Warsaw, which had been organized by the Workers’ “Bund”

against the Warsaw Synagogue Council. The “Bund” had warned Sirota not to dare approach the pulpit until the choir strike was settled, and if he did not obey he would be facing serious problems.

The Council members themselves therefore advised Sirota, in order to avoid unpleasantness, to go to Vienna for a while, until the situation was normalized. Besides, he would have an opportunity to complete his musical knowledge with the famous Vienna professors. He had no idea that there even was a division in Vienna of the gramophone company with which he had a contract. A few days before leaving Warsaw he had received an inquiry from the gramophone company in Berlin whether he was willing to sign a new contract under the heretofore conditions [in the existing one]. Sirota replied with a “no.” When he was en route again a telegram arrived as to whether he was ready for further negotiations, and what were his conditions. To this it was his family that replied that he had left for Vienna.

It was this telegram that gave General-Director Mikhelis the grounds to argue with me and to warn me that if I would not accept his conditions he would renew the contract with Sirota. He did not invent the fact that Sirota was in Vienna, but he used a specific psychological business *trik* to lure me all the sooner into his trap. He knew well what he was doing and later, I regretted more than somewhat that everything had fallen together, that I had been forced to rush into accepting conditions that later bound me up and caused great losses.

I was not able to forgive the Director for having been so wily in fooling me. I had a bitter taste in my mouth and firmly decided that there would come a day when I would settle matters with him aright.

## The Gramophone Carries My Name Across the Breadth of Russia

Very quickly, following the signing of the contract with the Berlin company, I was assigned to record the first ten numbers. I chose to begin with these ten prayers: “The Voice of the Lord Will Make Eilat;” “Eternal Love;” “And the Ways;” “May Salvation Arrive;” “May He Who Blessed;” “For the Sin;” “We Will Sanctify;” “How Great;” “On This Night;” “And You Will Keep”—the last numbers with the choir.

A few days later I was called to listen to the completed records. When I heard myself I was impressed. I am really this [good] by now? I asked myself. My voice sounded clear and powerful; I had joyful pride in myself. The Vienna representative, Herr Grinfeld, congratulated me warmly, expressing the belief that this day is actually the beginning of my musical and *khazonish* career. I must say that he did not err.

These first ten gramophone records with their old Jewish prayers carried my name far and wide over Great Russia, and began to emigrate to America, as well. The other Vienna *khazonim*, when they first heard the records, congratulated me heartily, but at the same time they began assaulting the thresholds of the gramophone companies, offering their service. But for quite some time the market was completely dominated by Sirota and myself.

It did not take long before I began to receive letters from the other gramophone companies with offers to pay me much more than the German company had agreed upon. My heart pained me greatly over having allowed myself to have been bought so cheaply, but I bit my lips and kept silent. Actually, being in Vienna, I had not the slightest concept of how tremendously wide my records were distributed and the sackfuls of gold that the gramophone company made off me. I learned of this sometime later, during my first tour of Russia.

On one fine day I receive a special delivery letter from my Director, Grinfeld, [instructing me] to come to the office at once. I thought — who knows what might have happened? But he shows me a letter from the main office in Berlin in which it is written that from dozens of cities in Russia, Rumania, Poland and Galicia come demands for new records by *khazn* Kwartin, and especially [in] the old, authentically Jewish styles. I must therefore record another ten numbers of my own improvisations, accompanied by an organ.

I never had a shortage of improvisations. I immediately hired professor Braslavski, an unusually musical person who played the organ well, and in a single morning I was done with the ten numbers, obtaining the check for fifteen hundred *krona* right on the spot. It was a very pleasant feeling and it filled me with pride that in less than six hours time I could earn such a huge, at that time, sum of money. However, I was too naïve to understand that with my great fortunes the company was making me a fool, because at the same time it was making millions off me.

The twenty numbers that I had to sing that first year had been done in the first two months and I was, that is, a free person. I began to be contacted by impresarios and agents from the most divergent cities in Russia, Lithuania and Poland, asking me to perform concerts. However, I had to postpone all that until after *shvues* [Shavuot, Feast of Weeks] when I had my annual furlough from my temple.

Early in June, 1906, I was granted the furlough and I could begin the great journey across the Jewish cities in my old home and also to visit the nest where I was born and to celebrate with my dear parents. My first concert was in Elizavetgrad, where I had taken my first musical steps and obtained my early education. Following that were the cities: Yekaterinoslav, Kremenchuk, Tsherkasi, Byelo-Tserkov and last but certainly not least — my almost-hometown of Uman, where I was awaited by my parents, my brothers and sisters, all my aunts and uncles, and even my old grandmother came from Khonorod to share prideful joy in her grandchild who is returning from the great world, but how differently he looks now than back then when he left here.

After the Uman concert all of us, the entire family with grandmother at its head, traveled for a few days' stay to Khonorod. It was for me an unexaggeratedly triumphant homecoming. I celebrated with all the hometown Jews, with the poverty and with the small-town stargazers who still dreamt about the great world, as I myself had in my time. I am simply unable to describe the joy they had in me, their townsman. I was literally hoisted on their shoulders. The recordings of my prayers sounded from almost every window in my *shtetl* so that it was already known what I can do and it wasn't even necessary for me to sing for them. But I was a big-city person and time was fleeting and I could not, sadly, remain for too long with my nearest and dearest. I returned to Vienna directly from home.

I was unable to fulfill all the requests to visit tens of other Jewish cities and had to postpone it until winter, when I hoped to be granted another furlough by my wardens. I found my family to be well, especially the children, and chanted during the Days of Awe in the best of voice, occasioning the deepest enthusiasm among the congregants and especially by the Council, which strengthened me still more in my belief that they would again "liberate" me, because when I return from such a trip across the old country I am still more surfeited in the old Jewish style and chant even better.

And actually, in January, 1907, I received a second four week furlough and went off on a series of eight concerts in such cities as Vilna and Bialystok, the densest and heartiest [areas] of Jewish life. At the border, in Podvolotshisk, I was awaited by my impresario, cheerfully bearing the good news that all the tickets to the concerts were sold out and that right here at the border he is prepared to arrange ten more concerts for me. But I cooled him down a bit, [saying] that I am not the complete master over myself and that we will discuss this later.

I will not forget for all my life my concert in Vilna, which was held as a benefit for the Aged Home organization but which drew thousands of Jews who could not be sufficiently satiated by the sigh of Jewish prayer which, here in Vilna, I presented with a special heartache and with profound connection to the fate of the Jews. Wherever I stood and walked, the gramophone trumpeted my and Sirota's records. It somehow seemed to me then that Jews are doing absolutely nothing else than making love to their *khazonim*. O, what joyful times were those then!

Two young men came to me at the Vilna hotel and introduced themselves as brothers, named Iserlin. When I asked what they wanted they replied that they wanted the honor of having me as their guest that evening at a special banquet they were arranging for me. "What is the occasion," I asked, "to which you're inviting me while we are complete strangers?"

To this the told me the following story: They have had for many years a store selling gramophones and records and barely made a living. But over the past few months a true fortune opened for them and

the fortune was the records of *khazn* Kwartin that had arrived from Berlin. They had managed to obtain exclusive rights for sale of the records in Poland, Lithuania and Courland, and during the last five months they have managed to sell almost a half-million records, far more than they had sold combined of all records of all artists during the five years they have had the store.

And the Iserlin bothers went on [relating] that they have made a great fortune also thanks to [the fact] that they do not sell Kwartin's records unless one also buys the gramophone on which to play the records. This is a separate source of income. They could sell twice as much as now, but the company is entirely unable to deliver as many records as the market demands. Now the company has fallen upon a plan to open a factory in Warsaw or in Vilna that would reproduce records from the matrixes that would be sent here. Thereby production would be greatly increased and earnings would become still higher.

"Now you understand, Herr Kwartin," the two brothers continued, "why you are so dear to us and why we want to thank you for the joy you have provided for us, at least by a modest banquet at our home." I accepted their invitation because they were so sincere and, really, who can incriminate these Jews because the manna from heaven had poured down upon them? And why would I go and tell them how the Germans had used me to make a fortune on me?

On the way back to Vienna I had more time to consider the entire matter. Now I had seen with my own eyes the impact of my records on the 'Jewish street' and I was beleaguered by bitter resentment over the injustice being done to me. Capital had harnessed the strength and the talent of artists in order to grow rich off them. And when I would lose the ability to sing — no one would pay any attention to me, while at the same time the company would continue to issue my records and gain new sackfuls of money.

I incited myself with all my strength, but I did not know concretely what one begins to do. I was bound on all sides by a strong contract and where might I get the strength to struggle against my exploiters?

## A Struggle With My German Exploiters

Refreshed by the old-home sources, I came back from my second trip across Russia to Vienna, cheerfully and with fresh faith. At home I found several letters from gramophone companies offering to negotiate with me about recording for them. I knew that these were empty words because I was bound hand and foot by my company. Still, the evil spirit was heard telling me loudly the things these companies might offer me.

The Pathé Company offered me ten thousand *krona* per year on a three-year contract to record twenty numbers a year, with exclusive rights for their company. The Odeon Company, which knew that I was bound to an exclusive contract with the German company, put me to a still greater test, offering me fifteen thousand *krona* per year for thirty numbers annually, also on a three-year contract.

I left there totally confused. That was how that gang had ensnared me, the provincial idiot, into their sack. Now I'm offered five times as much as the amount for which I, the fool, had sold myself with my own hands, and for five years' time, no less. I could find no rest for myself. I must devote the best five years of my life to enriching the German company. I clearly saw them laughing into their fists at me.

Arriving home I again took out the contract that I had signed, began to read it very carefully, in case I might find some "hassle" that might provide an opportunity to improve my conditions. But reading here, reading there, it is signed black-on-white that I am bound to the Gentiles and there's nothing I can do. Still I decided to call on a lawyer to inquire whether there might just be a means against such unheard-of exploitation?

The lawyer charged twenty *krona* for the visit, read the contract twice, shrugged his shoulders and said that it would be a shame to waste a single cent on the issue. I will accomplish nothing because I will lose in court. As embittered as I was, I nevertheless decided that I would consult another lawyer, more distinguished than the first. This time I paid twenty-five *krona* for the visit, declared my complaints with all my heart, that an honest court must recognize that I was used in an ignoble way, and that I have a right to demand of my company the same prices that are offered to me by the other companies.

He heard me out quite calmly and, at the end, said: "Herr Chief-Cantor, you are still a truly naïve young man to seek justice after having recorded twenty numbers and accepted monetary payment for it. The contract was written in German precision and is so tightly bound against you that you cannot in any way find the slightest blemish in it. Every cent of yours is wasted, young man."

In this way I became a lawyer-seeker. Every new refusal to take on my issue increased my bitterness, but simultaneously I adopted a firm inner determination that I would in no way ever let myself be used and that finally I will fight my way to my rights. When I had, for the hundredth time, re-read my own contract, I found out, first of all, that I am not tied to a specific time of year, meaning that I can make recordings at whatever time I will deem appropriate.

I therefore decided first of all to use this privilege of mine and not to sing precisely at the time that the company would need me do so for its business purposes. Further, I could not shake the thought: This is a specific error, and I had learned in my youth that an error can be annulled. Might one not come to court in so free a land as Austria then considered itself, and show them that I had been misled and ignobly fooled,



that I made a specific error, and that according to both Jewish law and all human laws, the agreement had to be annulled?

I still went around to Vienna's lawyers, this time asking them to search the Austrian codex as to whether there was a similar point as the Jewish "specific error," on the grounds of which my contract might be annulled. Again they took my money and promised to search. My last lawyer was Dr. Grin [Green], a son-in-law of my temple's president, Herr Bek. The president actually recommended him to me after having become acquainted with the entire issue and also agreed that I must not at all costs allow myself to be further used in such an obscene way.

This was a young man with a sharp Jewish mind and he was the first to encourage me, noting that it is truly a difficult "lawsuit," but that it is worth the undertaking. He requested a few day's time to become better acquainted with legal precedents relating to this matter. Meanwhile I received an urgent demand from Director Grinfeld that I come to see him. He received me with unusual friendliness: "How are you doing, Herr Chief-Cantor? How was your tour across Russia, Herr Chief-Cantor?"

I thought to myself: "Behind your little sweet-talk are hidden theft and mayhem. You will stand corrected if you think that I will always let myself be milked, in order to stuff the pockets of my German bosses." He begins to tell me that from every corner of the globe there arrive thousands of thank-you letters for my records and that requests for new prayers come from everywhere, and that he had received directions from the Chief Director, Herr Mikhelis, to arrange for me to record twenty new numbers, and if I want to record thirty numbers, it is certainly good.

I listened to all this and replied quite calmly that since I had only recently returned from so far-flung a trip, the company would have to have some patience until I might properly rest my voice and be able to sing again. He was not pleased by this reply, since I am actually halting the operation of his Jewish Department, but I was unable to help him and went directly to my Dr. Grin to learn whether he might have good news for me.

He explained that he had found in the Austrian codex a point that might be similar to the Jewish "specific error," and while one cannot rely on that heavily, he would take on the case without one-hundred percent guarantees, understandably, that I would win. The above-cited point in the Austrian codex said that when a business deal is made between two people and the vendor discovers that he had been fooled by more than half the merchandise's value, then the vendor could require the deal to be annulled. Dr. Grin strongly supported me in my decision not to make any recordings for the time being, but also not to conclude any sort of contract with any other company.

Hardly a week had passed and I was again called by the company to record new numbers. I gave them the same excuse, that my voice was not fully as it should be, and what use would it be to them if I were to record and the records would be useless? Herr Grinfeld was again unhappy with my reply and he raged that my conduct was causing the company harm.

I could notice that Herr Grinfeld does not fully believe me that my voice is not ready. And he actually concluded to convince himself of this. On Friday night this person came to my temple. When I concluded and Jews, as usual, shoved "congratulations" into my hand, I see Herr Grinfeld, too, congratulating me with a broad smile on his face, as though to say: "Young man, I've caught you red-handed and now you won't be able to get out of it."

When he called me the following Monday and declared that he had everything prepared for Wednesday for me to record, I saw that the time had come to come out with open language and I quite simply declared that I had decided not to sing anymore for the German company.

This fellow's face turned every color: "Whaddya mean you won't sing — and the contract that you signed?" he spewed through his teeth, hatefully. I was quite calm and said that "as long as you do not pay me for my work according to its worth, I will not sing for you anymore." He grew still angrier and, as I might have expected, began to threaten me with the law. "Our company will teach you to respect the law," he thundered at me.

Completely unemotionally, I replied that "If law means exploiting the brain and blood of an artist, using his best young years while becoming rich on his account and throwing him a bone for formality's sake — if that is law and justice, then you have won. But I have another concept of the law and I believe that the Austrian court, too, will conceive the entire thing differently. I am firmly decided not to allow myself to be used by you anymore and now — good day to you, you are free to do whatever you feel is best."

I was greatly on edge and said many other things, perhaps some that should not have been said. But I was burning with inner flame, like a wounded animal looking into the face of the murderer hunting her down. It was all the same to me, even if I might lose the trial, but I will no longer permit my face to be spat upon, and so I slammed the door and left.

## A Beautiful and Fortunate Time in My Life

That same day in the afternoon I received a demand from the company's lawyer that I should report to his office. I did not rush; instead, I went to see my Dr. Grin. He was very pleased with the way I had argued and requested of me that when it would come into court, I would make the arguments myself and that he would present only the legal side. As to the lawyer for the company, I should not argue with him too much, but simply declare that I am not inclined to sing any more for the German company.

I asked my Dr. Grin: "What will happen in the event that the company wins[?] They will then impound my earnings at the temple and it may yet cause shame and disgrace." Upon hearing this he calmed me, [saying that] he is certain that it will not come to that. Meanwhile, Herr Grinfeld, unable to come up with an idea about the situation, implored the General-Director, Mikhelis, to come to Vienna.

The conversation with the General-Director was angry and arrogant. He spoke in the voice of a ruler that had bought me for all eternity and left me no longer the master of myself, nor of my voice and not of my wife and children. His lawyer sat there and [Mikhelis], his face red with blood, gave me the final warning that if I were not to confirm at once that I would, on the morrow, start to record the next twenty numbers, his lawyer would turn the matter over to the court.

This arrogant tone, too, did not disturb my balance. To such language, I said, I have but one answer: No! I consider myself the only master over my voice, over my blood and sweat and over all the enormous exertions that were expended to develop this voice to its present level. If he wishes to speak with me in a strictly business sense, objectively, as one person speaks to another, then we might perhaps come to an understanding without the court.

He calmed down somewhat and said: "Well, good, let us hear what you have to say." So I told him that he might for a moment consider my situation. The feeling that I and my labors are being exploited for huge profits by his company, receiving a few poor pennies tossed my way — this feeling allows me no rest and prevents me from concentrating in order to carry out in appropriate harmony the duties that are, after all, not purely mechanical but that demand a deep process of inner preparation.

I then told him what I had learned in Russia about the sale of my records that the Iserlin brothers had told me, that the records of my prayers are being literally torn from the [sellers'] hands. The company is making millions of *krona* off me and all of this because I had been naïve and inexperienced.

He then spelled out his arguments that the company would look stupid if it allowed itself to be dictated to by every artist after he had signed a contract and had already received payment under that contract. "Here [if] one artist suddenly desired to turn us around, you would soon hear how this turned out." And he turns to his lawyer to hand him the papers of the opera singer Leo Shlezak [Slezak].

This Shlezak was, at that time, one of the most famous singers of the Vienna Opera. One might say that he was the second after Caruso. But he was, just as I, a beggar in business matters. That same company had caught him in its talons for a trifle and made a huge fortune off him. He grew angry and went off to the Odeon company and recorded ten of his best arias and was paid eight times as much as the German company paid him.

The company sued him in court for a quarter-million *krona* in damages. The court awarded the company not a quarter million but he had to pay ninety-two thousand *krona*. He also had to annul his contract with the new company and to pay it damages, as well. It was these papers that the lawyer pulled out in order to frighten me. When he read the papers it appeared as though he were reading the sentence against me...

I let the Director shout himself hoarse and to vent his anger and to make himself important. Then I replied completely cold-bloodedly that there is a minor difference between Shlezak and me: I had not yet recorded for another company and he has not yet anything to demand of me. He cannot get ninety-two thousand *krona* out of me for as long as he lives...If he proceeds against me in anger he can achieve only one thing: he will not take any money from me, but he would also not have any records to sell. Therefore it is far better that, instead of court actions, he should talk with me seriously...

All my talk had not brought any results so far. When I asked my lawyer, Dr. Grin, how long such a process might endure, he replied that he could extend it for as long as I wanted it to. The matter of time played the main role here because I knew that they had to have my brand that was in high demand in all corners of the world, and they could not delay but would have to produce new records at any price.

It quickly turned out that I was right. The General-Director called me again and he suddenly began appealing to me about justice: "How has such a thing been heard of? We, who were the first to popularize you across the world, should be repaid by such unthankfulness?" He, that is, was actually the one who was wronged! But from the tone of his voice it was already clear that he wanted to compromise.

And truly, he quickly turned to the other side: "By principal," he said, "we hold very firmly to the points of our agreements, but we are prepared to make an exception for you: instead of three thousand *krona* a year, we will pay you four thousand, five hundred *krona* per year." That is, the stone had been moved from its place. So I actually answered that I would not accept less than the fifteen thousand *krona* that the other companies are offering. If smaller companies are able to pay that much, the mighty German company could certainly survive it.

He replied that, since he is in a hurry and must urgently return to Berlin, he makes me the final offer: six thousand *krona*. I still held to my [position] that the minimum is fifteen thousand. But one had to offer something in return, so I agreed that for the first year, for which I had already been paid, I would take only twelve thousand.

He saw that I am standing firm and will not retreat, so he still tried to bargain, offering nine thousand and at the very end — twelve thousand *krona* per year. I was tired and exhausted by these long negotiations and agreed to the latter sum. They did not let me leave and the lawyer present immediately began to write up the contract. This time he added a new proviso that I must record at any time that the company requires it and that I, if it were necessary, am obliged to sing up to forty numbers a year, understandably with an agreed-upon increase in salary.

This was in the autumn of 1906. The more I recorded, the more widespread was my name in the Jewish settlements in Russia and across the world. Invitations actually poured in to me to have me come to concertize. Tens of letters of thanks were received from all corners of the world. One Jewish restaurateur from Bucharest wrote me tearfully that he would remember me all his life because since he put a gramophone with my *khazonishe* records into his restaurant he is making sackfuls of money.

I cannot deny that this was perhaps the most beautiful and fortunate time of my life. I was young, healthy, energetic and lusting after life. The work filled my life with deep content. I had three times as much in earnings than I could consume. I simply bathed in honor and recognition. My children developed well. I helped one brother of mine to become a cantor and he obtained a fine position in the city of Stanislav, in Galicia. My other brother, too, finally achieved a musical career, completing the Vienna Conservatory as a music teacher. I could help my entire family with a broad hand, which provided me limitless inner satisfaction.

At the same time I devoted several hours almost every day to deepen my musical knowledge, to learn of older Jewish styles and to compose my own prayers that later took their place in Jewish liturgical music.

But there is always a sort of rule in life that there is no sun that doesn't have a blot on it, and there is no eternal joy. For every day that my name became more famous and in which material concerns almost entirely disappeared — my wife's health conditions worsened more and more. She fell more and more into depression, nothing interested her, even the children, not my moral nor my financial successes. She did not listen to any doctor and not even to that which her nearest [relatives] advised. This poisoned my days which otherwise would have been the most joyful of my life.

## A Great Guest In My Home — Baron Ginzburg of Petersburg

It was during the *shvues* holiday that, in my Vienna temple, it was the accepted custom to celebrate confirmation or the maturation of girls. This celebration was held with great ceremony: the mothers brought their grown girls to the temple, all dressed-up in white clothes and flowers. The rabbi delivered a celebratory speech for them about their relationship to the Jewish people. I sang appropriate prayers. It was in a doubly holiday spirit that I returned home.

When I arrived, my wife informed me that two gentlemen are sitting in the salon, waiting for me. When they introduced themselves to me I was at the first moment somewhat overwhelmed: Baron Dovid Geratsovitsh Ginzburg of Petersburg [David Goratsiyevich Günzburg — per Wikipedia] and his companion Dr. Faynberg [Feinberg]. The name of Baron Ginzburg was a byword across Russia at that time and also reached beyond the borders of Russia. It was a highly unusual honor for me to have such a wonderful guest at my home and, especially, for the festive *shvues* party.

We took a *lekheyim* [made a toast] and Baron Ginzburg began to explain the reason for his unexpected visit with me. He is in Vienna on the way to Carlsbad. In Petersburg, where he heads the local [Jewish] Community Council, the position of Chief-Cantor in the synagogue there is now open. They had heard of my name there, they had also had an opportunity to hear my prayers on the records, so therefore the Petersburg Community Council asked Baron Ginzburg that, traveling through Vienna, he should see me and have a conversation as to whether I might not agree to take over the position of Chief-Cantor in Petersburg.

But before Baron Ginzburg came to visit me, he had quietly decided to come to the Empress Elizabeth Temple where I chant and to hear with his own ears that person whom the Russian capital wants to welcome to itself. He had listened to the entire prayer service and he wants to tell me that they know what they are doing there when they asked him to see about talking with me about taking over the position. It will be a great joy for them if I were to express my willingness to negotiate with them. And right on the spot he asks me what my conditions might be. If it were possible, they would like to have me come to Petersburg to chant on a Sabbath.

What could I reply to him on the spot other than to note again that it is a great honor to have such a distinguished guest at my home, and that it would be a very great privilege for me to take the cantor's job in the capital of the kingdom in which live, may no evil eye befall them, the greatest number of Jews in the world? As to conditions, we will not talk now, during the holiday, and we will have to put it off to another time.

When we met the next time he told me that the Petersburg Community Council is ready to pay me six thousand rubles per year. That is two-and-a-half times more than I receive in Vienna, besides the rich side earnings on which I can reckon. When he saw that I am still not enthused and am wavering about saying 'yes' at once, he asked me to declare to him openly my thinking about his proposal.

So I told him quite openly that I love Vienna, the city that honors me and shows me so much love. In this city I became famous across the world through the records I recorded. In this city I have the opportunity to continue my singing studies and voice training and — I am drawn to this city as though by

iron pincers. It is a civilized country in which I can raise my children according to my taste; they will not be persecuted anywhere and not be subject to a percentage quota [of Jewish university admissions] and nowhere would they hear the word “*zhid*” [Russian: Jew-boy, kike].

“These are the reasons, Herr Baron, that force me to seriously think about the offer of your honorable Community Council. I do not need any extra money because I do not consume that which I earn, but here in Vienna I enjoy such an atmosphere of freedom which I greatly doubt I might have in the Russian capital. Further, I will rethink the matter again with my family and will give you a written reply. As to my chanting on a Sabbath at the Petersburg synagogue, it can be arranged in the form of a concert. I can determine the time when I will get a furlough from my temple.”

The idea of a concert pleased the Baron, hoping that when I will be at the locale it will be easier to come to an understanding. He noted my price: twelve hundred rubles that such a concert might cost them, and we parted in a friendly manner.

I quickly wrote to my father and also to my brother-in-law Dubnikov about the Petersburg offer and, markedly, as though they had both agreed, they began raining down letters upon me [saying] that this is a rare opportunity in my life: who even heard of being Chief-Cantor in the Russian capital? There could not even be any greater joy in life and that I must not dare to refuse this offer.

However, I remained cold to the whole thing. This time I came together in agreement with my wife, who was also against taking on the Petersburg position. I somehow felt that I could not be happy in that cold northern city, and that it would be very difficult for me to separate from this comfortable city of Vienna.

Meanwhile my father- and mother-in-law learned of the whole thing, and all my uncles, and all of them in one voice thundered that I should not, heaven forbid, miss out on the opportunity with Petersburg, and that I should do them the great honor of becoming the *khazn* in the Russian capital. They were certain that a bit of my honor would fall upon them as long as I would be in Russia and not somewhere else in Kaiser Franz Joseph’s domain

Petersburg meanwhile advised that they were ready to pay a thousand rubles if I were to come there for a concert. I had already wanted to combine my visit to Petersburg with a tour of several Jewish towns that had been asking me to come for a long time. An impresario turned up who organized five concerts in the cities of Vilna, Grodno, Riga, Dvinsk and Libava, in addition to a Sabbath in Bialystok. Now what reminded was obtaining a furlough from my president, Herr Bek.

Here, too, I did not encounter any unusual difficulties and I began to prepare myself for a new trip to Russia. This time I rehearsed an especially modern repertoire of Russian and Italian songs. I even hired a special Russian choir-tutor to pay attention to my Russian accent so I might please Petersburg’s Russian-Jewish prominent folk.

The Petersburg community had to work out with the Interior Ministry special permission for me to come to Petersburg. When I obtained the permit and read: [Russian phrase transliterated, followed by:], which means in Yiddish, “The Chief-Cantor, the Jew Zavel Ben Sholem Kwartin, is permitted to live for eight days in Petersburg,” my eyes could not bear it. The whole dark scene of Jewish life in Russia arose as though alive before me.

During the years that I was gone from that land I had forgotten about the dark destiny of my brothers there. Further, I never while in Russia left the so-called Pale of Settlement and it did not befall me to live through all the humiliations on my own skin. This piece of paper that the Petersburg big shots managed to obtain for the “Jew” Zavel Kwartin pricked at me like needles. I suddenly recalled the pogrom that I experienced in our *shtetl* when I was a young child; the painful fears of the Jews, the wagonloads of Jewish bags and baggage, of the Jewish belongings, that ran across the bridge to the neighboring *shtetl*. And I thought to myself: Should I take it into my own hands now to go to again settle in this land of [anti-] Jewish oppression and persecution after having tasted a free life?

I struggled within myself and it became all the clearer to me that I would not forever remain in Russia. But one had to go on the tour and I telegraphed my father and brother-in-law Dubnikov that I would meet with them in Vilna, en route to Petersburg. My president, Herr Bek, knew only that I was presenting a series of concerts in Russian cities. However, he did not know of the conversations that Baron Ginzburg had held with me nor about the offer of the Petersburg Community Council. I didn't want to cause him any discomfort during that time, especially as the entire matter of Petersburg was not yet clear to myself.



## A Concert in Petersburg

In mid-January, 1908, I arrived in Vilna, where I had had my first stop and my first concert. This time I encountered a well-trained choir under the direction of conductor Gotbeter. The three main compositions for that concert were by Gotgeber: “A Song of Dedication,” “Holiness,” and the great “Master of the Universe” in [term unknown] by Sultser. Then followed my own improvisations of prayers as well as arias and songs.

My father and brother-in-law managed to arrive on time in order to experience the concert and they, as I, myself, found ourselves in the seventh heaven of joy. I had deep satisfaction over being able to demonstrate to my father what I had attained through the years in Vienna, and my father was virtually dissolved in prideful joy over having lived to see such happiness, that thousands of Jews virtually carry me on their shoulders.

But when we began to talk about taking over the Petersburg position, our opinions mightily diverged. My father approached me with tremendous stubbornness [saying] that I dare not even think of renouncing such joy, and I argued that I would be committing the greatest crime against myself and against my children if I were to exchange the pleasant, free, cultural Vienna for the Czarist, Jew-oppressing Petersburg.

But as time was fleeting and I had to arrive promptly in Petersburg for the concert there, we postponed the final decision until after my concert. I will see there what the aroma of Petersburg is like and I will then make the final decision, first making an agreement with my father.

In a frosty winter's day I arrived in Petersburg. I was awaited by the warden of the local main synagogue, Sopotnitski, the *khazn* Resel and the choir director Gurevitsh, as well as a secretary of Baron Ginzburg. I became aware that my concert is taking place in the imposing auditorium of the “Dvoryanske Sobranye,” [Noble Assembly — House of Lords] and that the main Petersburg newspapers have been publicizing my concert for several days [saying] that it will be something unusually delightful, the likes of which had never been heard in Petersburg.

So I was struck by stage fright — after all, I find myself in the very residence of Nicholas II and all his hangers-on. It somehow seemed to me that all of Russia, all the six million Jews who live here, look to me not to shame them, heaven preserve us, that I should not blacken the Jewish name, but that I should rather elevate it and create honor for it.

I had time to prepare with Gurevitsh's choir four major compositions: גדולו מה by Lewandovski, with its great solo כְּתָמָר צְדִיק by Gurevitsh ושִׁמְרוּ, “At the New Year” and “Lord of the Universe” by Zultser. The choir consisted of twenty-five well-trained men and boys with very good voices.

The day of the concert arrived. Petersburg at that time had a strong Jewish intelligentsia, half- or fully-assimilated and you could have met them all that evening at the Noble Assembly. Deputies of the State Duma [Parliament] and the most famous attorneys, such as Gruzenberg, Vinover, Karabtshevski and tens of others; attending were professors and musicians, and there was no lack of Russians: generals, high government officials, and even a Vice-Minister, I was told, is in the hall. And if this was not sufficient,

my view was directed to a whole row of [Russian Orthodox] bishops who had come to hear Jewish prayers.

A celebratory atmosphere reigned in the sparkling hall with its tall crystal candelabras that hung so majestically from the ceiling. I thought “see who it is before whom I stand” and a brief shiver ran through me as I mounted the platform. But I had felt earlier that I needed to especially prepare for this concert and — it turned out “not too badly.” This was without exaggeration and without bragging one of the four finest and complete concerts that I ever performed in my life, in my entire *khazonish* career. As to the other three, I will deal with them later.

My own recitatives: *עולם אהבת* and *ישראל צור* never sounded as mighty and so majestic as on that night. I also had a section of songs and arias in Russian and Italian and concluded with improvisations on the Days of Awe prayers that virtually tore apart the estranged Jews. In their daily lives they perhaps had nothing related to Jewishness, but the sound of an ancient Jewish prayer served to awaken them and to have them descend into wild enthusiasm.

The applause was unending. I had to return to the platform five times to sing encores. Baron Ginzburg and uncounted other prominent people came to me backstage and heartily congratulated me on the success and thanked me for the great prideful joy that I had provided for them that evening. Hundreds of Jewish students, male and female, surrounded me at the exit and begged for my autograph on their program booklets. It was a celebratory event in my life, at the highest level that an artist can attain.

It was around midnight that a selected crowd began to gather at Baron Ginzburg’s palace, actually right after the concert. You found here the cream of the Jewish aristocracy in Petersburg at that time. I was surrounded by such personalities as Shlosberg, Gruzenberg, Vinover, the librarian of the Royal Library Professor Harkavy and tens of others whose names resounded across Russia. They were very interested in where I come from, what sort of education I had had and from where I drew the strength to produce so powerful a Jewish style that had moved even their congealed Jewish hearts.

It happened at a dinner at the home of a Russian Vice-Minister whose name has left my memory. This high Russian official gave me an opportunity to speak somewhat from my heart and to give expression to my feelings about Russia and about the situation of my brother Jews. He says to me: “A great future awaits you personally here in the Petersburg Jewish community.” I gathered my courage and replied: “If the future awaits only me personally, and only within the Jewish community, it cannot be much of a future. Do not forget, Herr Minister, that I have children whom I must raise.”

I believe he understood my indication that, in Russia, Jewish children could not obtain a free education; there is a percentage quota determined for them and all sorts of other limitations, and finally they must travel abroad to study. So what purpose would be served if I were to bring my children here? After thinking awhile, he says: “I believe that your children will be permitted admittance into our gymnasiums [secondary schools] and universities.”

Again I was struck to the heart: “...my children will be permitted...” That means that perhaps an exception might be made on behalf of me, the Chief-Cantor of the richest [Jewish] community on earth, and all the other Jewish creatures will suffer the same humiliation as before. I saw that the conversation would lead nowhere, so I cut him off and joined another group that was hotly discussing the latest evil

decrees against Jews by Stolipin [Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin, then Minister of Internal Affairs] and what measures might be taken against them.

The crowd began to disperse slowly and only limited people remained: The rich Port Arthur's Ginzburg, the host Dovid Ginzburg, attorney Vinover and the Baron's secretary. And this small circle asked me before I left what I had decided about assuming the position of Chief-Cantor in the great Petersburg synagogue. I replied that before I could make such an important decision in my life I must know what the future of my children would be in this land where young Jews are persecuted.

Baron Dovid Ginzburg replied that I should not be at all concerned about this; they had already dealt with this before my arrival. They [the children] will be able to freely enroll in the gymnasiums and later, in the universities. As concerns my conditions, they propose six thousand rubles per year, in addition to side income: eight hundred rubles per year extra for a dwelling, and they will also contribute to furnishing the dwelling; they will also cover all the expenses of bringing my family from Vienna to Petersburg.

I saw that I find myself in a quandary and cannot say "no" right here and now, so I tried to make my conditions somewhat weightier for them and I said that if I were to decide to accept the position, I would require a contract for ten years on their part, and in the event I am dismissed earlier, they must pay for three years; to the contrary, I have the right to leave whenever I wish, providing them only with one year's notice.

This, too, was of no avail. They immediately agreed to the conditions on the spot and I was left with nothing else but to say that they would receive my final reply from Vienna, after I come to an agreement with my employers there. In this manner I bade farewell to Petersburg.

## I Become Chief-Cantor in Petersburg

Before leaving Petersburg I had the opportunity to see what the great Russian newspapers had written about my concert. They praised my voice and my presentation, comparing it [them] to the best that existed at that time. They most especially dwelt on the pregnancy [?] of my voice, on the excellent breath-control, on the volume and consistency of the entire registry of my voice. Even the antisemitic “Novaye Vremya” [New Time] had some good words to say about me. The reviews, in general, were on a highly professional level that brought me special satisfaction.

After the concerts in Riga, Dvinsk, Libave and Grodna, I went to Bialystok to chant on a Sabbath. I very much wanted to see my father again before leaving Russia, so I telegraphed him and asked him to come to Bialystok. When I arrived at the Bialystok station, to my great joy I saw my father who was awaiting me together with a committee of local householders. To my great amazement, my father already had a full report of my concert in Petersburg. He was a dedicated reader of the “Birzhevyye Vyedomosti” [Stock Statements — *i.e.*, Financial News] and it contained the most detailed report and most enthused review of the concert.

My father again insisted that I should not delay, for God’s sake, but immediately accept the offer of the Petersburg community and take over the position, which would do honor to the whole family. I barely managed to get him to allow me to consider the matter and to provide the final answer from Vienna. Thus we bade farewell and I rode back to my wife and children.

Sadly, I found my wife in a sick, melancholy condition that had a strong effect on my spirit. My only consolation was in the little children who were growing healthily and gave me fresh courage to go on with my work. I had to make a decision about Petersburg and I had no one with whom to consult. When I attempted to talk about this with my wife, she replied that she could not give me any advice, and that all would be as God would will it.

When I came to my temple on Friday evening, the president, Herr Bek, welcomed me with a sort of strange smile and he immediately asked: “Well, Herr Chief-Cantor, what is going on in Petersburg? We here in Vienna have read about your great success there!” I quickly grasped that there was no sense in further playing in secrecy, so told him the entire story about Baron Ginzburg’s visit to me, about the concert and about the offer they had made to me, that amounts to almost three times as much as I receive in Vienna, and that I do not know if I have a right, in light of the future of my family and of securing myself in my elder years, to reject such conditions.

Meanwhile I approached the pulpit. I immediately forgot all these reckonings and, with ardor and youthful enthusiasm welcomed the Sabbath, as was always my custom when I stood facing the eastern wall in a House of Prayer. The congregations welcomed me warmly after the interval of several weeks.

Right at the beginning of the following week I was called to a meeting of the Council of my temple. They reproached me for having gone behind their backs to Petersburg for an audition, as they interpreted it, and now they want to know where they stand with me, what my plans are for the future, whether I am choosing Petersburg or remaining with them in Vienna.

I declared quite openly that that especially now, when I am at my best powers and in the full magnificence of my voice, it is my duty to be concerned with my future and the future of my children. If the Empress Elizabeth Temple were integrated in the net of temples of the Vienna Cult [Religious] Community, I would have a chance to occupy, at some point, a permanent position with the Cult Community when something became available there. But as the situation is now, when I am not secured with a pension for my old age and also have no other security whatsoever in case of a family tragedy, and I am threatened in my later years to be at the mercy of the community, it would simply be a crime on my part not to seek to improve my life-conditions at the present day.

My proposal to the Council was that they see to establish that I be recognized as an official officer of the Vienna Cult Community with all the responsibilities pertaining thereto. If they were to give me this assurance I will give up all plans to change my place, even if it were to take several years until they could realize this goal. It was decided that the Council and I would visit the president of the Vienna Cult Community and see what could be done toward accepting my demands.

The meeting was with the vice-president, Dr. Gustav Kahn [Cohen?]. His was a negative reply to my demand that I be assured that whenever a cantorial position becomes available in the community, I would take it over with lifelong security. He argued that this is against the statutes of the Community which attest that an open position can be taken only by that cantor who is at the head of a year's long list. They can make no exception for me. Privately, he advised me not to leave Vienna because one can never know if "something might turn up."

For me, this meant depending on miracles, and in view of such a generous offer from Petersburg, I was not inclined toward it. Seeing the negative result of the negotiations with the Cult Community, the Council of my temple decided to take out a life insurance [English] *polisi* in the sum of thirty thousand *krona* if I agreed to remain as their Chief-Cantor. As usual in such cases, I requested time for consideration.

Meanwhile my family in Russia did not cease bombarding me with letters [urging] that I should not, in God's Name, allow the Petersburg position to pass, as it is not a common position but "a real pot of dough." And I had no one here with whom even to discuss the matter. I could not obtain from my wife any other opinion than: "Wherever God leads you, there shall you go." I was terribly tortured by the uncertainty of my situation and I could not come up with an idea of my own.

There is an expression: 'When a person cannot reach a decision, he should ask a child's advice, and whatever the child may say, so should he do.' So I called over my eldest little girl, little Ana [Anale], A child eight years old, and I ask her: "Tell me, Anale, d'you want all of us, your momma and your little brothers, to emigrate to Petersburg, or d'you want us to stay in Vienna?"

She did not think for a moment but answered me at once: "Yes, papa, I want [to go] to Petersburg." When I asked her why she had decided so quickly, without thought, she replied that "in Russia I have two grandmothers and two grandfathers and many uncles and aunts, so it will be happier there, while here in Vienna we don't have any relatives, and perhaps momma will feel better in Russia among so many relatives."

This answer by the child settled the entire matter. I felt that, through the child, a deep instinct was being expressed, as well as concern for her mother's health, and that I had no right to decide otherwise. At

that moment it became clear to me that I am going to Petersburg, though deep in my heart I still retained the same concerns about leaving the fine Austrian capital.

Right afterward I wrote to Petersburg that I am accepting the position of Chief-Cantor with the stipulation that I would still have to chant in Vienna during the upcoming Days of Awe, because my temple did not deserve being abandoned without a cantor during the holy days. A few days later I received a congratulatory telegram from Baron Ginzburg. A letter with the contract enclosed arrived later. the contract was exactly as precise as we had agreed. Without delay I advised Director [*sic*] Bek that I had decided to accept the position in Petersburg.

It is difficult for me describe how he received this news. He looked as though he had been struck in the head by some heavy weight. Quite quietly he asked me whether it was still possible for me to change my decision; they would take all the steps necessary to secure me and my family as I might wish for myself. But it was too late to make any changes at all. I also informed him that out of thankfulness to my temple and to its Council for the fine treatment I had received from them, I had decided to remain until after the Days of Awe and to give them enough time to find an appropriate Chief-Cantor. This latter information calmed him down a bit.

My father, too, was overjoyed upon hearing that I had finally obeyed him and am returning to Russia as Chief-Cantor in its capital. I hoped that my wife, too, would gladly receive the news and that it would improve her health. During the summer I settled her and the children in the best health resort, believing that by the time of our emigration she would be completely cured. Sadly, it did not occur as I wished. I began to make the necessary preparations for leaving Vienna.

## I Sing At the Great Rabbinic Convention in Petersburg

I was destined to have a great moment during my brief sojourn in the Russian capital. At that time the Czarist government convened in Petersburg a conference of the greatest rabbinic authorities in Russia and Poland. All together, 32 *rabonim* [conventional, and] *rabeyim* [Hasidic] rabbis from the cities found within the borders of the “*Tsherta Osyedlosti*” (Pale of Settlement): five of the most famous in Poland, two representatives of the Moscow Jewish community, two from the Petersburg community and an “Official Jew,” from the [English] *department for religious* of the Education Ministry, a certain M. Kreps. [No other participants listed by author toward the sum of 32.]

This historical conference, that lasted a month’s time and took place under the chairmanship of Baron Dovid Ginzburg — was at the time the greatest event among Russian Jewry and for months on end there was no end of talking about it and interpreting what it was that the Czarist government was targeting by calling such an unusual conference. General opinion among the folk was that the government, conducting a merciless struggle against Jewish revolutionaries, called the conference in order to emphasize the bourgeois and moderate Jewish element and to add more authority to the rabbis and religious authorities, thereby strengthening their positions in the Jewish towns and *shtetlekh*.

On the other hand, the notable composition of the conference, in which participants included [Hasidic] *rabeyim* and pious [conventional] *rabonim* at one side, and modern [Conservative, Reform] Rabiners and advanced social activists from the opposite side, provided the basis for thinking that the Czarist government wants to influence the “backward” element of Jews in Poland and other places through the advanced Rabiners from the large Russian cities.

Because actually, what sort of common language might then have existed between the Kishinev [Hasidic] *rov*, the die-hard fanatic, Tsirelson, or the Trisker *rebe* Tyomkin on one side, and the Moscow Rabiner Maze, or the Rabiner Tyomkin [*sic*] on the other side? It is, however, a fact that the gentle Baron Ginzburg, as chairman of this conference, tried with all his might to maintain a balance between the opposing movements and opinions, and while following all the wishes of the government that were expressed at the conference by the “Official Jew,” he simultaneously tried to bring “to order” the various entangled problems that were then torturing the Jewish communities in the huge Russian Empire.

The most difficult problem was that the Russian government required that the rabbis in the Polish towns and *shtetlekh* should know Russian fluently. The conference adopted a resolution [saying] that the rabbis would have the right to employ interpreters of Jewish law who are not required to know Russian. Further, there was the question of the record books that the rabbis maintained on the “*korobke*” [communal membership dues] and candle taxes that hung like a heavy burden on the inhabitants of the little *shtetlekh*, and tens of other problems.

On a wintry morning I am informed by the Community Council that Baron Ginzburg wants to see me. And he tells me about the conference that is soon to take place, and that he wants, in honor of the opening of such an honored gathering, to arrange a celebratory Divine Service, to be attended by highly-placed representatives of the government and of the most prominent circles of Jewish and non-Jewish

Petersburg. Later, the plan for a modern Divine Service, due to the presence of so many [Hasidic] *rabeyim* and Orthodox *rabonim*, was changed to an afternoon prayer session at the main Petersburg synagogue.

And the day of the conference opening arrived. The synagogue was filled with light and among the hundreds of holiday faces there shone especially the stately appearances of the Polish *rabeyim* in their wide-brimmed hats and satin robes and shiny white collars. Due to the government representatives it was required, first of all, to say the *mi shevorakh* [He who is blessed] for the Czar and to sing the [Russian] anthem “*bozhe tsarya khrai*” [God Save the Czar].

When it came to the high *shmoyne esre* [daily Eighteen Prayers] I found it to be appropriate to emphasize two verses that would speak to the two sides that participated in the conference: both the *rabeyim* and pious rabbis and the modern Rabiners, a few of whom, like Rabiner Tyomkin and Dr. Eyzenshtat [Eisenstat?] from Petersburg, and also the Rabiner Maze from Moscow, were active Zionists and aspired toward the rebuilding of Jewish life in our Own Land.

For the first I chanted with special fire the “For the saints and for the devotees and for the aged of the people of Israel,” and when it came to the verse “תשוב ברחמים עירך ולירושלים” I infused the words with all of the Jewish pain [existing] at that time in Russia. I had in mind [the desire] that there be an end to all the pleading for “favours” from the Russian Czar; that persecuting Jewish children reaching for education be ended and that, generally, that we be liberated from the pitiful life and to become rulers over ourselves in our own land.

When I concluded the afternoon prayers I could convince myself that I had actually attained the twin goal that I had set for myself. The first to come to me was the Trisker *rov* [who] placed his hands on my head and blessed me. He did not believe that in this “Gentile” Petersburg a *khazn* could elicit from Jews such spiritual awakening and that in a Petersburg “*sinagoge*” at an ordinary afternoon prayer session there might rule such a deeply religious mood as could only have been noticed in the old Houses of Prayer in our homey towns and *shtetlekh*. The *rebe* moved me deeply with his words.

And from the other side I was approached in my *khazonish* office by Rabiner Maze from Moscow and Dr. Eyzenshtat from Petersburg who thanked me heartily for the great prideful joy that I had created for them. In that manner, both sides were satisfied and the most satisfied was Baron Ginzburg himself, by then an ill person, who actually shone in joy that in “his” Petersburg synagogue he could provide such a traditionally-Jewish welcome to the *rabonim*, *rabeyim* and Rabiners.

How far from correct I was in my opposition to the Petersburg “shot-callers” and to the begging of favours from the Czar and his crowds of servants, was quickly demonstrated by an event that, at that time, shook up all of Russian Jewry. At the very same time that the government had called, with great pomp, a conference of the greatest religious authorities in the country, wanting to show the Jewish population that it cares about their interests, at that same time there appeared one of bitterest decrees against the Jewish population.

The most grievous problems of the Jews in Russia were, aside from other troubles, the “Pale of Settlement,” that is, that Jews could live only in designated areas, and the percentage quota for Jewish youth, due to which only a quite small portion could beat their way to higher education. The second problem weighed most heavily on the Jewish population. Because Jewish youth was intelligent and



capable and strove with all its might toward a higher living standard that could only be reached through higher education.

And here a padlock hung on almost all the learning institutions. The ten percent quota for Jews, which was even not observed everywhere nor in an honest manner, brought the Jewish youth to the highest level of desperation. Not all could afford the dear expense of traveling abroad to study. There was enough torment for Jewish parents who broke their heads over seeing a future for their children.

But this was not enough for the Czarist satraps who sought to embitter still more the lives of Jews. At precisely the time in which the great rabbinic conference was being prepared, a new evil decree appeared, reducing the percentage of Jewish children permitted to attain higher education from ten percent to three percent. This was the greatest spit into the face of the six million [strong] Jewish population which was thereby to be reduced to the lowest levels of social life.

And irony required that in the very celebratory evening when the rabbinical conference assembled under the merciful permission of the Czar, I am called by the secretary of the Community Council, Herr Yoyne [Jonah] Ginzburg, asking me in a trembling voice if I had heard the sorrowful news. I pricked up my ears [to learn] what had happened. Then he told me that as a result of the new evil decree against Jews by the Russian government, 136 Jewish children had committed suicide. They chose to put an end to their young lives rather than suffering the new shame of beating on the doors of higher schools and being sent away with nothing.

This was truly a terrible blow for the representatives of Russian Jewry who were bustling around the rabbinical conference and were trying to create the impression that the government was doing something to help the Jews. The shame and deep sorrow was tremendously great. I happened to personally witness the tragedy of two of the 136 dear Jewish young lives. The tragedy occurred to two young girls in the house in which I was living. One of them was of the Pinsk Lurye [Luria] families and the other — a friend of hers, the daughter of one of her teachers.

The girls were studying music and were to enter the Petersburg Conservatory. The new evil decree put an end to all their dreams. So they put on white dresses, played Chopin's Funeral March on the piano, where the score was kept, opened the gas pipes, and thus two young lives were extinguished.

The question arose as to the funerals of these remarkable victims of the absence of Jewish rights in Russia. According to Jewish law they, as self-murderers, were to be buried at the cemetery fence and no eulogies were to be made over them. But because of the huge protest-roar over the Jewish humiliation that was heard [following] their deaths, the Petersburg rabbinate decided to give them the most honorable funerals that were permitted under Czarist conditions. I was invited to chant *el moyle rakhmim* [God of Mercy] and several chapters of Psalms over their graves.

My spirit was clouded after such experiences and my unwillingness to remain an eternal Petersburger was strengthened.

## Petersburg Doesn't Warm Me and I Leave the Russian Capital

At the end of 1909 I left the fine city of Vienna that had brought so much light and happiness into my life. In my contract with the Petersburg community there was a provision that in the course of a year's time I had to bring my family or the contract would thereby be abrogated automatically. My Petersburg wardens were therefore amazed when they found me at the railroad station by myself alone, while my family remained in Vienna. I calmed them [saying] that because of my wife's poor health-condition, the doctors had forbidden her to undertake such a long journey during the winter.

I did not rest up long after the trip but immediately began rehearsals with the conductor, Gurevitch. We began preparing a program for the first Sabbath as well as for Hanuka, which was occurring within a few weeks. There were large announcements about the first Sabbath's chanting in all the Russian newspapers and the synagogue was over-packed by a strange element of people, Jews and Christians, and converts were also not lacking. There could also be seen high government officials and priests, and I thought to myself: ["Lord of the Universe, for whom will I pour out here my hearty Jewish prayers, my improvisations, soaked through with ancient Jewish tears?"]

Also coming to the synagogue were the two famous opera singers, Davidov and Sibiryakov. The latter took special prideful joy in me, especially enjoying [the fact] that I had followed his advice, given me so many years previously, and had not gone to the opera stage.

So it went from Sabbath to Sabbath. I could actually touch my success with my fingers, but at the same time I remained innerly cold to that success. That first winter I felt quite strange in this city on the Neva [River]. Each time that I was seen by Baron Ginzburg he did not fail to ask me when was I thinking of bringing my wife and children. Somehow he did didn't feel secure in my being all alone, without my family.

I greatly wanted to please my father: let him see with his own eyes how I chant before the Petersburg big shots. It was, after all, his dream and his most intimate desire that I should assume that post. So I wrote him and asked him to come visit me as a guest for two weeks. My father did not think at all and [soon] arrived.

Right after my father's first night at my dwelling, a guest appeared at early morning. This was the gatekeeper. He asked to see my father's documents so that he could report them to the police. I turned hot and cold. He took the passport into his hand and, as though he was a great expert, asked: "And where is your permit to live in Petersburg?" The landlord of my dwelling knew what that meant, so he called the Gentile aside, put a green three-ruble note into his hand and told him to hold onto the passport and not to report to the police.

The Gentile went off, but on the next morning the District Official arrived and asked my father: "What right did you have to come here?" Again it was necessary to turn to the assistance of my landlord, who called the nobleman into the next room, and this time it cost two three-ruble notes. Four days later a still-higher official arrived, and that time it cost a whole ten-ruble note.

These three visits by the gang that worked with the gatekeeper to extort the greatest amount of money from the Jews who had the short-term need to come to the Russian capital had a very depressing effect on

my father. He did not receive the prideful joy he had hoped for from my chanting. He felt driven and oppressed and wanted to leave this dear location as soon as possible.

He was especially disturbed when, on a fine day, the assistant to the Sherif himself came for a “visit.” It just happened that the landlord’s wife was at home, so she quickly sent her little girl to tell her father to leave the house by a rear door. Then he [my father] felt that his steps were being burnt and, without saying it out loud, he regretted deep in his heart having urged his son to settle in such a city, where they actually set up a hunt against a non-resident Jew.

One afternoon Baron Ginzburg sent a person [to me] to ask that my father and I come over to him. He spent much time chatting with my father about life in the small *shtetl*; he enjoyed my father’s replies, praised his life-cleverness. When, before leaving, I complained about the “visits” that the Russian police had begun to make on us, he calmed us, that it would not involve anything other than money, and that the Community would cover all the expenses that we might have because of this.

As soon as we arrived home at evening — the higher official is here again. This time he wasn’t satisfied by a ten-bill, but he wanted specifically to see the victim with his own eyes in order to determine his worth. My father sadly turned as pale as the wall, and to all the talk of the kingly figure about why he had violated the law and come to holy Petersburg without “*pravozhitelstvo*” [official permission], he knew not what to answer. The landlord again led the “Lord” into another room and came to an agreement with him there. My landlord, Klebanov, was generally a bosom buddy of the Petersburg police. He had a large apartment of nine rooms and made a living by renting them out overnight to “non-kosher” Jews. The police licked a fatty bone from this and therefore we could be calm [that] nothing bad would happen to my father.

But his being with me in Petersburg had already been disturbed, and after having been with me for ten days, my father said to me quietly: “My child, I now begin to understand why you were not drawn to the Petersburg position, after having tasted the appeal of a free life in Vienna. It is truly an awful feeling for a proud Jew to live under such circumstances. I wish you great success in your life, and I assure you that I will no longer inject myself into your affairs. I see that I can, bless The Name, rely on you, yourself...”

And so I accompanied my father to the train on his way back home. My heart was sad and my soul was gloomy. And if this were not enough, I saw this scene on the street: A policeman was dragging a poor, tattered worker into the police station, beating him viciously. The worker resisted and wanted to know why he is being dragged and beaten, so in place of a reply he received the blow of the police baton on his head so that he was totally covered in blood. Then the copper added kicks of his boots, called over a coachman and laid [the worker] across the wagon [so that] his head hung down on one side and his legs on the other, and blood seeped from both sides.

This here is Russia, I thought to myself. Kaiser Franz Josef’s Vienna was then, by comparison with this, a true Garden of Eden. A person there had more worth, and in a twinge of anguish over the exchange I had made, I returned home. Here I was again awaited by another “scene.” My landlord, himself the son of a soldier in [Czar] Nicholas’s army, which gave him the right to live undisturbed in Petersburg, was lying on the ground dead-drunk and greeted his family with...Russian curses. His wife and little daughter pleaded with him with bitter tears to calm down and go to sleep, while he went on hurling deadly curses at everything and everyone. Finally I succeeded in getting him to sleep.

These two scenes that I had seen still further strengthened my repugnance toward Petersburg, toward remaining to live in Russia. If I thought of something it was about how does one get out of here? I was not frightened by the thought that I might remain without a position. I knew that the Vienna job was ready for me at a moment's notice. It was only difficult for me to decide to create unpleasantness for Baron Ginzburg and the other members of the Petersburg Community who had shown me so much gentility and kindness.

So Passover passed. My chanting won their hearts still more, and a week after Passover I was called to a meeting of the Community Council where I was reminded of the provision in my contract that I had to bring to Petersburg my wife and children. It is spring now, they argued, and there is no longer danger for their traveling. I used the opportunity to find a possibility to leave this country. Since after *shvues*, I told them, my furlough begins, I will travel back to Vienna and then return together with my family. Saying this, I greatly doubted that I would return, but I considered this the best way out, in order not to create vexation for them. They certainly hadn't earned that from me.

## Budapest — A New Chapter in My Life

A nice story occurred to me in Petersburg when I was in the process of leaving. I submitted a request to the Governor's Office for a permit to leave and enclosed twenty-five rubles. I was issued a number and was told to appear three days later. When I arrived at the assigned time and reported to the official in charge, he told me to wait my turn. I wait and wait for hours on end and when I was finally disgusted and I asked the official what was the reason for my waiting so long, he had only one answer for me: "*nuzhno zhdai*" (which means, one must wait.)

Evening was arriving and I am still not called. So I again go up to the Gentile and now request justice, how much more must I remain sitting and waiting. He replies again: 'one must wait, but if you wish, you can return tomorrow and I will exert myself for you.' I returned home very embittered and quickly called the secretary of the [Jewish] Council and told him the story and asked whether he might come to my aid somehow so that I might obtain my [exit] pass.

The secretary laughed his fill and said that I know very little about Russian customs. When the official had said "*nuzhno zhdai*" the real meaning was "*nuzhno dati*" (one must deliver a bribe into the hand), otherwise I might go [there] for weeks and months and will not obtain my pass. I myself did not have the inclination to shove bribe-money into an official's hand, so the next day I took along my landlord who was very learned in these matters. He actually did shove a five-note into his hand, and within a few minutes I had my pass in my hand.

In the month of June, after having been in Petersburg barely eight month's time, I left the city on my way to Vienna. I was delighted to again be in my family circle. I hadn't yet managed to celebrate with them as is required, when suddenly I receive a special delivery letter from Budapest, from the Jewish Community there, that the post of Chief-Cantor is vacant in the famous Tabak Temple and if I have an interest in the job I should come the next day for negotiations.

I was interested in another thing: How did they there in Budapest learn that I was back in Vienna, while everyone knew that I am far-off in Russia? Actually, Vienna and Budapest were at that time sister-cities that belonged to one kingdom: Austria-Hungary, but I hadn't yet managed to open a door in Vienna and they already know that I am here and immediately [present] an offer, which, truth be told, was very tempting.

Because the Budapest story has a bit of a pre-history. Back in 1906, when I was at the Empress Elizabeth Temple, I had received an invitation to come to Budapest to take over the position in the Rambakh Synagogue to replace the great and talented Chief-Cantor Yakov Bakhman [Jacob Bachmann]. I chanted on a Sabbath there and they wanted to keep me there in the position, but then I rejected the proposal for two reasons:

First, there had arrived in Budapest a very good *khazn* from Kishinev by the name of Tkatsch, who had, with his family, escaped from the pogroms in Russia. He exerted himself for the job and it was only just that I, the secured one, not stand in his way. Secondly, even if the *khazn* Tkatsch would not have been there, I would not have accepted the job.

I had, in Vienna, become accustomed to the modern form of worship, which required chanting facing the congregation, to utilize a mixed [men and women] choir and an organ. Here, in the Rambakh Synagogue, which was a pious [Orthodox] *shul* I would have to completely change my style. I would have to don the long, heavy wool prayer-shawl and the heavy silver crown on my head. “Come, Let Us Sing” was chanted there in the middle of the sanctuary, at the reading desk, and then one had to run back to the pulpit. and, generally, it would be difficult for me to follow all the Orthodox customs where one dare not omit a single one, heaven forbid, of all those songs of praise.

At that time I had declared to the president, H'[err] Adler, that although they offer me much better conditions than at my Vienna temple, I am not inclined to accept the job. If it were, however, to deal with the Tabak Temple and not the Rambakh Synagogue, I would not think for a moment and would remain as a Budapester. Herr Adler then remarked in jest that they would keep an eye on me and as soon as the job in the Tabak Temple were to be free, they would at once get into contact with me.

Now, it appears, that moment has arrived. Since my heart was not inclined to go back to Petersburg, I made no delays and overnight I was already in Budapest. I was awaited by the representative of the Community, Eyzler [Eisler], along with the secretary Berger, and right from the station we rode to the Community House on “Dohani Utca” [Tobacco Street], where I was already awaited by the president Herr Adler along with a few other representatives.

Herr Adler was a person with a sense of humor, so he says to me: “Herr Chief-Cantor, the position is open for you, [the one] that you wished for five years ago, but we, too, hope to obtain the Chief-Cantor whom we have wished for a long time.” He assured me that during all the years I had been in Vienna, and the past year in Petersburg, they did not leave me out of their sight and had awaited the opportunity for me to finally come and settle among them.

As we sit there and converse, I am handed a telegram from my wife in which she informs me that the president of the Vienna Jewish Community had telephoned that he urgently wants to see me. So I should not conclude anything with Budapest until I see him. I could guess that this was about a vacated post in the Vienna Cult [Religious] Community.

When the Budapest Community-folks began speaking with me about conditions, I found myself to be in the best situation that a *khazn* had ever been in all of his life. A high-paying job awaited me in Petersburg, and all it would take would be one peep out of me for them to present me with bird's milk [*i.e.*, the best of everything]. Now I hear that the Vienna Cult Community is calling upon me, which also means a lifelong position with all the best that I could possibly request. So why should I not think most highly of myself and actually mention a price that would compensate me for making a new change?

So I actually was not ashamed and proposed fifteen thousand *krona* per year. When those Jews heard that, their looks turned sour. “That is impossible.” said Herr Adler: “It violates the statutes of the Community which forbid any other official to receive as much as the Chief *Rabiner*, Dr. Kohn, the highest and most honored official of the Community.”

Since I knew that Herr Adler was a kidder, I also allowed myself to kid around. “I don't care,” I said, “if you were to raise the Herr Chief *Rabiner* and pay him thirty thousand *krona* per year, so that my fifteen thousand won't be so much.” They offered me twelve thousand *krona* for the job with the excuse

that they cannot pay any more because they would then have to provide other raises to the cantors and *rabiners* in the fifteen Budapest temples and that would drive them into too-high expenses.

Thus we were unable to come to an agreement and I traveled back to Vienna. I hadn't yet managed to cross the threshold of my house before receiving a special-delivery letter from Budapest, actually from Herr Adler, who wrote me that after my departure they had reconsidered my demands and had found the proper form of a way out that would please both sides. They therefore request that I come over to chant on a Sabbath, not as an audition, heaven forbid, but simply to provide the members of the Community the opportunity to become acquainted with their future Chief-Cantor. He hopes that right on that Sabbath evening we would be able to write the contract.

I put Budapest aside for the time being in order to find out what it was that had happened in the Vienna Cult Community. And while preparing to visit the vice-president, Dr. Gustav Kohn, I'm called by telephone by the president of my former Empress Elizabeth Temple, Herr Bek, [saying] that he wants to visit me at my home. His visit was, for me, a pleasant surprise after the long time that we hadn't seen each other.

Herr Bek immediately began to talk [English] *biznes*, that is [whether] perhaps there is still an open possibility for me to return to their temple. They will raise my salary and they will increase my insurance [English] *polisi*, they will give me frequent furloughs so that I might use my time elsewhere; in general, they will do everything for me that they can and that would be within their capabilities.

I must say that Herr Bek's coming to my house recalled to me that years earlier he didn't even want to speak with me because I am a Russian...and his heartfelt words moved me deeply. The six years that I had chanted at his temple passed before my eyes: the six most important and decisive years of my life, when my name grew famous, when from an unknown young lad from Russia I became a famous and beloved man, over whom [Jewish] communities in various parts of the world wrangled, wanting to have me for their own.

Much of my honors and recognition was thanks to them, that temple that had taken the name of the Austrian Empress. So how could I not be moved by their president's heartfelt words? However, on the other hand, I was facing great challenges: Petersburg is still awaiting my return, I have not yet finally torn myself from them; Budapest makes a very attractive offer, and one must be stronger than iron to refuse it; and now the Vienna Cult Community is calling me, perhaps with something to offer on its own that would not be too bad. So what sort of an answer can I give on the spot to this very love-worthy president?

## Budapest [Reform] Rabbis Start a Battle With Me

Herr Bek left me with mixed feelings. Somewhere there still glowed within him a spark of hope that I would reconsider and not shame the temple that had given me so much when I took my first *khazonish* steps in Vienna. Meanwhile I had to go to see the vice-president of the Vienna Cult Community, Dr. Gustav Kohn, to hear the purpose for which he had called me.

On the way while walking to him, I recalled my last visit with this bureaucrat before leaving for Petersburg. At that time I pleaded with him to just give me his promise that if there were to be an opening in the temples of the Cult Community I would be the leading candidate. At that time he categorically refused, giving the excuse that this would violate the statutes of the Community. I had then noted to him in bitterness that there will come a time when he will search for me and we would then have a quite different conversation.

Strange arrangements ruled the mighty Cult Community at that time in the city of Vienna. Arrangements that were quite distant from justice. Whoever had the proper protection, meaning stronger shoulders among the members of the executive body, was the winner. Because of this protection-system, Vienna — in its twenty temples of the Cult Community in the course of continuous decades — did not have a single proper Chief-Cantor, except for the talented B. Gutman. The best cantors served in the private Associated Temples, where relationships were far more decent. While in the lifelong posts of the Cult Community, seizing the opportunities, were not the most capable or talented, but the most cunning with powerful elbows.

I knew all this quite well, yet in the moment when I walked to see the vice-president, I was free of any feeling of vengeance, and honestly wanted to hear what he had to offer to me. Herr Gustav Kohn received me quite politely, as was the custom in Vienna. He asked whether I was now free to accept a position and if I were not bound by an agreement with Petersburg. To which I replied to him that I always consider myself to be master of myself and of my fate and that my future depends on my own decisions.

“If so, Herr Chief-Cantor,” he said, “you can now have the opportunity to become Chief-Cantor of the Vienna Cult Community.” Since I was in the midst of proposed wealthy arrangements among Petersburg, Budapest and my old post in Vienna, I decided right on the spot that I would not accept the new offer, but I did want to try this bureaucrat’s patience somewhat, so for the fun of it I asked him: “What sort of conditions might you be able to offer, Herr President?”

“Eight thousand *krona* per year, Herr Chief-Cantor, with an increase of one thousand *krona* every five years, beyond the usual side incomes.” I decided to play with him further and said that I could not accept less than twelve thousand *krona*; in addition, I require that they include the six years that I served as *khazn* in the Empress Elizabeth Temple to be added to my pension.

The doctor put me in a steely gaze, as though he wanted to swallow me. And then he said insolently: “You rate yourself a bit too highly, Herr Chief-Cantor.” Then I decided to put the whole truth before his very eyes, that I have offers that are more than twice as large as his and that he had lost the moment when his Community might have had me as its Chief-Cantor, so now he’d have to wait awhile. It gives me deep



inner joy to tell him that I can toss aside his offer, and generally there is no room for me in a Community where protection stands higher than actual interests and — see you later, Herr President!

I went down to the street feeling good that I had received the strength to speak thus with people who had earned such speech. In all times and in all parts of the world there are those types who think that thanks to their wealth or social status they can be unscrupulous with an artist who owns less than they or who possesses nothing but the God-given talent to bring people enjoyment. I felt true pride over being independent and able to defend my own honor.

I immediately informed Budapest that I would comply with their wish and come over to chant on a Sabbath so that my prayer-followers might have an opportunity to become acquainted with their prayer-leader. It was a great pleasure for me to chant again with organ accompaniment, as I had been accustomed to in Vienna. Somehow that accompaniment inspired me and I was in an unusual mood which understandably affected my chanting.

The audience, too, repaid me with such warmth that I felt deeply that Budapest is perfectly suited for me. There was not a vestige of the coldness of the distant, northern Petersburg. A heartfelt atmosphere was quickly created between me and the worshippers and I firmly decided: Here is my place and here I will stay. I will not even take things too far during the negotiations. Budapest pleased me.

And when, on Saturday night at the home of the president Adler, they proposed these conditions: salary actually only twelve thousand *krona*, but in addition, fifteen hundred *krona* per year for a dwelling, eight hundred *krona* for the children's education, and seven hundred *krona* per year for summertime travel, I thought: this is actually the same sum that I had demanded, but from another pocket, and if that pleases you, I'm delighted! And I concluded [with the wish] that it would be in a fortunate hour. However, I managed to notice during my stay in Budapest that the Chief *Rabiner* and the other three *rabiners* of the Budapest rabbinate were not too enthused by the success that I had had on that aforementioned Sabbath.

They required of me that I take over the position at once, but I explained to them that I still have certain duties in connection with my previous city of Petersburg. I left there [Petersburg] without a true "be well" and, as the Days of Awe are approaching, it is no more than right that I not leave them lacking a cantor because I hadn't warned them in time that I am not inclined to remain with them.

They [Budapest] understood my viewpoint and we agreed that I would assume the new position as soon as it might be possible for me. Since I was preparing to travel back to Petersburg in order to settle my affairs, I agreed with my new employers that they would send the contract to me in Petersburg [to the postal box], "awaiting delivery."

In all times there were among Jews zealous lovers of Jewish melodies and of *khazonim*. In every city in which I happened to spend time I met such zealous followers who were ready to go into the fire on my behalf. During my brief sojourn in Budapest, too, a friend of that sort, named Natan Behm, reported to me, saying that "he is in love with me at first sight" and that he is ready to serve me in any way possible, and that I can trust him with all my desires in complete security. He will be my "ambassador" in Budapest during the time before I take on my position.

He was an older person, childless, with sufficient means to avoid concerns over income. He actually devoted himself with all that was in him and I had no grounds to suspect that he had a side-interest in all

this. So we became strong friends. He even took it upon himself to travel from time to time to Vienna to serve my family's needs until I would return from Petersburg. He also undertook to inform me in Petersburg about all the occurrences in the city that I had chosen as my future dwelling-place.

I spent a week with my family in Vienna and then left for Petersburg. I found two letters from Budapest awaiting me. One contained the contract from the Budapest Community which I was to sign, and the other was from my newly-obtained friend, Natan Behm. As I began to read the contract I saw that all its points corresponded with what we had agreed. But at the very end there was an added point that was new to me and did not awake the slightest sympathy in me.

It was precisely stated there that this contract would come into full force when I submit all the indications and certifications found in my control [issued by] various communities and rabbis. I must also provide a certificate from my town of birth [attesting] that I am an honest person, descended from a fine family, and so on. In Russian that was called a "*tshestne povedenye*" [*lit.* better behavior; *i.e.*, report card]. All these documents will be turned over to the Budapest rabbinate, they will investigate them, and only when they may find that I am kosher, only then will I be able to consider myself the Budapest Chief-Cantor.

That point left me with a certain aftertaste even though I knew that the cited demands were in full agreement with the old statutes of the Community that required that no Community employee could be taken on without the agreement of the rabbinate; but for me it smelled too much of medieval times, and rebelliousness rose within me to refuse to accept such a point.

The letter from my friend Behm explained what had happened in Budapest after my departure. All the high officials of the Community, led by the Chief Rabbi and the other cantors, opined that I had been given too many privileged conditions and they raised a storm against me. All demanded that their salaries be increased to match mine. The Community was therefore forced to ask the government for a subsidy of one hundred thousand *krona* in order to meet all the demands.

After all these reports I was already certain that I would not allow a rabbinic dictatorship over me and I responded in short and sharply to president Adler that if they did not delete the final point I cannot sign the contract with them.

## My Final Farewell To Petersburg

Only after the fifth day of my arrival in Petersburg did I report to the Community Council. The business about the Budapest rabbinate that wanted to put me under their control had me very agitated and until I had decided that I would not agree to all of the underhanded tricks of their regulations, I was unable to appear before the Petersburg big shots.

I immediately recruited the conductor, Gurevitch, and we began to prepare a program for the upcoming Days of Awe. I was asked this question from all sides: Where had I left my family? But I managed to avoid providing a clear response to the question. A few weeks before the Days of Awe, when Baron Ginzburg had returned from his summer home, he invited me to visit him. His first question was the same: Why had I not brought my family with me? I gave the excuse that the climate in Russia is not healthy for my wife, but he guessed that something is not in order here. So he referred to the point in the contract that requires me to bring my family; otherwise the contract can be annulled.

Since I was seeking a way to be rid of Petersburg in an honorable way, I pretended ignorance and thought to myself: This would be the best escape, if they were to annul the contract. It took no more than two days for me to be called to a meeting of the Presidium of the Petersburg Community Council. Among those present there was also the Port Arthur Ginzburg, a powerfully rich man whose fortune was estimated to be forty million rubles and who gave a great deal of money to the Community.

The mood at the meeting was clearly against me. The leading screamers were the sexton Sopotnitski and that millionaire, Baron Ginzburg from Port Arthur. A motion was made that, since I do not adhere to the agreement to bring my family, the contract with me should be declared invalid. I sat as though on pins and needles: God grant that they decide that quickly, so that a stone might be removed from my heart.

The Petersburg Baron Ginzburg, who was certain that the annulment of the contract would cause me grief, wanted to make the thing milder and proposed that they wait until after the Days of Awe, perhaps I might reconsider and yet bring my family. To everyone's amazement I rejected the proposal and said that I actually consider myself to be free of the agreement and I support the words of the sexton Sopotnitski and of the Port Arthur Ginzburg that we are no longer bound together. But in order to prove that my intentions are of the best and I do not retain any animosity toward them, I informed them that I am decided to remain with them until over the holidays [*i.e.* past *Sukis/Succoth*] in order to spare them any unpleasantness by leaving them without a *khazn*.

I could notice a certain movement among those in attendance; they had not expected that I would, with lightning speed, agree to annul our contract. On the other hand, they were pleasantly surprised by my offer to remain past the Days of Awe. Everyone privately sought to calm me and convince me that everything would be well again and I would yet remain as their cantor. But I sought to confirm in writing that which we had verbally agreed. I had no interest at all to confuse them or myself.

Meanwhile I prepared an unusually good program for the Days of Awe. I rehearsed the choir in wonderful compositions which, right at the rehearsals, sounded so mighty that I myself drew pleasure. On the first day of *rosheshone/Rosh Hashanah* the synagogue was over-filled, as usual, by a mixed audience

of Jews and liberal Russians who came to hear the religious devotions as one would a good opera. I succeeded in bringing forth the best I possessed, and after the service I was congratulated from every side.

When Baron Dovid Ginzburg wished me a good year he did not forget to add the wishes for himself and the entire Petersburg Jewish community that I would remain together with them for many years. But sadly this was a wish that was impossible to realize. All through the Days of Awe I kept the services at the highest level of attractiveness and completeness, as though unconsciously I wanted to leave a good commemoration after my short stay in the Russian capital.

The Russian Jews knew how to appreciate this. For that month they sent me a doubled salary although our relationship was frayed because of the rescinding of the contract against their will. Baron Dovid Ginzburg tried once again to convince me, calling me to him and assuring me that he takes it upon himself to make certain that all will again be well, even if I did not agree to bring my family. Then I explained that, sadly, in the interim I made an agreement with the Budapest Cult Community. He was beside himself on hearing this. He, who had for a year and a half not spared any effort to win me for the Petersburg community.

Baron Ginzburg did not come the synagogue for my *Sukis* chanting. The reason given was that he was sick. I was very sad at having caused pain to this gentle and pure person who was an honor to his community as well as to all Jewry. I did not even have the opportunity to bid him a “be well” because no one was permitted to come near him. And so I bade farewell to Petersburg.

In the meantime I had scored a victory in Budapest. President Adler replied to me that, after long inner battles, my demand to strike the point about the control of the Budapest rabbinate over me — was accepted and a new contract was sent out to me, in which the insulting provision was no longer included. My dear friend, Natan Behm, wrote to me in somewhat greater detail about this.

Upon receipt of my letter refusing the contract, there was great turmoil. The Community had already received a subsidy of one hundred thousand *krona* from the Austro-Hungarian government to cover the greater expenses connected with my invitation as *khazn*. Now, because of my refusal over the point about the rabbinate, the question arose: either to begin a struggle with the rabbis who insisted on their rights according to the statutes, that a Chief-Cantor could be hired only with their approval, or to refuse the government subsidy, which would be an insult and a spit into the face of the government.

Finally, they confronted the rabbis and agreed with me that I should not come under their control. I had reason to be proud of my victory. I had defended not only myself but the general status of a *khazn*, that he is a person with his own rights, a meritorious servant of his community, and he does not need the patronage of the [modern] *rabiner*, [Orthodox] *rov* or as later here in America — of the [Reform] *rabay*.

After bidding farewell to Petersburg, I still made use of my presence in Russia to give several concerts in the heavily Jewish cities. I again visited Vilna, Riga, Libave, Dvinsk and Bialystok and once again met the joyous Jewish masses that truly enshrined Jewish melody and Jewish prayers. Such visits surfeited me with enthusiasm for the many long years that I then had to spend in the Germanized cities. Always, when I stood before the pulpit in a Vienna, a Petersburg or a Budapest, I kept before my eyes the Jews of Vilna and Bialystok; their lit-up glances and fluttering hearts empowered me and gave me strength to conjure up all the beauty and all the depth of the Jewish form of worship.

If I am in Russia — how can I not travel to see my father and my mother and all the dear hometown Jews of the *shtetl* of my birth? So I did not give it much thought but immediately telegraphed my father to meet me in Tolna, the nearest train station to which I could arrive. As soon as I exited the rail car at the Tolna station, I was met by a congregation of Jews of whom I could not begin to understand how they had become aware of my arrival. And at once they began to speak about matchmaking, [that is] about chanting at an afternoon prayer service and giving a concert and about many other plans. I could barely get them to allow me to be joyous with my father, because of whom I had come here.

When we sat later in the home of a relative of ours, we noticed that the area around the house was blackened by crowds of Jews. At once there entered a delegation headed by the City-*khazn*, Avrom Shoykhet, and several other big shots who heartily begged that I should at least bring them the pleasure of chanting the afternoon and evening prayers. It was of no use to tell them that I was in a hurry to go home, to Khonorod, where my mother is not well. They insisted. I had to give them an ironclad promise that on my return trip I would make a special stop in Tolna, where I will give them an evening of chanting or a concert.

I will never forget one Tolna Jew crying out: “You may even curse us, as long as we may hear your voice!” I replied that I am a *kohen* [hereditary High Priest] and my function is to bless Jews, not to curse them, and that when I will be with them next time I will chant the blessing from “Blessings of the High Priests.”

A few hours later I was already in the dear arms of my mother, who could hardly control the stream of joyful tears upon having lived to enjoy such prideful joy in her child and that she had been rewarded by God for the worries and pains that she had suffered through me in my childhood years.

## Budapest [Reform] Rabbis Send Fire and Flame Against Me For Turning Their Temple Into...A Hasidic House of Study

I remained at home over a Sabbath and, it is understand, I had to chant at the pulpit to the great joy of my family and of the *shtetl* Jews. One more time I dipped into the sea of love and heartiness that only one's mother's home can provide and for which you yearn all your life.

I kept my word regarding Tolna and on the way back gave them a concert with the condition that all income be contributed to charitable purposes. *Khazn* Shoykhet and his choir accompanied me and I created pleasure for him by singing his two compositions. En route to the border at Podvolotshisk I stopped over for a concert in Proskurov where the chapter of unending enthusiasm was repeated, and I was soon back together with my family in Vienna.

This was at the beginning of December, 1910 and I immediately reported to Budapest that I am prepared to take over my job on January 1, 1911, but they insisted that I hurry up and arrive on December 15th. So I packed my things and rode over to the attractive capital of Hungary.

In the course of the first week I had enough time to rehearse the choir and I prepared several compositions that best suited my voice and were closest to my taste. As is the custom among people, I dearly wanted to use [phrase missing] in the new place. I custom-ordered a wonderful *ornat* [?] of French brocade, dressed myself in all the other accoutrements demanded of a modern cantor, and so attired in all the best [Yiddish: "vinegar and honey"], I arrived at my new temple on Friday evening.

The Tabak Temple in Budapest was one of the largest in the world and could accommodate as many as four thousand people. As I began to look around at the huge temple, I somehow saw no Jews. I hardly noticed some six prayer-quorums that had come mainly to recite *kadish* [memorial prayer]. Things grew dark before my eyes. Should this be my first official appearance as Chief-Cantor in Budapest? After Vienna and Petersburg I was accustomed to have the synagogue in which I chanted to be packed. And here am I to stand at the pulpit before almost bare walls?

Shame brought the blood to my face. The other cantor, meanwhile, began to chant the evening prayer and right after that I was to chant "Come, Let Us Sing." I felt that I would not overcome the insult. So I quickly asked the sexton to advise the president Adler, who by then was in the temple, along with the entire leadership, that I want to speak to him about something and ask him to meet with me for a moment in the dressing room, where the *rabiners* and the cantors were changing clothes.

I declared to Herr Adler quite categorically that I will not chant tonight. And when he expressed his amazement, I had yet a complaint for him: "What purpose was there in engaging me as your Chief-Cantor so that I might chant before bare walls? I am accustomed to chanting in fully packed halls, and when I feel that the hall is empty, the prayer does not emerge from me. Where are your Jews?" I ask, "Why did you bring me here at all?"

Herr Adler did not lose himself hearing my excited words and quite calmly replied: "We brought you exactly for that purpose, so that you would bring the Jews into the temple!" So I then asked him: "Did you at least announce in the newspapers that on this Sabbath there will chant a new Chief-Cantor, named

Zavel Kwartin?” No, that they had not done, either. “So how do expect Jews to know and come to the temple?”

And so it actually remained: I did not chant on that first Sabbath. Instead of me, the pulpit was approached by the Chief-Cantor Lazarus. In the course of the week there finally appeared notices in the press that on the coming Sabbath the chanting will be by the famous and-so-on new Chief-Cantor. I was certain that on this second Sabbath there would appear between one thousand and fifteen hundred Jews. But it was not to be. Our Jews can’t be lured by [press] notices, they must convince themselves and develop love for the *khazn* before becoming his die-hard followers.

Friday evening, when I entered the huge temple, I estimated at a glance that there were between two hundred and three hundred worshipers in the synagogue. It seems the advertisements were of no help. Jews do not trust unless they themselves determine the worth of the merchandise being sold to them. I began to chant and in my heart asked the Creator to give me the strength and power to fulfill the new mission I had undertaken and that I might succeed in bringing Jews into the temple, to the pleasure of my new overseers.

Before beginning my chanting, I warned the president that my worship service would take longer than usual because the program of compositions was much fuller. He was tactful enough to reply to me that I am in charge of the pulpit and no one has it in mind to offer me suggestions. This was very fine of him, but right after the prayers I had the first conflict with those people who did not agree that I was the boss at the pulpit and who did actually want to exert control over me.

The program of the compositions that I sang with the choir that first Friday evening was entirely new for the temple; they had never been sung here previously. My voice was outstanding and, in addition, the wonderful acoustics of the temple — all this created an unusual atmosphere that captivated the worshippers. I was warmly greeted and there was no lack of *yasher koyekhs* [may you be strong, thank you, congratulations]. The only ones who said not a word were the [Reform] *rabiner* and, understandably, the other cantors.

When, after chanting, I went into the dressing room to change clothes, the *rabiners* and the other cantors were ready to leave. I greeted them with a fine “*gut shabes*” [good Sabbath], but instead of responding, the Chief-*rabiner* directed these words at me:

“Herr Chief-Cantor, I want to draw your attention to [the fact that] the programming (the order) of the worship service in our temple was firmly established some forty years ago, when the temple was first dedicated, by the rabbinate and by the late Chief-Cantor, Professor Fridman [Friedman]. Any change in this programming without the approval of the rabbinate constitutes a violation of the worship service as well as a violation of the statutes of our Community. The rabbinate will not permit this under any circumstances whatever. It is established that the cantor starts [at the beginning of] the chapter of a prayer and concludes it with the last verse. You cannot permit yourself,” the Chief-*rabiner* further thundered at me, “in our temple to sing or to improvise the entire ”Eternal Love” or the entire “Lay Us Down” from beginning to end. This is fit for a House of Study [*i.e.*, Orthodox], or for a Hasidic prayer-group, but not for our aristocratic temple, which we will not at all costs allow to be converted into a prayer-group.”

So there you have a new problem over my head, I thought. Just see the defect: “the bride is too beautiful,” I sing too much. I had never expected such. I listened to the Chief-*rabiner*’s sermon in the

greatest calm and did not reply with so much as a word. The whole story amused me greatly. The next day, Sabbath, though all the Jewish-owned businesses were open in Budapest, there were yet more Jews in the temple than had been Friday evening. I again presented the best and most beautiful. This just happened to be a “New Moon Sabbath”, so I chanted all of “May It Be”, “He Who Made Miracles”, “Suspect Him.” I presented all of it at this semi-Reformed temple in the truly Jewish, old-traditional style and formula that broke hearts and tugged at one’s soul.

I caught a glimpse from afar at my *rabiners* and saw that they were as if inflamed by fever. At every Jewish movement I made, at every stronger coloratura that I undertook, they arose from their seats; they began whispering among themselves and making nervous gestures. Also the Chief-Cantor, Lazarus, and the cantor Likht had an expression on their faces as if to say: [“] Look at this ‘idiot’ who has come from Russia and wants to teach us here how to chant on a Sabbath in a modern temple!["]

I paid no attention to all this and concluded the *musif* [final added prayer] lustily and inspired, not omitting any “saying” and producing hearty satisfaction among the worshippers. I was congratulated from all sides. Also the president, Adler, along with the other members of the leadership, had the best of words of praise and recognition for me.

When I came into the dressing room to change clothes, the Chief-*rabiner* was no longer there. By contrast, the *rabiners* Dr. Fisher, Heveshi and Grosman [remained]. I greeted them with a “*gut shabes*.” In reply, the *rabiner* Dr. Fisher came out with a great shout: “Herr Kwartin, did you not understand what the Herr Chief-*rabiner* told you last evening, that your chanting is not in accord with our programming and with our established worship service? The rabbinate will not under any circumstances whatever permit a worship service such as yours. Therefore I am again making you aware, Herr Kwartin, that you must come to an understanding with Chief-Cantor Lazarus and he will teach you our programming, from which you may not divert by a hair’s-breadth.”

He spoke further, breathing fire and water, but I no longer heard him. So that’s it: the *rabiners* want me to go study here in Budapest with cantor Lazarus who will make a decent person of me. I again believed that the smartest thing for me to do in this moment would be: Not to reply at all. However, I felt that the day would come quite soon when I will begin to answer these unwanted advisors of mine.



## Budapest *Rabiners* Who Insult Our Old House of Study

This was how my life began in the Hungarian capital: a circle of enemies began to surround me from the very first day. These were not so much enemies as they were envious. The *rabiners* considered as an insult to themselves [the fact] that a newly-engaged Chief-Cantor, a young man in his mid-thirties, and in addition one from Russia, that was always hated in European lands, should be equaled in salary with those who had served for tens of years, who had diplomas from universities and consider themselves generally to be the cream of the crop. As to the lesser *khazonim* with weaker voices, there's no question: envy truly consumed them because the new-arrival is given so much honor and so much money.

I could rely only on the common Jew, the member of the temple who upon barely hearing me for the first time became a devoted follower of mine with [his] body and soul. He had been truly disgusted by the dry "programatic," as they called it, worship services that were closer to church prayers than to true, heartfelt Jewish devotions. He was truly enthralled upon hearing my Jewish sighs and the Jewish nuance that expressed our pain and our hope that had accompanied us during our long life in exile.

The president of the Tabak Temple, as well as the other members of its governing body, had a good "nose" and they quickly grasped what the congregation thinks about the new form of chanting that I had brought them. Therefore they stood firmly on my side in the struggle that slowly began to spread between me and my opponents, the *rabiners* and the other cantors.

Right during the first weeks, when the town became aware of the sharp verbal conflicts that I had with the *rabiners*, the president, Herr Adler, invited me to his home for lunch and declared to me that I should continue in my style of chanting as I wished and that I should have little concern for the angry remarks being made on the part of the rabbinic members.

At the beginning it was the custom that I would chant on one Sabbath and on the next Sabbath the chanting was by the Chief-Cantor Lazarus. It was my bad luck [?] that, on the Sabbaths when he chanted, the temple was almost empty, and on my Sabbaths the number of congregants kept growing so that, by the third or fourth week it had reached the total of eight hundred on an ordinary Sabbath, which should have been considered, in the local situation when all the Jewish-owned stores were open, as sufficiently large. This gave me still more added inner security and more obstinance in replying to my opponents when they again tried to attack me.

I began to also include in my worship services classic liturgical compositions in order to beat back my opponents' main complaint that I am no more than a prayer-leader and do not understand the modern cantorial craft at all. But this was of little use. If someone wants to bury you, he will find an excuse. On the next Sabbath, I again received a nasty greeting in the dressing room from the Chief-Cantor. Why and for what reason do I retain the public in the temple for so long by my chanting, and that the public is not accustomed to all those "tricks" of the Orthodox *khazonim*.

However, I knew quite well that the greatest part of the worshipers were actually Jews who understood the meaning of [biblical] words and who actually did love the old style, and specifically the "tricks," as they called them. So I pretended ignorance although I felt that the day was approaching when I will begin to reply.

This was on the sixth Sabbath of my chanting. I just happened to arrive at the temple's courtyard some time before the [Friday evening] Sabbath greeting and I saw long lines of hundreds of people waiting for the temple's doors to be opened so that they might get a better seat. When I got dressed and entered the temple I was amazed: the entire temple with its three balconies was overfilled by men and women, ordinary folks and aristocracy. Where did so many Jews come from in my temple?

When the pious [*i.e.*, Orthodox] Jews would pass by the Tabak Temple, they would spit and invoke the biblical phrase [Deuteronomy] "thou shalt utterly abhor it, for it is a cursed thing," as we would do back home when pious boys would go past the church, may they not be compared. The Tabak Temple was *treyf* [non-kosher] in the eyes of pious Jews. But since it had become known in the city that a new *khazn* had come from Russia, who chants in the old Jewish manner, many of the pious Jews were intrigued to drop in and hear the new *khazn*. They were ashamed to do this by day lest someone, heaven forbid, notice, but on Friday evening, when it grew somewhat darker, masses of them began to sneak into the temple. Many of them shoved their long earlocks under their plush caps.

This mass of traditional Jews at my temple warmed me greatly and in a heightened mood I prepared to ascend to the pulpit. In addition, the president, Herr Adler, told me that on this Friday evening we have honored guests at the temple. There had come one of the highest generals of the Austrian [military] staff, the Jew Shvaytser [Schweitzer], the Municipal Secretary Bosniyak and his wife who is a prima donna of the Budapest opera, the Justice Minister Dr. Vozhani and many other celebrities.

That Friday night I gave the best of my soul and put all my heart into my chanting. It was a worship service for every class of people, everyone found something of his own. I was congratulated and my hands were pressed at every turn. The president was proud of the good words on my account that all the dignitaries did not spare.

When I came into the dressing room after chanting I again noticed my "good friends" standing there like wolves, waiting to tear me to shreds. The Chief *Rabiner* quickly began his usual sermon to me, and the other *rabiners* supported him like servants. I decided that this time I would not remain silent.

Quite calmly and slowly I asked the Herr Chief *Rabiner*, Dr. Kohn, why it was that he so seldom delivers sermons in the temple. I've been here a long time and still have not had the opportunity even once to hear one of his sermons. When he turned a pair of wondering eyes on me [about] why I am so suddenly interested in his sermons, I further declared that, instead of being concerned with satisfying the broad congregation of the temple with his sermons on morality, he has begun to be involved with matters pertaining to the Chief Cantor, which are not his concern because I was engaged not by the *rabiners* but by the president and the ruling body.

"Instead of being thankful to me for having brought thousands of Jews to the temple," I said further to the Herr Chief *Rabiner*, "while prior to my arrival one could count only a few prayer-quorums of Jews, you attack me with bitter, false accusations and with insults. I will no longer tolerate such insults. I want that there be peace in the temple among all who contribute to the blossoming of the temple. Without such peace there is not the slightest purpose to my being here. But I will not permit anyone here to dictate to me how I must chant and I will no longer allow myself to be insulted!"

A storm broke out after I said those words. How come such insolence from "a Russian one" to insult the highly placed Budapest rabbinate, to dare assault the holy statutes of the Community and the order

that has been established for more than forty years, and more, and more. I did not have further debate in mind, said “a good Sabbath” and walked out.

On Sunday morning I was visited by a committee of the Board consisting of three people who reported to me that last night the rabbinate had brought charges against me to the Community for having publicly insulted them. They demanded that I apologize to the *rabiners*. I had nothing for which to apologize because I had not insulted anyone., I had only protected my position as *khazn* so that no one might tell me what to do. Sill, I declared, I am ready to come to a general representative-assembly and to explain the entire matter.

Such a representative-assembly was actually called for the next week with the participation of all the *rabiners*. When I entered, the members of the council rose to their feet except, of course, the *rabiners* and the cantors. The session had the appearance of a formal judiciary hearing. The president, Herr Adler, advised me that an accusation had been lodged against me by the *rabiners* about insults, and he asks me what I have to say about that.

What could I have said other than I do not know what to say. By all means, let the Herr *Rabiners* and each of them separately, formulate their charge against me. So the Herr Chief *Rabiner*, Dr. Kohn, stood up and began to fulminate against me. He repeated the entire *toyre* [*lit.*, Torah; story] that I had heard so many times from him in the temple dressing room. The temple has stood for almost fifty years, during all that time there has been just one form of chanting, a “programatic” that I, the “Russian” had come here to break. Their style of chanting had raised Hungarian Jewry to a higher level of culture and morality, and now I have come wanting to sink their culture back to the level of the “*ost jüden*” [Eastern Jews] who have, in his opinion, no culture at all.

He thundered against my traditional style of prayer, that these are merely *khazonish* “tricks” of which Budapest Jewry has no need, and that he and the other *rabiners* will not permit the conversion of such a famous, gorgeous temple into a small-town House of Study or into a Hasidic prayer-group.

As the bottom line, he demanded that in regard to liturgy, the programatic of worship, I should be totally controlled by the final decisions of the *rabiners*. As they decide, so I will have to chant.

I listened to the talk about culture and high Jewish morality that the *rabiners* had planted here, according to Dr. Kohn, in the course of the past fifty years, and I gave a thought to the hundreds of Jews who stood for years in the corridors of the rabbinate in order to...withdraw from Jewry. I thought of the tens of mixed marriages that were a daily occurrence in Budapest. It was painful to observe the degeneration of a Jewish community, and here there stands a *rabiner* and fulminates with the ugliest words against our old, proven House of Study that, in the course of entire generations was an armored protector against assimilation and against melting away among the Gentiles.

I could barely hear all this calmly and not to interrupt, but I thought to myself: this evil needs to be torn up, root and branch; I will expose them until the end. Therefore one needs to arm oneself with more patience!

## **My Eastern European [Ashkenazic] Traditions Triumph in Budapest**

The religious dispute between me and the Budapest *rabiners* went on, and following the fiery cursing words by Dr. Kohn, the president, Herr Adler, turned to me [asking] what I have to say in my defense, so I replied that “Until now I have heard only vituperations against our old House of Study and the Hasidic circle; I have not, however, heard [about] what constituted my personal abuses of the *rabiners*.”

At that, one of the other three *rabiners* stood up and repeated again the entire *toyre* of the Chief *Rabiner*, that my kind of chanting had profaned, may we be preserved, the holiness of the temple and of the worship that has been established for almost fifty years. As to any personal insults on my part, again not a word was heard.

When the *rabiners* had ended their accusations against my kind of chanting, I stood up and took the floor:

“Do you remember, Herr President, and you, representatives,” I said, “that when I came to Budapest and was to chant on that first Sabbath, I refused to approach the pulpit because the temple was empty and I was not accustomed to chanting before bare walls. I then lodged a complaint with you for having brought me here. So you replied that you had actually brought me here for the purpose of filling the temple with worshippers.

“This objective, my Herren, of bringing Jews into the synagogue, I have fulfilled one hundred percent. Over the eight Sabbaths that I have chanted here there, began to attend the temple not only Orthodox Jews, who sneak in so that no one may see them, but also people of the highest intelligence, who generally had avoided crossing the temple’s threshold. If this incontrovertible fact does not suffice for you, and instead of thanking me I am attacked, in that case I have nothing more to do with you and I proffer my formal resignation from the post of Chief-Cantor of your temple. I have never allowed anyone to dictate to me in my *khazonish* career and will not permit it in the future, as well.”

I meant my words quite seriously because the *rabiners* were beginning to stick in my throat and I did not intend to conduct an eternal battle with them. But the reaction of those assembled was quite notable. A storm of protests arose after my words:

“No and no, we will not by any means permit Chief Cantor Kwartin to leave us!”

The president, Herr Adler, quickly caught the mood of the attendees and he said a few words directed to the *rabiners*. He said that during the short time I have been at their temple I had created honor for the Budapest Community and limitless joy and pleasure for the worshippers. My prayers, he went on, are taken up with enthusiasm among all sorts of Jews, and that I had contributed much in raising the economic status and moral prestige of the community.

In conclusion, he demanded of the *rabiners* that they make peace with the idea that my type of chanting was to their own benefit and that of the entire Community. He led the Chief-*Rabiner* over to me and insisted that he stretch out his hand to me as a sign of peace. We shook hands and in this manner the painful incident was concluded. But Herr Adler still found it necessary to express to me publicly, before all the representatives and before the *rabiners* and other cantors, in his personal name and in the name of the temple management, most heartfelt thanks and recognition and the wish that God give me the strength to serve their community for a long time.

I left the representative assembly with a feeling of justified pride over having won a battle with such a mighty force as was the Budapest Rabbinate at that time. And this was a battle not only for my own use or honor, but for the honor of Jewish Tradition, for all those treasures that I had inherited in my blood from my father's house and which I carried honorably across the world through all my years.

When, on the next Friday evening, I came into the temple's dressing room, I again relived a feeling of deep satisfaction. The Chief *Rabiner*, Dr. Kohn, spoke to me quite differently this time. He said to me:

"Herr Chief Cantor, I greet you and value you as a tactful person. I respect your strength of character and wonder at your perseverance and your energy. Let us hope that in the future there will be no more misunderstandings and the temple be ruled with the peace that we all wish for ourselves."

And a peace actually was established that, with the growth of my success in the city, became still more entrenched. Although people's natural envy toward a younger and more successful colleague was not entirely uprooted, neither among the *rabiners* nor my cantor colleagues, and I came to feel it from time to time.

So my peaceful years in Budapest ran by. I made countless friends in the city among all classes of Jews: ordinary folk, storekeepers, bankers, academics, musicians, writers and editors. And since talk of editors has come up, I must mention the editor of the Hungarian Jewish newspaper "*Edjenlashik*" [?], Herr Saboltshi, who became one of my closest friends. A yeshiva student in his childhood, he beat his way to higher modern education and he occupied a notable position in the life of Hungarian Jews.

He maintained a fine Jewish home and there wasn't a celebration or simply a gathering at his home at which he didn't insist that I be present. And one could always find there the leading personalities of Hungarian Jewry. When the first Passover of my time in Budapest was approaching, he insisted that I be his guest at the first *seyder*. I argued that I could not do this because of my family, so he wanted for me to be there along with my whole family as well as with my brother who was then living at our house.

Since due to the health condition of my wife this was not possible, he himself asked my wife to allow her husband to conduct the *seyder* at his house, taking into consideration the high government officials that would be present there. Both my wife and my brother urged upon me that it is not fitting to refuse and I accepted the invitation.

This was a rare *seyder* in my life. The main guests were: the Jewish general of the Austrian military staff, Shvaytser; the mayor of Budapest, Heltay; the Justice Minister, Dr. Vozhani, and still more high government officials, all of them Jews. For me, the Jew from Russia, it was an unusual spectacle to see such Jews who occupy the highest government positions in their country. And all of them had the greatest reverence and interest in the celebratory ceremonies with which I conducted the *seyder*. The host himself, Herr Saboltshi, who had not forgotten his pious ancestry, took care that the *seyder* be conducted in every detail as it had been for generations in the old, pious homes of Hungary.

These were fine years for me in Hungary, were it not for my wife's illness that poisoned the sweetness of life for me. One can boldly say that the position I occupied was one of the best if not the very best cantorial post in Europe at that time. I was honored and valued and certain circles of Jews almost venerated me. I bathed in money, earning three times as much as I could consume.

The side earnings that poured upon me called out no dearth of envy and hatred among the other cantors. It went so far that I had to request of the temple leadership that it not allow private individuals

who needed a cantor for their celebrations or, may we be preserved, in a moment of sorrow, to have the right to choose the cantor they want, because in the majority of cases they gave no thought to anyone other than me...I requested that the management itself instruct those interested as to which cantor they must hire so that the functions might be justly divided among all the cantors.

Quite soon the leadership of the Tabak Temple was again convinced about the meaning for them of my engagement as Chief Cantor. When the first Days of Awe approached, the demand for seats was so great that for the first time in Jewish life in Hungary, the Community was forced to rent the old Parliament Building, with seating for fifteen hundred, for the Days of Awe. We exchanged with Chief Cantor Lazarus: on one day he chanted at the Parliament Building and the next day at the Tabak Temple, and the same for me: one day here and the next day, there.

In this, the Community achieved two purposes: First, it gave its members the opportunity to hear both Chief Cantors during the Days of Awe. On the other hand, during the holidays it collected tens of thousands of *krona* from the new worshippers.

The Budapest Jewish community was truly revived. It became younger somehow. The matchup of the old Jewish style of Eastern Europe that it attained through me brought youth and beauty and added charm to its semi-assimilated appearance. Old Jewish qualities were revealed in it. I could take pride in having had a hand in this, and this filled me with limitless joy.

## My Father's Arrival in Budapest and My Mother's Sudden Death

And Budapest repaid me with everything with which people can reward one on this sinful earth. I had fistfuls of honors and recognition, but the earthly means, that are expressed monetarily, were also not stingy to me. It went so far that on one fine day I looked about and saw that too many barrels of money were hanging about with no utility, and good friends approached me with the idea that it would be well for me to buy a house.

So I did become a homeowner in the fine city of Budapest. And not merely a little house there, but actually a house of six stories with 42 apartments at the price of 280 thousand *krona*. I paid eighty thousand *krona* in [English] *kesh*, the remainder left in a *hipotek* or [English] *morgedzh*, as it's called in America. After deducting all expenses, the house brought me four thousand *krona* per year in income, besides my own fine dwelling of five rooms.

And it would have gone on in this way, higher and higher, and I might perhaps have become the richest cantor that had ever been among Jews, if the First World War had not broken out.

Meanwhile, I received word in Budapest from my father that he is preparing to visit with me and at the same time to see my other two brothers who were employed, one as a music professor in Vienna, and the other as a *khazn* in the city of Stanislav. My joy over having my father come to see with his own eyes that I am deluged in wealth and honors — was without limits. For him, as well, it appears, it was a tremendous experience of his elder years to travel into the world again to see how his little birds had flown off and how each had built his nest according to his best possibilities, and how all together create honor and joy for the family.

My father's arrival gave me the opportunity to again be convinced of how genteelly and magnanimously the Budapest community related to me. Coincidentally, I blurted out to the Community Secretary that my father was arriving by boat via the Danube from Vienna to Budapest, and that he would arrive on a Tuesday at about eleven in the morning. Early that same day my doorbell rings. I open and see the Community Secretary. I was alarmed — what had happened here, perhaps I am being called somewhere, and now I need to meet my father at the ship. Yet the secretary calms me and asks me to make haste, because two members of the Executive are downstairs in an automobile and they will greet my father on behalf of the Community.

I was moved to tears by this unexpected honor that the Community had decided to pay my father. At the port we took a motorboat and sailed out on the Danube toward the boat that was arriving from Vienna. The meeting with my father was heartfelt. A strong impression was made on him by the fact that the Jewish community of such a large, advanced city like Budapest had found it necessary to send special representatives to greet him. The representatives took him by the arms and led him off the boat. My father actually burst out in tears of joy which was totally not in his nature.

On this occasion my father recalled the "welcome" he had received when he came to visit me in Petersburg; all those concierges and police superintendents and supervisors who had chased him like hunting dogs, and who had to be "greased" so that they would let him breathe the "holy" Petersburg air.

Here, in Budapest, he felt free, as never before in Russia, and he again praised my foresight in not having wanted to remain in the cold Russian capital.

My father's reception was exceedingly great when, on the first night of *shvues*/Shavuot, he came to the Tabak Temple with me. The entire Executive was gathered at the entrance and the Chief *Rabiner* himself, the one who had at first led such a an embittered struggle against me, greeted him with "blessed be he who comes in peace." On one side the president and, on the other, the vice-president, took my father by his arms, led him to the platform and sat him next to the president himself. My heart was delighted as I watched this. Finally I can repay my dear father for all the pains that he suffered on my account in his youth, and for all the wise ideas he had given me and which had led to my not being mired in the little *shtetl*, but that I might develop all the strengths and abilities that Providence had provided to me.

The next morning, the first day of *shvues*, my father was called up to [read] "*Kohen*" and he donated [pledged] one hundred *krona* for poor people. After services, the entire Executive assembled at my home for *kidush* [wine blessing]. The president, Herr Adler, made several compliments to my father in regard to his successful son, but my father declined the compliments, because...he had not yet heard me chanting in Budapest. On the first day of *shvues* the chanting was done by the Chief Cantor Lazarus.

My father's joy and happiness cannot be imagined, but each time that he embraced me and pressed me to his heart, a deep sigh tore from his breast: "My dear son," he said, "how much greater would be my joy if your dear mother were also to be able to see with her own eyes that great prideful joy for which her child is destined."

Unusual yearning for my mother befell my father and he could not forgive himself for not having insisted that she accompany him on a visit to their children. He made countless accusations against himself for having made such an error. Because such joy in their children can parents have but once in their lives. So both of them should have, therefore, seen and experienced this. My father explained to me that my mother had in no way agreed to close the store and the house for several weeks and to go off on such a long journey. She assured my father that as soon as he had returned, she would then travel for several weeks to celebrate with her children and grandchildren.

But sadly, sadly that joy was not destined to be for her. I chanted on the second day of *shvues* and, knowing what a rigorous listener I had in the temple in the person of my father, I chanted well, with heart and soul, as our old prayer leaders would do in our old home. My father beamed, seeing how after prayers the worshippers come to me in a long line, as to a Hasidic *rebe*, to thank me for the pleasure thst I had brought to them. When the president wished my father "good *yontif*" [holiday], my father jokingly said that now he accepts the compliments that had been made to him yesterday. He had convinced himself that the compliments had "coverage."

We returned home, made the *kidush* and sat down to eat, but in the midst of the meal we noticed that all the happiness and holiday cheer had disappeared from my father's face. He sank into himself and was not the cleansed and joyful father that had today gotten so much prideful joy at the temple. When I asked my father after the meal if he feels not well, God forbid, he replied that he himself is in the very best physical condition, but he is tortured by a bad feeling that he cannot in any way describe in words.



He fears, my father went on, that the unusual joy and happiness that he is experiencing in being with me might bring on the evil eye and might bring on, may the hour not occur, some sort of disaster upon us. His heart is beating [quickly] and an inner unease has befallen him that he is in no way capable of conquering.

He is being drawn as if by iron pincers, my father said further, to my mother. And he asks me with tears in his eyes that I should not, for God's sake, at the close of the holiday, after *havdole* [the parting prayer] forget to collect the hundred *krona* that he had pledged for poor people at the temple, and to send them to the Community, because one dare not play around with a charitable contribution and one dare not delay in paying it. I had to assure him emphatically that I would fulfill his desire right after *havdole*. I barely convinced him to lie down for awhile to rest up a bit.

A quarter of an hour after my father lay down, my friend Behm came to me and asked me to come with him into a separate room as he has something to discuss with me in strict privacy. When we were alone he said to me: "I know, my friend, that you are an intelligent and smart person and you have had enough experiences in your life, have gone through enough misfortunes and pain, and were strong enough to endure it. Therefore, hear out, my friend, what I have to tell you."

This long preface that he delivered quickly made me uneasy and my heart began to beat faster. I began impatiently to demand that he tell me what had happened. He embraced me and pressed me to himself as he took from his pocket a telegram that my brother in Vienna had sent him. The telegram read: "Carefully prepare my brother for the sorrowful news that our dear mother has died."

As deeply as I was struck by this shattering message, yet my first thought was: My father! His notable foresight that a great misfortune was approaching us and his strange yearning to see my mother one more time, as if he deeply felt that this would no longer be possible, and as though he had bade her farewell across the wide distance that had separated them in the last moments of her painful life!

I had the feeling that my legs had been chopped off from under me. The awareness that my father is with me strengthened me somewhat and I did not cease thinking: How does one muster the strength to bring him such terrible news?

## After My Mother's Death My Wife Dies, As Well

As I stood there downcast, and not knowing what one is to do first, another telegram was brought in, which had the following content: "The Zagorski trial has been won. You have been awarded eighteen hundred rubles. Come here quickly."

One could guess that this telegram had been sent for my father in order to get him to return home at once, not wanting to tell him the [then-impending] sorrowful news before its time. Meanwhile, my father awoke from his sleep. I had already washed my face so that signs of my tears would not be seen. I tried to control myself as best I could and handed him the telegram about the victorious trial.

Normally, my father would have celebrated the win of such a sum of money in a conflict with another tradesman; but no, my father was quite far from joy. He kept on insisting that the telegram does not please him, and that his heart continues to tell him that something bad has happened. Right on the spot he decided that, be The Name willing, he will head back home early tomorrow morning.

That night, right after the Sabbath-concluding prayer, he began to torture me to immediately send off the hundred *krona* that he had pledged and early the next morning, with a heavy heart, he rode off. Not knowing that in Khonorod he was awaited for the funeral of his wife, he even stopped off in Vienna to say farewell to my brother Boris, and in Stanislav, to bid farewell to my other brother, Gedalye.

I observed [the seven-day mourning period] *shive* and right afterwards I received my father's sorrowful letter with all the details of my mother's death. He tried to comfort me though he, himself, needed consolation that no one was capable of providing to him.

Thus a sorrowful year began for me, the year of 1913. The death of my dear and kind mother was the beginning of a chain of tragedies for me. Right after that my wife became very sick and she had to be placed in a sanitarium. I remained alone with the children, having to be concerned with their care and education, and for housekeeping, in addition to the major and responsible obligations that were tied to my career.

After having been in the sanitarium for several months, her condition, rather than improving, became still worse. The professors advised that she must leave Hungary, completely forget about her household and about all her duties as wife and mother, perhaps then her nerves would be tranquilized and she would be herself again. I wrote at once about this decision of the doctors to my father- and mother-in-law and to my brother-in-law Dubnikov, [asking] if it might be a plan for her to travel for a bit of time to Russia, where she would find herself under the care of a special person.

My brother-in-law came at once and took my wife to Tsherkas [Cherkasy, central Ukraine] where my in-laws' parents then lived. Months went by, I was greatly plagued by concerns over the children, but I still hoped that my wife would be rested there and become herself again and would return as a healthy momma for her children. But fate had been written otherwise. Half a year after her leaving I received the sorrowful news that my wife had died, surrounded by her parents but far from her husband and beloved children.

One might have been destroyed by these two calamities, one following the other. The grief of the young children completely undermined my equilibrium. I was now both the daddy and the mommy, both the cook and the governess and the educator. No woman of the house, no mother for the children. I felt that I was beginning to collapse under the calamities and weights that had fallen upon me.

Finally I managed to arrange for my two eldest daughters, Anna and Clara, [places] in an educational *pension* [boarding house] in Germany. They received a fine education there and also studied music. But the First World War that soon broke out destroyed all the plans for their long-term presence at the *pension*, and I had to bring them home at once.

How wretched was that year of 1913 for me! Even before the death of my beloved mother I receive a telegram from my father [advising] that my youngest brother, Mordkhe [Mordecai] who was eighteen then, had become very ill in his lungs and the doctors urgently order that he be sent to a sanitarium near Baden. His health managed to be restored. But he devoured much of my strength, nerves and means, and I was pleased that I could extend a hand of aid to my nearest family.

At that time, that was during the first months of the historic year of 1914, after so many tragedies had passed over my head, suddenly a new concept arose in my consciousness, a concept that would later result in a fundamental change in my life. The new thought that captivated me and held me enthralled for several years before it could be realized was the sole magical word: America!

I knew quite well that in that country, where hundreds of thousands of Jews had emigrated from Russia, Poland and Lithuania, a new Jewish life was arising. Back in 1908, when I had begun recording the first gramophone records, I heard that the agile entrepreneurs, who had made great fortunes off me, had not failed to throw the new product across the sea and there they reached the newly-arrived Jews who were starving for a bit of Jewish melody that would remind them of their old, beloved home.

I knew that in almost every Jewish home in America the gramophone trumpets day and night and that Jews are licking their lips over a bit of Sirota or a bit of Kwartin. But as to traveling to America — I had never thought of such a thing. I would have been truly crazy to want to throw away such a pot of wealth as Budapest was for me, where I was almost covered in gold, and to exchange it for the new country that is full of newly-arrived people who are tortured in the

sweatshops to make a living and to manage to save up a few dollars to help their impoverished families that remained in Russia.

But this time America lit up for me in quite another light and I began to burn in an almost fevered desire to visit this new land. And it happened due to a total happenstance that I must describe here in greater detail.

In my birth-*shtetl*, Khonorod, I had a cousin, Avreml [Little Abraham] Kwartin, the son of my uncle Khayim, one of my father's brothers. I remembered him as a child and he remained in my memory due to a defect in his leg [foot?] that caused him to limp as he walked. When he was quite young he, along with his father, was one of the first emigrants from our *shtetl* to leave the old home to go off to America.

It sounds so easy to say: Go off to America. In those years such a voyage across the ocean was the most fraught undertaking that a person might ever imagine. It meant that: one is traveling to the ends of the earth and only the One God knows what might occur en route. And it did occur for them that their travels to America lasted no less than...one and one-half years.

When they arrived by train at Odessa they fell into the hands of swindlers posing as ship's agents who took their few saved rubles, loading them onto a not-large freight ship and — go on, little Jews, may the One Above come to your aid. And the voyage was a bitter one, leading through various ports, and everywhere they had to wallow in filth and need for months on end until finally, after eighteen months, after suffering through the seven generations of hell, they managed to beat their way to the shores of the Golden Land.

Here there began a fresh series of tortures until they beat their way to something. Avreml, however, had a good mind, he was a capable boy and had great ambitions. The greatest of all the ambitions, however, was to get rich quickly. But he did not know how to attain riches. He had not brought, understandably, great knowledge from the Khonorod 'universities,' so had to begin as an ordinary laborer. His first job was in a factory making paper boxes. He learned the craft quickly and his earnings began to grow.

Very rapidly, however, he became ambitious to become a producer of paper boxes himself. Why should he work for another and be used, when he could rather try out his luck as a producer? And one must say that his luck proved out. From a quite small little factory a larger factory quickly grew. The orders kept increasing and he had to take on a partner in order to increase the factory's size and to deliver all the [English] *orderz* that kept streaming in.

That same Avreml had brought a love for music from our birth-*shtetl*, especially for *khazones*. He himself was possessed of a quite small little tenor voice. This bound him even more to the world of sound during his entire life.

In a few words: this cousin of mine, Avrom [Abraham] Kwartin, determined that he must bring to America his famous cousin, the great *khazn* of Europe.

## I Am Engaged For Thirty Concerts in America

My cousin in America had not heard from me nor from the entire family in many long years. It was the gramophone records that carried my name across the Atlantic Ocean that brought to him the name of Zavel Kwartin and reminded him: “Ha? That’s my cousin Zavel from Khonorod! Is it he singing so beautifully that it deeply touches one’s heart? Is it he making our family name famous throughout the world?”

And then this Avreml, or Abie, as he was by then known in America, took it into his head that he must at all costs bring me to America for a concert tour and to chant on Sabbaths.

He somehow found my address and in January of the year 1914 I receive a letter from him, written in very bad Yiddish, in which he makes me the offer to come to America. Because of the typicality of the letter, here are a few quotations:

“Dear Cousin Zav! This letter is being written to you by your cousin Avrom, a son of your uncle Khayim. I don’t know if you remember me, but I remember you quite well from our *shtetl*, I even remember the blows I caught from you when we often beat each other up in the House of Study. I am here in America for over ten years and have experienced bad and good times. I have gone through fire and water, have suffered limitless pains until through hard work, until beating my way to my own little [English] *fektori ov peyper bokses* and make a good living. I also have three fine children and should, I believe, be satisfied with my life.

“But a strange ‘Hear our call’ came into my head, it did, which gives me no rest and doesn’t let me live. For several years wherever one looks they’ve been selling here in America your records in which you have sung such dear, heartfelt Jewish prayers, that touch one’s heart. In front of some stores I have seen Jews standing on [English] *layn* to get a record of yours. They demand only yours. And you have driven all the other *khazonim* off the market.

“Well, so the thought has entered my head that if you could come to America for a tour of concerts and for a series Sabbaths and holidays, you would earn a great fortune here, you would be truly joyful. And I would have the greatest happiness that my world-famous cousin conquers Jewish America. Wherever one walks and wherever one stands one hears only Kwartin and Kwartin and part of that honor would befall me as well.

“Consequently, dear cousin, write me at once your opinion about this idea, if you are willing to undertake such a thing, and also how much [payment] you require for a concert, for a Sabbath and for a weekday afternoon-evening prayers, and how many concerts you might give in the course of three months’ time.”

This letter came as a great amazement to me. First, that a relative had turned up who is a great patriot of my talent and especially — he had lit in me the desire to actually travel to the New Land that has become the home of so many Jews, may no evil eye befall them. And third, he talks there about some sort of great joys that one can obtain there; and why then should I just wave it aside?

The first question that arose about the plan to travel to America was: Will my temple let me go for so long a time as three months? The second question was: Can one depend on my cousin, the box-maker; is

he sufficiently responsible to organize and carry out so great an undertaking that involves tremendous [outlays of] expenses and a large organizational apparatus?

When I asked him in a letter about the last question, he quickly replied that since his business partner is very intelligent and a rich man, as well, he had entrusted him with the whole thing about his plan to bring over the Chief Cantor of Budapest to America, and he indicated that, as two times two is four, they both face, as the organizers and [English] *menedzhers*, the possibility of earning a great deal of money through my coming, and the partner had at once agreed to become a partner as well in this undertaking, which is named “Zavel Kwartin.” All the agreements that they will conclude with me will be strictly adhered to, with the required bank guarantees.

So, it seems, one question has been dealt with. There now remained the second question: How does one arrange for my Community to allow me to undertake the journey? I somehow had a premonition that they would create difficulties. But before I went to talk about this with my president I wanted to make clear for myself what I hoped to accomplish by traveling to America, what sort of conditions must one place before my cousin and his partner as the *menedzhers* of the entire enterprise, and perhaps my conditions would be too difficult for them and they would not be able to abide by them.

I put together a list of the following demands to my cousin Avrom Kwartin. I had the desire thereby to test just how serious and solid are his commitments and responsibilities:

1) My tour of America must include a cycle of thirty concerts, including the Sabbaths that I may eventually have to chant;

2) I require one thousand dollars for each concert or Sabbath chanting;

3) The thirty concerts must take place during the period of three months;

4) My *menedzhers* must send me two steamship tickets, first class, for me and my daughter Anna, a soprano who will participate in the cited concerts;

5) My *menedzhers* must send me a [English] *depozit* of two thousand dollars that will be deducted from the concert [payments] in America;

6) It would be well to have a guaranty from a bank that everything will be strictly adhered to in accordance with the agreement;

7) I will be able to travel to America only after the Days of Awe at the end of October or early November, if, it is understood, I will obtain the necessary permission from the Community;

8) the concerts should not take place more frequently than two per week, not including the Sabbaths.

In early March I had a reply that all my conditions had been accepted in principle by both partners, but they want to first consult with professionals about engaging the necessary halls and theaters, and that he will soon advise me about the final answer — yes or no.

At the end of May, 1914, the final answer arrived, that in the course of two weeks I would receive the contract, two steamship tickets and a thousand-dollar deposit. Only after receiving this final declaration did I decide to begin conversations with my president about giving me permission to leave Budapest for three months.

Her Adler replied that, although he is a strong friend of mine and has nothing personally against my plans, he yet believes that this will be a difficult thing to pass through the Executive body. He will bring it up and will advise me of the result.

I did not have long to wait for the result, which was negative: the Executive body had rejected my request by a large majority. I became quite dejected in my heart. On the one hand I did not want to launch a dispute with my Community for which I had nothing to accuse it of. It had always been heartfelt and fine toward me and treated me in the most noble way. And it was, after all, a lifelong position with one of the wealthiest communities in Europe.

On the other hand, America has so deeply entered my nose [*i.e.*, being] that I could not imagine: how could they not let me travel? And actually, thirty thousand American dollars were at that time, after all, a huge fortune, so how could one have the heart to turn down such a huge amount? I had already made plans: I would pay off the mortgage that I owe on my house and will be a complete homeowner and be able to think of good [marriage] matches for my children and assure their future. Who knows what a father of four children thinks that he will be able to accomplish when a free and comfortable penny falls into his hand!

When, at the end of June, I received a letter from my Avreml that the contract and the steamship tickets and the deposit of a thousand dollars are being prepared and will very soon be sent and that I should in the meantime prepare the passports for me and my daughter, I could no longer be calm. I felt that I must adopt all measures to assure that such a golden opportunity not be lost to me.

I went off to my president, Herr Adler, and asked him to again call a meeting of the Executive body about my request concerning the voyage to America, and that I ask that I also be invited to the meeting. Meanwhile I wrote my cousin that I am conducting negotiations with my Community and I ask that, meanwhile, he should not make any more outlays [of money] until I telegraph him that I have received my Community's permission.

At the beginning of July, 1914, I was called to the meeting of the Temple Executive body. I lay down a speech to them that could have moved a stone. First, I said, it is the natural ambition of any artist to become famous in ever-broader circles. America is the arising country; Jews there have heard me only on gramophones and when they now invite me for personal appearances, I have no right to refuse them, and, secondly, those thirty thousand dollars. Who can assume the right to rule that I should refuse such a sum that could secure the future for myself and my children?

And I had another argument: the Chief Cantor of the Warsaw synagogue, Gershon Sirota, had received such permission from his community to make a successful tour across America, and his community had garnered only joyful pride from his success there. So why should Budapest be worse than Warsaw? And at the very end I made a jest: in order to make easier the hearts of the community-members, I am ready to refuse my salary during the time I would be enroute.

The next morning the president brought me by telephone the good news, that my three-month furlough had been granted.

## The First World War Destroys My Plans About America

I was overjoyed that my dream about a trip to America was so close to being fulfilled. I quickly sought out my closest friend, Behm, to share the good news with him and to, together, consider the plans about what to do next. I went with him into one of the finest Budapest cafés, that had such appeal and charm in those peaceful, pre-war years. A friend of Herr Behm quickly sat down with us, a high official of the Foreign Ministry, and the talk quickly turned to the political situation in Europe.

The official believed that the political sky of Europe was growing overcast and that some undefined breezes [were blowing] that awoke unease and agitation. We listen to this strange talk that sounded so strange and remote in that beautiful evening at the Danube, as the young, fluttering couples rushed to the rowboats and whispered such sweet words into each other's ears. Somehow we placed no weight on what the official was saying. Everyone stood up and went his way to attend to his affairs, as though nothing was untoward.

I began making preparations for the trip for myself and my daughter. I thought about a passport and about the other preparations for the trip. Suddenly, during the final days of July in the year of 1914, my friend Behm came rushing to me in agitation: "Have you heard the news? The Austrian Crown Prince [Archduke], Franz Ferdinand, has been murdered in Sarajevo, in Bosnia, and this means — war with Serbia. In all the coffee houses there's talk that this as a provocation by Russia, and apparently Russia will also enter the war. Who knows what sort of calamities will result from this murder!"

We went out into the street that was crowded by people. At once the little fellows tore through the streets hawking the extra editions of the newspapers [carrying] precise descriptions of the murder and about the unease that had gripped all of Europe. We stood there distraught. Further developments did not take long to arrive. Three days later Austria-Hungary and Germany declared war on Serbia and Russia. The First World War had begun.

The so yearned-for trip to America appeared to be a far-off dream that was not fated to be accomplished. Quite a different question arose: Would I not be arrested as an enemy Russian citizen? In the *dacha* [country home] in which I lived an hour's ride outside Budapest, there just happened to be with me my brother Boris, my brother-in-law Dubnikov and my brother's father-in-law from Riga, Geyer — all Russian citizens and all of us trembling with fear: What will our future fate be?

The soundest thing would have been, understandably, to quickly leave Hungary, but before we could look about, the newspapers reported that all enemy aliens must quickly register or they would be interned. We quickly took two automobiles and headed toward Budapest. But as the [English] *detektivs* began their spying, they noticed that two automobiles were quickly fleeing the *dacha* area. They followed us to Budapest and when I was at my home they came up and inquired as to who were the strange people who had come with me from the *dacha*, and at the end they demanded that I report to the Main Police [station] the next morning.

When I had legitimized myself at the Main Police [as to] who I am and which job I fill, I was made aware that this is wartime and I should be careful with strange people, and if I were to conduct myself as "kosher," that is, not be involved in politics, nothing bad would happen to me.



The sudden outbreak of war struck at the curative places of Austria and Germany, the thousands of Jews from Russia, who were suddenly torn away from their families, lacking [monetary] means and any contact with their home. Those people threw themselves helplessly at all sides, trying to find among the Hungarian Jews whatever support they could to survive or to escape from the country.

I recall standing once at the streetcar stop to ride into Budapest and a woman came up to me, very elegantly dressed but with an expression of great misgiving on her face. She screamed: “Herr Kwartin, don’t you remember me? Save me!” When she had calmed down a bit she told me that she is Mrs. Obranitski from Vilna, a social activist who had herself twice brought me to Vilna for charitable concerts on behalf of various societies. She was in Carlsbad when the war broke out. Now she has remained totally without means and without the possibility of traveling home. She had recalled that I am the Chief Cantor of Budapest, so with her last pennies, in Fourth Class, she came here, learned of my address and pleads for my help.

I took her into my home, but the main aid she asked for was: to get the Budapest Jewish Community to make it possible for her, through some neutral country, to return to Russia. I finally succeeded in having the Community request a visa for her to Romania, which was not involved in the war at that time. And she finally received such a visa and traveled home peacefully. Twelve years later, sitting in a coffee house in Tel Aviv, that same Mrs. Obranitski came up to my table and, with tears in her eyes, thanked me for not having refused her help at such a critical moment in her life, and for actually saving her life.

When the war was raging at its great scope and every day brought fresh news about fresh calamities and human suffering, on one fine day I received a telegraphic transfer of five hundred dollars from my cousin Abie in America and simultaneously, two steamship tickets; he would send the other five hundred dollars next month. So I was totally confused: How does one undertake such a distant journey during wartime? And on the other hand I pitied my cousin who was making expenditures, dizzying himself with such huge responsibilities and — doesn't he know that there is a war on in Europe?

Therefore I immediately telegraphed him to stop making any expenditures until the war situation becomes clear and we would know if one can undertake such a voyage while the world burns. But I myself was impatient: How does one allow such an unusual opportunity to pass by? I had received a furlough, steamship tickets are here and advance payment is in my bank account — so should I not actually travel?

Thoughts of the trip gave me no rest. It ignited my fantasy and actually persecuted me by day and by night. As is common among people, great influence was exerted by the fact that Chief Cantor Sirota was already in America, and as I heard, he was having great success. Envy arose in me: Why should I not also try out my luck? How am I any less than he? Why am I not owed an appearance before the American Jews?

And I determined firmly that despite the war and the restless situation in the world, I should yet do all that I am able to make possible my trip to America. Since Austria-Hungary was, in fact, under the knuckles of Germany, one had to obtain permission from the German [military] Staff to leave the country. After long efforts and after countless uses of influence, I finally, as a Russian citizen, obtained a permit to leave the country.

But then a great uproar arose in my family and, as well, in the Community: How come a person endangers his life to travel across the seas in wartime? Everyone said that the war would last no more than a half-year, at most, so it makes no sense to risk it and it is better to wait past that half-year and then to travel. So I no longer knew what to do and went about in a daze.

Meanwhile the war went on its way and began to drag on not for months but for years. Life grew more difficult day by day. Limitations increased and even in bread-rich Austria, ration cards were needed for a small portion of bread. This was no small calamity for the great gorgers of Hungary.

I, too, in my role as home-owner, got to feel the taste of war. The government declared a moratorium on rent, meaning that the debt of the *morgedzh* to the bank plus interest did have to be paid, but the families whose husbands or fathers were at war did not have to pay rent. Of the forty-two tenants that I had in my house, eighteen were freed from paying rent.

All my fortune began to blow up like a soap bubble. Whatever I earned at my job had to be put into the house. And the income from the temple was also reduced. Who had it in mind then to arrange weddings? Everyone was consumed by a single thought: Where does one get some merchandise? The city people began to rush to the villages, bringing various urban articles to trade with the peasants for foodstuffs.

My head was so twisted that I slowly began to forget about the America that had so recently ruled my mind.

## **I Am Arrested at a Hungarian Health Resort**

So the weeks and months of the First World War flowed on. I no longer regretted not having undertaken the risky voyage to America because it quickly became known that the Germans had invented some sort of underwater ships that could not be seen on the surface but that could, in a single moment, transport you to the world to come. This new German invention then instilled terror among people. America was not yet in the war against Germany and there still remained a postal exchange between those two countries, but people feared traveling by sea [Atlantic Ocean] and I, too, waved it away: America won't run off [disappear] for me. It isn't worth taking the risk lest I share the fate of the Prophet Jonah...

One summer I traveled to a health resort in the Carpathians, which was not far from the Russian border. It was during the time when the Russians were advancing and were approaching the Carpathian mountains. I took carbon-dioxide enriched [mineral] baths there and forgot about what was happening in the outer world. At that same place I encountered a friend of mine from Budapest, Professor Ferentsi [Ferenczi] and we spent our free time together in that remote spot.

One fine morning, two policemen came to my hotel room and informed me that I am under arrest. No arguments nor excuses were of any use and I was led to the police station. A guard was placed alongside me there and I was told to wait. So I waited for an hour, then two, then three, and no one paid me any attention.

Suddenly the door opened and there entered my acquaintance Professor Ferentsi in the company of an Austrian officer. He began asking the officer why I was being held, of what am I guilty? To this the officer replied that this is a "state secret." The professor then asked me to tell him on my honor whether I feel that I am guilty of anything, if I feel I have sinned in some way. I gave my word of honor that I feel as innocent as a newborn babe. But this was of little help. The professor offered every possible guarantee that I would not run off if they were to free me. He telephoned various official bureaus in Budapest as well as my Community. They did everything possible there to have me freed. Finally, at around ten [o'clock] at night, I was informed that I would be freed under the condition that I would, the next morning, leave the health resort and, upon arrival at Budapest, I would immediately report to the police there.

My word was not trusted, but early that morning a policeman came to my room and saw to it that I packed up my things at once. Upon arrival in Budapest I went directly to the main police station where the chief, who knew me well, informed me in a good mood that I had been informed upon by a "good friend" and that I need not be frightened. The Community assumed every responsibility on my behalf.

I did not need to exert myself for too long to determine who that "good friend" was that had reported to the proper place that I am not a kosher citizen. This was a singer in the Budapest opera by the name of Rozha who used to be hired during the Days of Awe by the management of the Tabak Temple to sing a few solos. When I took over the position, I had eliminated the solos by outside singers and, from that time on, he maintained anger against me and, during wartime, he believed that now the right time had come to avenge himself, because I am some sort of enemy Russian citizen.

Years later this same Rozha turned the tables on me. This was in New York. He had lost his opera job in Budapest after [Communist ruler] Bela Kun was driven off and, under [Miklos] Horthy's [fascist] regime, persecution of Jews began in Hungary, especially of those who held high positions in public and artistic life. This Rozha came to America, where his Hungarian countrymen arranged a concert for him so that he might have enough to manage on during his early times here. So he was not ashamed then to come to me along with a committee and to beg me to participate in his concert to assure its success.

Although I well remembered his informing on me, I pretended I didn't know and promised to appear. After the concert I had great satisfaction. Rozha came up to me and confessed it all: "I have sinned against you," he said, "and did not behave at all well. Please, forgive me! You are an honorable person of gentle character. I beg you again, forgive me!"

He did not accomplish much here in America and quickly died alone and abandoned.

I did one good thing in the course of the bitter war years: I did not neglect the education of my two grown daughters and I even made it possible for them to become full-fledged singers. Before the outbreak of the war, after they had become motherless, they found themselves in an outstanding German *pension*, where they studied general education and languages, music, needlework and even housekeeping. Everything was studied there in true German depth and punctiliousness. When war broke out I had to bring them home.

But soon my brother Boris, the singing professor, came from Vienna to Budapest where he, together with his musical wife, opened a singing school that was successful from its very beginning. My two daughters, as well, enrolled in the school where they studied voice-training and singing as well as playing the clavier. Both of their voices developed very well. They began rehearsing various songs, arias and ballads and also desired [to have] an opera repertoire.

During the war, outlying Hungarian districts developed small opera companies that wandered through the cities. My elder daughter, Ana, had an engagement in Temeshvar [?] with the local opera. Just as my father had, in his time, drilled into my head that opera was not a matter for Jews, I took that over, and when it came to a child of mine, I did not have any great desire to agree to it. Yet these were different times and the great city of Budapest was, after all, not tiny Khonorod, so I did not find it possible to oppose her career. In fact, the provincial operas stood at a high enough level and the artists who performed there considered them a bridge to their later successes in the operas of the main cities.

Meanwhile we in Hungary began to receive reports of the terrible destruction of Jewish life in Russia, especially in Lithuania and Poland, from which the Czarist generals ordered all Jews to be driven out in a single night. Generations-long Jewish settlers had to place their packs on their shoulders and disappear, wandering, with small children in tow, down roads and paths, seeking a place to lay their heads. Of course, by comparison with the murderous destruction of millions of our brothers by the Germans during the Second World War, the suffering of the Russian Jews in the First War was child's play. But at that time, when the devil's crematoria had not yet been invented, the news of the suffering of the Russian Jews due to the war spread quickly across the world and produced great sorrow and sympathy for the sufferers.

The Austrian-Hungarian Jewish communities, while making great efforts to help their government in conducting the war, also did not neglect bringing aid to Jews in those places that had been liberated by the German and Austrian armies. And this aid was eagerly accepted by the Jews, because hate toward Russia

was deeply implanted in all Jewish hearts and the Germans — no matter how strange this may now sound in our ears — were welcomed everywhere by the Jews as true liberators.

Soon I, too, was fated to lend a hand to alleviating, with my poor strengths, the pains of the Jews that had been freed of the Russian yoke and were to be found in the area under German military management. I did not bring them bread and other foods that they so desperately needed because I didn't have it myself, but therefore I brought the ancient Jewish prayer, the song of my heart that strengthened them spiritually and provided courage and strength to overcome the suffering that yet awaited them.

## **The German General Staff Invites Me On a Concert Tour For Jews in the Occupied Territories**

This was in early January of the year 1917, when the war was raging in all its scope. I receive a letter from the chancellory of the German General Staff in Budapest, in which I am asked to report at a specific time. They did not specify what was involved. So one can guess how my hands and feet began to tremble. Who knows, I thought, what sort of a new sin I have now committed and what sort of new calamities await me.

I strengthened myself, gathered up all my strength and went off to the German chancellory. But on the way I felt it necessary to stop at my friend Behm's and to ask him to accompany me. Who knows what might occur with me, so let Jews know, at least, where I've ended up. We agreed that he would wait outside the chancellory, and if I were not to emerge after a certain time, he would enter and find out what had happened to me.

Inside, at the German military management, I was not kept waiting and was welcomed by a high ranking officer. The first thing he did was to tell me to be seated. This calmed me a bit, because if they would've called me as a criminal they would not have been so polite to me. Then a long series of questions began. The first: what sort of citizen I am, how long I've been living in Budapest, how do I relate, as a Russian citizen, to the Austrian-Hungarian government.

The longest conversation took place around the question of how I, as a Russian Jew, relate to my Russian government, whether I am a Russian patriot and how do I regard the fact that Germany is liberating there my brothers that have suffered under the Russian yoke. Here there was required a certain dose of diplomacy to formulate the proper replies because I still did not know what this German was aiming at.

Finally he began to boast to me about how the German military forces in the occupied former Russian territories treats the Jews, that it doesn't consider them to be Russians but victims of Russian oppression; that it aids the Jewish population with whatever it can: Germany doesn't have much bread to give them, but, therefore, culture — as much as their hearts desire.

And it was because of culture that he had called on me. And he tells me that the German military Chief Command had received countless requests from Jews in Minsk and Homel [Gomel], in Vilna and in Shavle and from tens of other cities, that since the festival of Passover was coming on and poverty on the part of the majority of the Jewish population is very great, Jews need to be provided with *matses*/matzohs for Passover and the community chest is empty, these cited communities plead that the German regime allow them to bring to them the famous Chief Cantor Zavel Kwartin for a number of concerts and Sabbath services so that the income that the concerts may bring will enable them to feed the poor people.

Hearing such words, a stone fell off my heart. First, I am receiving regards from my old, dear Jewish cities. I hear that they are alive, bless The Name, but that they are suffering and they still believe that a *khazn* who will come to them with a sackful of Jewish prayers will prove the miracle and fill up the community chest, so that no Jew, heaven forbid, should remain without *matses* for Passover. Secondly, I

was greatly pleased that they specifically ask for me, meaning that I still have remained in their memory and that the horrors of war did not cause them to forget me.

I breathed more freely and declared that I will not hesitate for a moment to fulfill the desire of my suffering brothers and of the German military regime that is so friendly as to desire to assure the Jews in the occupied territories even with [the presence of] a Chief Cantor from far-off Budapest. But first, it is understood, I must receive permission from my Community to undertake the journey.

“That,” he calmed me, “will be taken care of by the German regime.” That same regime would also provide me with a military “passage certificate” that would make it possible for me to move freely in the military areas and to enjoy every aid that I may need.

It was very pleasant for me to hear all this and I went off to my president to inform him of the contact by the German military regime. When I came into his office he already knew the whole story because that same high ranking officer had called him telephonically and, it is understood, there could be no talk that the Community might not accept the request of the German regime. They might have bickered with me about my planned visit to America, but not when the German “empire” itself had asked for this.

Later, it was revealed that the entire idea of inviting me during wartime to give concerts in all those Jewish cities came from my friend, the famous conductor Leo Lyov [Low]. During the war years he, along with the *khazonim* Sirota and Hershman, lived in the German-settled area and for a long time he traveled with them, giving concerts. When their tour was concluded, he proposed to the Jews in all those cited cities that it would be good to bring over *khazn* Kwartin who had not been in those cities for several years and that his arrival would certainly bring in enough income to cover the great needs of those Jewish cities.

Before leaving, I took up with the German regime two other points: that permission be granted to me and my daughter who will also participate in the cited concerts; and, secondly, that I must complete my tour two weeks before Passover so that I might return to my Community for the holiday. They provided me with all the necessities and I traveled in good fortune to my old, well-known areas over which the storm clouds of the war had passed.

Earlier, before leaving, I wrote to conductor Lyov [asking] if he would agree to tour with me as he had done with the *khazonim* Sirota and Hershman; I also asked him to put together a choir as far as was possible under those circumstances, and that he would also have to accompany my daughter on the piano.

I met with Lyov at the first concert in Bialystok, which had always been a lively Jewish city with a large Jewish intelligentsia. Right after that we traveled to Minsk where we held two concerts in the large theater and on a Sabbath in the great synagogue where cantor Levinson presided. Both the moral and the material success of those concerts was very great. The theater hall was filled, in addition to Jews, by high ranking German military men.

I must tell a story here about how a warden of a *shul* [traditional synagogue] of a *shtetl* near Minsk wanted to entice me there with a few hundred rubles in wartime, and I decided that I would not agree at any price. One fine day a committee from a Minsk suburb came to ask that I chant there one evening and also give a concert along with my daughter. We agreed on the price of fifteen hundred rubles, or German marks, which were then of equal value. They gave me 500 rubles in advance and the rest was to be paid a few days before the concert.

Meanwhile I traveled to Homel, where the Jews simply did not know what to do for me out of great glee. I was literally carried out of the hall in their hands. From there to Bobroysk and then to Borisov. And everywhere the same scenes: enthused Jews who lacked enough to live out the day, but when it comes to Jewish melodies, to a bit of *khazones*, to those old prayers that move the heart and convey one to other worlds — then one is ready to deny oneself one's last and to buy the ticket so as not to be shamed and to hear the *khazn* who has come from such far-off lands.

When we returned to Minsk I began to await the Jews from the suburb who were to bring me the thousand bucks so that I would appear there for a Sabbath's chanting and Sunday concert. For two days there was no one to be seen. Meanwhile, Lyov and I and the dilettante [amateur] choir that we had in our charge prepared to chant on the Sabbath. The *shul* was over-packed. Thousands of Jews pushed at each other and the police had to be called to maintain order.

On Sunday morning the warden showed up and brought only 400 marks. The rest, he said, he would bring that evening, before the concert. I immediately told Lyov and my daughter that this Jew somehow makes me suspicious, he is trying to entice me here with the few hundred rubles, but I decided not to allow it.

When we came to the *shul* where the concert took place we were unable to push our way through, so great was the crush of people. The warden comes running up breathless and pleads with me with actual tears: "Herr Kwartin, the public is restless, go out to sing meanwhile. As soon as I complete the box office accounting I will come to you during the first intermission and hand you the rest of the money, six hundred rubles."

Somehow I recognized that these were a thief's prattling and I declared to that Jew that I will not go out [on stage] to sing until I am at once brought the six hundred rubles. Meanwhile, in the *shul* there arose stomping and shouting [demanding] that the concert should finally begin. And right then the warden completely disappeared. The tumult grew still louder, while the audience became aware of what was going on. Delegations were sent to me [saying] that they are not guilty of anything, they had paid for the tickets and if I do not want to sing I should refund their money.

Finally we agreed that I would appear only in the first half, that is, I will chant the evening prayer and during that time they would try to find the warden who had hidden away with those purloined few rubles. When I finished chanting and the audience was wild with enthusiasm, the warden still hadn't appeared. I then declared categorically that I would not sing in the second half until I was paid what I was owed.

The shrieks and cries reached the heavens, but I remained determined. Then there were fellows who brought down the Russian sheriff who, under German control, kept "order" in the town, to force me to sing. And the sheriff did actually thunder: "*ya vam prikazivoyu pyet!*" (I command you to sing!)

Now I became truly angry, remembered the paper from the German regime that I had in my pocket, in which it was stated that, during my trip I should be given all assistance, and I gave the sheriff to understand that if he did not calm down, I would turn him in to the Germans and he would suffer a black year. Instead of giving me orders and threatening me with arrest, he had better send out some policemen to bring in the disappeared warden who had grabbed others' money and disappeared with it.



It seems that the sheriff was no fool. He obeyed me, sent off several policemen, and twenty minutes later they came dragging the warden by his ears. He, sadly, to his shame, had to empty the wallet, paid [me] to the last penny, and I finished the concert in peace to universal satisfaction.

After the concert the conductor Lyov says to me that he admires my courage during wartime to deal with such determination and to not allow myself to be pushed around. A similar case, he relates, occurred when he was on tour with Sirota. That time a sheriff didn't arrive, but an ordinary policeman. So Sirota grew so frightened that he didn't collect the five hundred rubles, sang quickly and ran off from the town. On the road Sirota had said to Lyov: "They have no sense, those Jews; if they were to ask me to pay them five hundred rubles to avoid seeing any policemen, wouldn't I have paid them?"

## **My Concert Among the Ruins of the Lithuanian Town Shavle [Shavl? Siauliai?]**

Lithuanian [Jewish] towns were never known for their wealth. The days were “pushed through” with whatever God provided, [but] therefore Torah was studied with gusto, out loud and from a full heart. In such cities as Vilna [Vilnius] and Kovne [Kaunas], poverty always howled through every corner, at all times, but it was a bright poverty, a poverty that did not break people but that made them more genteel, uplifted, because what choice was there? To whom can one complain when income is meagre and the little children that fill the house, may no evil eye befall them, cannot be given all that they ask?

So one pretended ignorance of being somewhat starved and one devoted oneself more to spiritual life. The intimate prayer houses were not only filled by old Jews, but also by the middle class, with the storekeepers and craftsmen who yearned for a chapter of “*Jacob’s Well*,” the sermon of a passing-through preacher in which, in words of fire, he intoned that all the suffering in this sinful world wasn’t worth a penny, and that the main thing is to gather as many *mitsvos/mitzvot* [ordained commandments] and good deeds as possible and, after [a lifespan of] one hundred and twenty years, to march into Heaven like a prince!

To say nothing of when the city was visited by a *khazn* with a God-blessed voice who was able through his hearty prayers to penetrate the most hidden corners of their hearts and to evoke an ecstatic tear — then they entirely forgot the sinful needs of daily life, they saved their last pennies, often the last bite of bread, went off and ran to hear the magical sounds that reminded them of the [Solomon’s] Great Temple.

An appearance of mine in such a Lithuanian city will be unforgotten, I think, until the final days of my life. That was when, on the concert tour through the former Russian areas, which the German military régime had arranged for me, I strayed into the city of Shavle [Shavl? Siauliai?]. Upon arriving in the city we saw before us a terrible scene of destruction and devastation. Shavle had been considered, before the war, as a wealthy city because of the large leather factories located there.

But when we arrived there in the spring of 1917 we did not encounter a single undamaged house. People lived in the ruins and the cellars of the previous houses. The collapsed walls and the charred chimneys that protruded from them brought dread upon us. I stared at the conductor Lyov who had come with me, and he stared at me, and my daughter stared at both of us, and all of us thought a single thought: Master of the Universe, to where have we strayed? This is truly the World of Chaos! Are there any living people to be found here, and is there anyone for whom to organize concerts and to chant prayers?

But it was not long before the shadows began to emerge from their holes. They were haggard and emaciated through all their war experiences, through meager food, but the fire in their eyes had not been extinguished and just the rumor that quickly spread among the ruins, that a world [renowned] *khazn* had come to them from a foreign land, was enough to revive the “dry bones.”

But where was one to sing in such a ruined city in which there was not a single undamaged house? Finally, we were led to a collapsed house in which two downstairs rooms had barely survived. Those two rooms were the city’s treasure. It was here where the community gathered. Here a prayer quorum

gathered on the Sabbath and holidays, and it was here that I was to favor the town's Jews with my melodies. I said to Lyov: "I regret the whole story of coming here. It is a bitter pity on the producers who put so much money into bringing us here and now they are in danger, heaven preserve them, of losing their heads. Because how is it possible that these two little rooms, even if they were to be overfilled, could cover expenses and even provide a bit of surplus for the town's needs?"

Things, however, proved otherwise. When we approached the former "Kupetsheski Club" to which those two rooms had belonged, the crush of people was so great that we had to exert super-human strength to force our way through. What took place in those two rooms is very hard to describe. People were jammed together and, in addition, they opened the windows and thousands of Jews stood on the little piles of bricks that proliferated around our "concert hall."

Were had they found so many Jews, may no evil eye befall them, I thought. When we had arrived here we were certain that this was a destroyed town and that we would not find a living soul. And now, suddenly — all the cellars and all the ruins opened up and thousands of dear, hearty Lithuanian Jews had begun to stream, carrying their pennies [to hear] a bit of melody, to hear an old Jewish prayer that refreshes one's heart and provides the strength to survive this bitter time.

Tears choked my throat as I stood on the few boards that were to serve as a "stage." But when I opened my mouth and the first notes sounded across the cramped little houses [rooms] and far out through the open windows to the ruins that were hung with people — then I could notice that people were truly moved to other, higher worlds. What worth was for them their bitter life under the German occupation, the daily drudgery for a bit of moldy bread with a bit of marmalade or margarine, when here they have suddenly flown to such heights that one's head was dazzled and they totally forgot about grey reality[?].

I stood there and sang for them until late at night, and I was ready to keep singing until morning, to sing out all my heart, because these people had captured me unto my deepest depths. I did not know how to repay them for their love for my fine sounds, for their striving toward spirituality while the surrounding real life was so despicable, for their ability to transport themselves into other, higher worlds, while they're awaited at home by hunger, cold and need, and more than one child has to bed down lacking the bit of milk with which to still hunger.

After the concert the Shavle Jews did not have in mind letting go of the high guests who had wandered to them, just by happenstance, but to provide as fine a banquet as they had earned. True, one cannot in any way compare that banquet in Shavle during wartime with the banquets that are now given in America. A dried-out herring wandered across the table, Jews managed to get a bottle of liquor somewhere, but the speeches were the most fiery ever; no words of any kind were able to express what the Jews felt, how thankful they were for our coming to them and creating for them so much joy of the spirit.

My daughter and I did not skimp on songs for them at the poor meal that was surfeited with so much heartiness, the likes of which I may never have encountered again in all my life. We danced, played and sang until the grey of dawn appeared and with the most joyful feelings we left Shavle, which was, for me, the embodiment of all of the wonderful Lithuanian Jewry, whose tragic fate was to be mercilessly cut down in the course of the Second World War.

When I returned to Budapest for Passover after the trip across my old home, I had the certain feeling that Jewish life there had been truly destroyed due to the events of the war, but that Jewish spirit was not broken, and as soon as the storm abates, the Jews will rebuild their life, if The Name wills it. How differently, however, it appeared after the Second World War in which the same German who had, in the First World War, been concerned with spiritual support for the Jews, this time targeted our people for destruction and total elimination from the world.

In Budapest in 1917 it could already be noticed that the German and his unfortunate partner, the Austrian, were headed toward inevitable defeat. The transports of wounded soldiers that we saw by the thousands being taken on Budapest's streets to hospitals gave witness that they are not licking honey on the [battle] fronts and the end is near. The entrance of America into the war on the side of England and France poured in a stream of belief that all the misfortunes will soon be over and that Germany will be taught for once and all not to attempt to set the world aflame.

## **The Moral Destruction Following World War One**

We finally lived to see the day on which the First World War ended with the defeat of Germany and its allies. The surviving soldiers began to return home and now the full moral destruction that the four years of war had done in human minds and hearts became apparent. These were no longer the same people: wild, violent animals had come back, not knowing on whom to vent their anger over their broken lives, for their destroyed youth, for the evaporated dreams, for the demolished careers, [all of which] they were not able to restore.

I came to suffer a great deal due to my second-born daughter, Clara, who had also joined a wandering Hungarian opera troupe and finally remained cut-off in that part of Hungary that had been taken over by the Rumanians. For a long time I did not know where she was. Every connection with her was broken and my anxiety was beyond reckoning. No matter what influence I tried to exert, it was for naught. It took many long months until I learned that my daughter was finally free of Rumanian captivity. All that time she had suffered loneliness and need, because the Rumanians had dispersed the Hungarian opera troupe and she was unable to earn for her support. But I was overjoyed that she is alive and hoped that she will quickly be reunited with me.

Meanwhile, Hungary seethed like a boiling kettle. One could somehow feel that storm was in the air. One didn't know when the storm might break and what forms it might take. The destruction that the Rumanians had made in those parts of the country that they had occupied was beyond compare. The factories were destroyed and their machines were expropriated. The grains of the fields were stolen, the retail stores were emptied. This filled the hearts of the returning soldiers with tremendous bitterness that had to find some manifestation.

The population began to agitate against the military-men, against the government, against the speculators who had stolen fortunes during the war. Unemployment grew and, instead of working, one went to meetings where there grew ever louder the call to overthrow the old, rotten order that leads to wars. Ever more often, the poor clashed with the police. Life became insecure and there was also nothing to eat, as well, something that had never been felt in Hungary before.

This was the foundation upon which the Communist uprising in Hungary was to be based. It took place on a fine day in April of 1919. A Hungarian [Leon] Trotsky arose, named Béla Kun, also one of our brothers in Israel, overthrew the old order and promised the people a heaven on earth. First of all they confiscated the [apartment] houses, the factories, the businesses, and the world turned upside down.

Since I also had the misfortune of being a landlord, that role was denied to me on one fine day, and all that was left for me to do was to be silent. The real miracle was that Béla Kun ruled over Hungary for a short while, so he had few opportunities to assure that the destruction would be complete. Still, life was poisoned by the pains that people suffered, the hunger and poverty.

After the short royal rule of three months time, Béla Kun had to flee the country and his place was taken by wicked reaction, embodied by the Hungarian Admiral Horthy. Arrests began to take place everywhere and all the anger was placed, as is customary, on the minority of Jews. It was they who had to

pay the bloody bill that Béla Kun had left. A wave of pogroms engulfed all of Hungary. No Jew could be certain of his life. All had to be responsible for the few Jews who had sat in Béla Kun's cabinet.

I must here describe one "participant" in the Communist upheaval, who belonged to my family. This was a distant female relative of mine whom my father sent me years earlier from Khonorod to help my late wife in the household. She was almost only a child when I had gone to the train to pick her up. Ragged and shabby though she was, I took her into our house where, in the course of years, she became a full-fledged person, saved a few pennies in the bank and even began to meet Hungarian fellows with whom she went out from time to time.

When after the defeat in the war the air began to fill with gunpowder and all employees and housemaids raised their heads, preparing to take over the houses and businesses of their former employers, my relative, too, was infected by the same disease, and under the influence of her familiar young fellows, she began accusing me as an exploiter, a user with whom one must "struggle," completely forgetting that it was me whom she had to thank for taking her out of the dismal dead end that was Khonorod and bringing her into the wide world.

The end was that she joined the "movement," leaving my home. For a long time I did not know where she had gone. When Béla Kun was deposed and the years of reaction arrived, she hid for a long time. Finally she remembered me, the distant family whom she had, with spite and fury, left at a critical moment, and she knocked at my door. She sought protection in my home along with her "husband," a Communist activist.

I hid the couple in my home for a long time, and when the pursuit of former Communists had somewhat abated, I actually performed their wedding at my house. Years later my eldest daughter brought them to America, where they live in pride and joy and even have two sons in the Army.

Those were bitter times in Hungary after the war, both when the Communist terror reigned and later, when the White Terror took revenge on the Red Terror. Not even talking about material impoverishment, when I had lost the entire fortune I had accumulated during all the good years, but the spiritual atmosphere was such that life grew tiresome. My community of the once richest Tabak Temple was greatly impoverished and was truly ruined. The economic ruin of the temple members was reflected in the temple itself.

It was the most desperate period of my life and I had no idea as to how salvation might arrive. But just then, completely unexpectedly, it arrived in the guise of a letter from America. Communications among the various parts of the world had begun to be normalized, and at the end of 1919 I heard from my American cousin, Avrom Kwartin. He reminded me of our old agreement from before the war about a tour of thirty concerts and Sabbath services in the United States of America at the price of thirty thousand dollars that had not come about only because war had broken out.

At almost the same time I received another letter from Herr Taub, who was the assistant cantor to Yosele Rozenblat. He, too, wanted me to undertake a tour of fifteen to twenty concerts and asked what my conditions might be. These two letters were, for me, like a ray of light in heavy darkness. It appears that the world is again a world and that people still remember me and that one must not belittle oneself.

My first responsibilities were toward my cousin who had, before the war, made expenditures in connection with my arrival. I quickly began to make efforts with my Community to renew the

three-month furlough that they had given me before the war and which I had not had the opportunity to use. They did not make any difficulties for me at all and approved my journey.

My cousin wired a thousand dollars to me and also sent two first class steamship tickets on the famous “Ile de France” that was to sail from the port of Cherbourg. I need not relate here the sort of deep experience that was my first journey to America. After the destruction of Russian Jewry that had been occasioned by the Bolshevik Revolution, I felt that the center of Jews in the world is now to be found in America. And all my senses drew me to that center, where I was awaited by so many spiritual elevations as well as no lack of disappointments and failures.

But as usually occurs in such cases, due to my great excitement over facing the realization of my most intimate dream, I fell ill at just the time when I was to take up my belongings and head out on the road. I lay for two weeks in the Jewish Hospital of Budapest, and when I finally got well, my conscience began to plague me: How could I travel away from this land without seeing my daughter Clara, who was by then actually freed from her imprisonment by the Rumanians, but I had still not had the opportunity to see her after all the terrible things she had experienced?

Truth to tell, I had received news from people who had seen her and who reported that she is in a fine Jewish home, but I still wanted strongly to see her before leaving on such a long road. In mid-March, 1920, I and my elder daughter traveled to Paris and, en route, we stopped in Vienna.

Here I bade farewell to my son, here I also bade farewell to my brother and his family and all the other relatives, and I continued on to Paris where, at the office of the steamship line, I was to receive the steamship tickets and then continue on to Cherbourg where I was to go on board the ship.

But my first journey to America turned out to be difficult for me. Wherever I placed my foot I encountered pitfalls that gave me the premonition that something was not right about this journey. I left Vienna in plenty of time so that I would arrive in Paris promptly, manage to take care of everything and arrive at the ship’s departure time. But to my ill-luck, the train was delayed for ten hours and, too, in Paris, where I had never been before, I lost additional time until I located the office of the shipping line. The bottom line was that when I arrived at Cherbourg, the “Ile de France” had departed and I remained standing in the harbor as a fool.

I knew that in New York my *menedzhers* had made all the arrangements for my arrival, and now I had to either wait for another ship of the same line that had a First Class and was to sail in ten days, or to leave via the second rate ship “Adriatic,” that only had space in Third Class and was to drag slowly to New York for all of eleven days.

Having no other choice, I decided on the latter and telegraphed my cousin that I will arrive on the “Adriatic.” But the ill-luck that was persecuting me really grabbed me tightly on that ship and saddened my heart before arriving in the New World. When I saw the cabin in which I was to spend the next eleven days of the journey I felt faint. It was adjacent to the ship’s funnel and was so hot that Hell would certainly have been more endurable.

In addition, on the second day of the journey, I suffered seasickness to such a degree that it was only on the tenth day, close to the shores of America, that I fully recovered. Exhausted and completely drained, I finally saw the Statue of Liberty, that bright symbol of the free world that was a mother to hundreds of

thousands of wanderers who had to leave their homes of poverty and oppression and who came here to build a new life.



## I Arrive in America

It was in this way that I came to America for the first time, as a Third-Class passenger who had wallowed in filth and in indescribable heat in the course of eleven days. I could barely stand upright after having gone through the seasickness and all the vexations that I had lived through. As I had telegraphed my cousin Avrom Kwartin that I am coming on the “Adriatic,” he could not conceive that I wasn’t in First Class. He had sent me First Class tickets, after all.

On Friday, April 11, 1920 we finally arrived in New York harbor. As is the general rule, the first to debark were the First Class passengers and, at the very end, we, the Third Classers. My cousin peeled his eyes, seeking me among the First. He had not the slightest idea that I might be found among the Third Class passengers. He was extremely concerned seeing that I had not arrived and, after waiting for several hours, he left the [English] *pir*.

And he hadn’t come to meet me on his own, but, as is the custom in America, with a whole circle of delegations, among which were: *rabonim*, artists, *khazonim*, synagogue presidents, [English] *sosayetis* [home-town associations] and uncounted others. He needed all of this due to the major publicity he had launched around my arrival and which he needed as dearly as life so that my concerts might be a success.

Finally, around four in the afternoon, they began to allow the debarkation of the passengers in Third Class. Every person was awaited by a close or distant relative. People hugged and kissed, while I and my daughter stood in the port of the greatest city in the world, searching with our eyes for someone to bid us welcome. I began shouting “Kwartin! Avrom! Avrom!” and also called my uncle Khayim’s name, but sadly no one responded.

When I saw that the last passengers are leaving the *pir*, I asked them if, at the exit, they would call out the name “Kwartin,” in case someone is waiting there for me. And this is just what happened. My cousin and his partner and all the others who were awaiting me were standing there in despair, but they had nevertheless not departed. Finally I heard my name being called, and I quickly recognized my cousin with his lame leg, whom I had not seen for more than twenty-four years.

Many of those awaiting had gone off, yet there were still several hundred people standing at the [English] *bariyyer* and they greeted me with a hearty “blessed is he who comes” [welcome]! It was especially pleasing for me to greet the famous preacher Maslyanski, the great Yiddish actor Yankif [Jacob] Adler and, far from the least, *khazn* Yosele Rozenblat, who had come to extend his hand to a colleague whom he had visited years ago in Vienna and whom he had then asked to listen to his voice and express his opinion as to whether he is becoming a *khazn* of the People of Israel...

They loaded my things into an automobile that was driven by a Russian chauffeur, some sort of outstanding member of the pre-revolutionary Russian aristocracy, and drove me off to the Hotel Knickerbocker, where three rooms for me and my daughter had been reserved. I remember as if it were today the trip through the New York streets, through the very center of [streets numbered in] the 40s at evening, when traffic is at its height. I was confused by the noise of the hundreds of automobiles, by the thick human crowds, by the crashing and whistling to be heard from all sides.

All this was in addition to the exhaustion and strained nerves [left by] the misfortunate voyage. I longed to throw myself into bed to rest up a bit, but where — the series of tortures had just begun. As soon as I took my first step on American soil it appeared that I am no longer the master over myself. My two *menedzhers*, my cousin and his business partner, had a super *menedzher* above them, whose name was Relkin. It was he who was the expert on the matter of renting theaters and [English] *hols* and to arrange for the huge publicity program that was to accompany my concert tour.

So as soon as I crossed the threshold of the hotel room and was overjoyed to have a free moment to myself and to regain my strength, I was surrounded by a group of newspaper reporters from the English and Yiddish press. Since I've arrived from Hungary and some sort of Communist revolution had happened there and then the Communists were overthrown — well, so they began to pose questions about what I know about all these happenings.

But here I remembered that I had left two children in Hungary and that I plan to return to my Budapest temple and that therefore I must be careful in discussing the political situation under Horthy. But the journalists would not let me rest, and when they finally departed I felt that all my strength had left me. Yet this wasn't the end of the day's work for me.

Suppertime arrived and my *menedzhers* led me to the restaurant near the hotel. I could not understand a single word on the menu because I was quite bereft of English knowledge. I was handed a half [English] *greypfrut* — a treat we had never seen in Europe. So I began to eat it with bread...My cousin whispered into my ear that this was a kind of hors d'oeuvre to create appetite and that it's not eaten with bread. But it was sour and bitter, so I thought: is the taste of America both bitter and sour?

After supper I believed that I would finally be allowed to rest after the difficult journey. But it was not to be. In America, I was told, it's [English] *biznes for plezhur* and we had quite a bit of *biznes* to discuss. So we came up into the rooms where Herr Relkin was waiting and a conversation began that lasted far into the night.

I asked my cousin about which synagogue I would be chanting on the first Sabbath, because that was what I had written to him in all my letters, that I want my first appearance in America to be Sabbath-chanting in a synagogue, with a proper choir, because I feel that in a synagogue I am in my proper place with an appropriate atmosphere where I am certain that I am in my own home and have no fear that I may not succeed.

My cousin, however, replied with unusual pride that they had not rented a synagogue for my first concert, but the greatest [English] *hol* in New York, that is: the Metropolitan Opera House, where the world's greatest singer, Caruso, appears.

When I heard that it felt as if my head had just been struck by a hammer. It started to become clear to me that my *menedzhers* had not done well by me. What do I care about Caruso, when my place is at the altar. Here I know before Whom I stand and what is demanded of me; here I know all the enchanted strings upon which I must play. Here I speak in the familiar voice with my audience and it is impossible that the audience would not understand me from the first note. I was fearful of the Opera House, and the larger it was the greater was my fear.

I began arguing with my bosses: How could you have done such a thing since I had specifically requested of you that I want to have my first appearance in America in a synagogue, and this would be the

best beginning for me in this attractive land. But of what use are protests when the thing is a done deal? All the tickets to the Opera were sold out. The same was true of the tickets for almost all my other concerts in the Hippodrome, in Carnegie Hall, in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland and in many other cities. Last minute changes were impossible.

All this 'good news' left me very depressed. This was the first time in my *khazonish* career that I was frightened by my successes. I felt with all my senses that it will be different this time, because from its very beginning it was an unlucky journey; from its very beginning it had not gone as I had wished.

Then there began conversations about the program, about the choir, and about tens of other things and when, around two o'clock in the morning, I finally remained alone in the room, I realized what sort of a broken soul I am; how all my nerves are loose and I am barely managing to remain erect. But I couldn't sleep this first night in New York, anyway. Only at dawn did I fall away and awoke around two in the afternoon.

This was my first Sabbath in the new Jewish world. I went wandering in the streets, wanting to be among Jews, to be warmed by them, to sense the breath of the old world that, in recent years in Vienna and Budapest, I had rarely had the chance to feel. I became a bit more cheerful and hoped: perhaps a miracle will occur and all will end in peace. But sadly that miracle did not occur.

## My Unsuccessful Concert at the Metropolitan Opera House

Some months before my arrival in America there was a guest visit here by the famous *khazn* Hershman, who brought with him the conductor Leo Lyov, with whom I had had the pleasure of appearing in many cities in Lithuania during the war. I implored my *menedzhers* to exert themselves to win him for me during the time of my appearances in America.

But sadly this was impossible, because Lyov was already bound by contract to Tomashevski, who was then the *menedzher* of *khazn* Hershman. It was therefore decided to hire the conductor Herman Vol [Wohl]. The orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera was also engaged under conductor Badanski, who was to accompany my daughter Ana in her performance of several opera-arias and songs.

The next evening conductor Vol came to me and we put together the program for the first concert that consisted of the following compositions: "And You Will Keep," by Gurovitsh; "Holiness," by Vol; "How Great," by Levandovski; "At New Year," by Zultser, and the great "Master of the Universe," by Zultser. In between these I was to sing some of my own improvisations.

After putting together the program and after conducting several rehearsals, I believed that now I will take the time to be fully rested before the concert. But since the newspapers were full of unending publicity about my concert and the publicity was accompanied by photos of me, I began to be assaulted by numberless 'aunts' and 'uncles,' male and female 'cousins' and simply 'friends' and 'pals' who 'remembered me from my childhood years,' and all of them began to question and debate with each other. I even had instructed that I was to be left alone, but that was of little help.

*Photo caption on adjoining page:*

***Khazn Kwartin at the New York Metropolitan Opera House, 1920***

They barged into my room through all sorts of tricks, and there could be no talk about a moment's rest.

Various pests plagued and tortured me from morning to late at night, and since I was, after all, a Viennese with its required politesse, I was unable to drive any person out of my home. But I felt that they were pouring salt into my wounds, that nothing good would come of this.

One day, during rehearsal with Vol's choir, I became very emotional over several matters, and when I returned to the hotel I felt bad and broke down; the doctor said that this was nerve-shock: various vexations had accumulated and had subverted my health. Long time rest is required.

This was six days before my first concert at the Metropolitan Opera House. Well, I was very sick and did not fully understand the import of my illness. But my *menedzhers* and my daughter were beside themselves with heartache. The *menedzhers* had already calculated how much they would have to lose if I were not, heaven help us, to get well in time and they would have to postpone the first concert.

When I came back to myself somewhat I asked the *menedzhers* to postpone the concert to a later date. I told them frankly that for me to appear in my present condition would mean to certainly fail. But they

insisted throughout that postponement was impossible. First, they argued, all the tickets had been sold. Beyond that: the professional ticket-brokers had bought up a third of all the tickets and had re-sold them at double and triple their price. If we were now to reimburse the ticket prices, people would demand far more than their face value because they paid more, and this would lead to great ruin.

Secondly, cancellation of the first festive concert in New York would mean a death-knell for all the later concerts. Third, many thousands of dollars in expenses had already been expended. And the final word of these entrepreneurs was: If I am ready to [personally] cover the loss that would amount to nine thousand dollars, they are ready to call off the concert.

Both options would be dark and bitter for me. I did not feel sufficiently strong to make my first appearance in America in such a weakened health-condition, nor was I able to assume such a great [financial] loss and to risk all my other later appearances. I was devoured by pangs of anguish. I finally decided to put my fate into the hands of the Master of the Universe, who might help me in my great need.

I lay in bed until the very evening of my concert. That same day my cousin had brought me a new pair of highly lacquered shoes, a formal shirt with a white bowtie of the very latest style and told me to get out of bed. When I shaved, I remember as though it were today, I could barely stand up. I did everything mechanically, as though in hypnosis. I downed a glass of tea with lemon and wanted to try out my voice, but I somehow feared to open my mouth. I had a premonition of something not good.

I arrived at the opera house twenty minutes before the concert. Conductor Vol and the choir were gathered backstage. He was uneasy because he thought I had not had sufficient rehearsals with the choir due to my illness. I calmed him: "As long as I am in good voice, all will work out."

The curtain rose. The choir stood each in his place. When I mounted the stage my eyes were dazzled by the sea of people I saw. The applause went on for some time. But I felt that my hands and feet were trembling in weakness and nervousness. The applause began to quieten and I heard the beating of my own heart.

The choir began the "And You Will Keep," and I sang my solo in accompaniment by the choir. For a moment I felt that I was not Kwartin, I could not control my voice at all. The applause for "And You Will Keep" was quite weak. This led me into still greater nervousness and confusion. When I then sang my "Love For the World," I already felt clearly that my voice was somehow veiled, soundless and not resonant. The applause after this number was even weaker. I was filled with indescribable fear.

The third number was Vol's "Holiness," a wonderfully beautiful composition with solos for a cantor. Here the applause was a bit stronger. However, I believed that the applause was meant more for the composer of the composition, Herr Vol, than for me. For the fourth number, the last of the first section, I sang "Man Comes From Dust". All of it was not that which the audience expected from that so-highly publicized Chief Cantor Zavel Kwartin, whom they knew so well and loved through his phonograph records.

After finishing the first section I came backstage as a broken person. My failure was comprehensive and, as it's said — with a bang! The question arose: what is to be done about the other sections of the concert? I decided to request of my *menedzhers* that, before I return to the stage, one of them should announce to the audience that I am ill, that against my will I had been forced to come directly to the stage

from my sick-bed. And to tell them, as well, the full truth, that I was not given the opportunity to recover from my very difficult journey and that I beg forgiveness from the public.

When my *menedzhers* heard my demand, they almost lost their minds. How is it possible that I could demand such a thing that would mean causing a true uproar in the hall? As soon as a word would be said that I am sick, people would begin to shout that this is a swindle, they had been fooled, and they would demand that their money be refunded. And, too, the *menedzhers* themselves would be in mortal danger. And besides that, who might then come to the following two concerts that had already been announced — at the Hippodrome and in Carnegie Hall?

Too, the conductor, Herr Vol, began to calm me, [saying] that such things happen to the greatest of artists, and that I should not eat my heart out. The second and third sections of the program will certainly come off better, so we must not cause any useless hubbub and let everything go on in its normal course.

The second section was sung mostly by my daughter, accompanied by the orchestra. I only presented one of my improvisations. It is a fact that her success that evening was greater than mine. My father's heart swelled upon gaining such prideful joy from a child of his.

During the intermission, the huge foyers of the Metropolitan and the balconies were full of whispering that something was not in order at this concert; it must certainly be a swindle. They had not brought the real Kwartin, but a phony, in order to hustle the people's few dollars. The first to spread this rumor were my honored colleagues, the *khazonim*. As I was later told and as was confirmed by the late, great *khazn* among Jews, Yosele Rozenblat, he was encircled in the foyer by a group of *khazonim* who, in spite and gall, pointed their fingers at him: "Ha, what have you got to say about this swindle?" To which Yosele, peace be to him, replied: "Shut up, you shameless ones, you're spreading falsehoods about the genius of Jewish prayer!" I was told this some time later by Yosele Rozenblat in his own words.

The third and final section of this most mournful concert of my life was somewhat more cheerful for me, but it could by no means rescue my reputation that had been destroyed by my first failed number. There was no vestige of what could have and was supposed to have been and which the public expected from the name of Zavel Kwartin. I was applauded and even greeted when I exited the Opera House, but I heard in the applause more of an expression of sympathy and mercy than of recognition. I acknowledged fully to myself that my first appearance in the world-city of New York was a total failure.

## My Second Concert in New York Erases the Stain of My First Failure

Barely alive after the greatest tragedy that had ever struck me in all my long career as a *khazn*, I dragged back to my hotel room. My nearest, that is, my daughter and Herr Shulman, who later became my son-in-law, did not let me out of their sight and guarded my every movement. They probably read my thoughts, how close I was then to the despondent thought of wanting to do myself in due to profound loss and brokenness.

When I remained alone by myself and was able to rethink calmly what had occurred to me — my last sixteen years of public service in Jewish life began to pass before me. Yaroslav and Vienna, Petersburg and Budapest, a long chain of constant successes, an unending march upward, higher and higher, from day to day and from year to year my prestige grew. Jews came to love me, esteem and honor me, and even often to venerate me, as the person who most profoundly expresses their yearnings and dreams. A bright, streaming sun did not cease to shine in my sky and to accompany my every step.

And now, suddenly — such a fall, such sinking down! From so high, so low had I fallen in a descent to the gates of Hell! Such a moral defeat that it causes me to glance at the balcony of my hotel room on the twelfth floor and to think: Here, just one leap out the window and I will be freed of all the pain that has deeply penetrated my soul! — My heart hurt so much that I barely believed I might yet overcome this destructive blow that fate had meted out to me.

My daughter consoled me with the most heartfelt words. She tried to redirect my thoughts in another direction, ordered something to eat from room service; she explained to me that the world was not yet coming to an end, no matter what might sometimes happen to a person, things will yet be good. But for me it was a devilish night with unending thoughts about putting an end to myself. When, at around four in the morning, I finally threw myself into bed — there could be no talk of my falling asleep. The tragic events ruled over me!

At around seven in the morning I got dressed and went down to the little garden alongside the public library [Bryant Park?]. The cool morning invigorated me, my nerves calmed down a bit, my thoughts became clearer and I began to recover belief in myself, that the world is still the world, and it is yet to be seen whether Zavel Kwartin is really such a cripple as it might have seemed yesterday.

At around nine in the morning, as I ate breakfast with my daughter, Herr Shulman arrived with my cousin, the entrepreneur of the whole undertaking. They brought along the Yiddish and English newspapers that had already managed to publish reports of last night's absurd concert. They tore me to pieces. The worst critics were in the *forverts* [Yiddish Daily Forward] and the *tog* [The Day]. Ab Cahan [editor-in-chief] himself wrote in the *forverts* and he left not a single stitch on me. By contrast, the reviews of my daughter's appearance were very favorable. This was enough to return me to a melancholy mood. But my cousin, Avreml, rubbed his hands in glee: he told of the great material success that yesterdays' concert had brought.

My cousin's daring was so great that he began to speak atop my fresh wounds about the next concert that was to take place four days later in Carnegie Hall. I made it clear to him that I would not be able to

continue with my concerts unless the following conditions were met: First of all, the concert in Carnegie Hall must be cancelled at once; Second, I must be taken out of the hotel immediately and transferred to a private, bourgeois home where I might be a familiar guest and not have to feed at the restaurant where my gall was turned topsy-turvy by all the strange dishes which I was not used to.

When my cousin heard that they would have to call off the concert at Carnegie Hall he began to shout that this means a huge material loss. I assumed part of the [monetary] damages and finally the concert was cancelled. As to the second point, about leaving the hotel — that was more easily dealt with. My cousin just happened, some time ago, to have bought an eight-room house in Brooklyn, so we moved there that very day.

That evening, when my cousin's wife had cooked our first meal in the old home style, as we were used to in old Russia — I immediately felt like another person. You should not laugh at your stomach, it is often the source of your upset nerves, of a fallen-mood condition. Somehow I became restored and more cheerful, the world took on a new appearance in my eyes.

I instructed all [my guardians] around me not to permit others to approach me, enjoyed complete rest, and each day my failure at the Metropolitan began to concern me less. I began to believe that I would repay with interest, and that Zavel Kwartin would yet be here in America, too, the same that he had been for the Jews across the sea over many long years.

With the improvement of my mood and of my outer appearance, my voice began to clear; it grew brighter and more resonant, I no longer feared opening my mouth in my room. I totally recovered my inner balance and began to feel more secure day by day.

When the date of the Hippodrome concert drew near, it having been scheduled as the third but was actually the second, because the middle concert, in Carnegie Hall, was meanwhile removed, I said to my *menedzhers*: "Children, we can travel! The wagon [wheels] is well-greased, and I anticipate that there will be no more difficulties."

And good fortune actually came to me this time. It was with assured steps that I ascended to the huge stage. I did not walk, but I flew. I was carried by a mighty inner strength of belief and certainty. The choir sounded the first chords and my voice tore out as though I wanted to shut the mouths of all the evil and intolerant people who had already rubbed their hands in glee over the one time that I had failed and who had already buried me alive. They did not want to understand that one is no more than human, a gentle net of invisible matter that does not always come together harmoniously as we might want and desire.

What occurred at the Hippodrome which, despite my first failure at the Opera, was over-packed by Jews — is difficult for me to describe. The audience enthusiasm was so great that I was literally carried by hand off the stage into the automobile. The street was black, I was deafened by the joyous shouts. I well noticed the numerous Hungarian Jews with the heated temperament with which they had come to greet the Budapest *khazn* who had created such honor for their community.

It was as though a magic wand had cleansed me of the shame of my first failure at the Metropolitan Opera. The Yiddish newspapers, too, pealed with praise about Kwartin, that this is now the real Kwartin, not a counterfeit, as thousands of Jews knew him from his prayers on the gramophone records that never departed any Jewish home.



The best reviews in the newspapers, as well as the fame that quickly spread from my extraordinary success at the Hippodrome, immediately produced an abundance of *menedzhers* and synagogue leaders who came to “hire” Kwartin for a Sabbath or a concert. And they turned up from all the corners of America. The first five Sabbaths were bought by the conductor Ruvn [Reuben] Kazimirski at the price of seventeen hundred dollars per Sabbath. The first days of Passover were “seized” by a *sosayeti* [hometown mutual aid group] paying two thousand and five hundred dollars. And so it kept pouring as though from a porous sack.

After New York the turn came for the large cities: Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago, Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg. Here the local *menedzhers* handled things [English] *holseyl*, with three or four concerts for the smaller cities. They paid fantastic prices, the record being my *shvues*/Shavuot chanting in Chicago. The [English] *kongregeyshon* “Anshei Shalom,” [People of Peace], which was then located on Ashland Boulevard, with Rabbi Shaul Silver at its head, paid me for the two days of *shvues* four thousand and five hundred dollars, and in addition they were to provide and pay the choir.

If, someday, the history of *khazones* among Jews is to be written — the historian will not be able to omit [the fact] that my triumphal tour of America, after having suffered such a disaster right at my opening in New York, was something that one might not have by any means encountered earlier by any Jewish *khazn* in the world. In Chicago Jews tore after the tickets and paid up to fifteen dollars for the opportunity to hear me chant the morning and supplemental holiday prayers. That was a huge sum of money in those days.

I do not intend, heaven preserve us, to say thereby that I must be recorded as the best *khazn* that Jews had ever had. I know quite well and self-acknowledge that there were greater and better *khazonim* than I. But I must give myself credit for having conscientiously, honorably and in the most loyal manner, always fulfilled my duties. My profound foreboding regarding my failure at the New York Metropolitan Opera House and my unwillingness to appear, which was then literally forced on me, is the best evidence that I did not always tread on a secure bridge, that I had the deepest respect for my listeners and wanted to appear before them only when I was one-hundred percent certain that I would be able to give them that which they expect of me. Sadly, that could not be said of many other artists of that time, who took the audience for granted and believed in themselves more than was justified for them.

## America Becomes My Second Home

My remarkable first visit to America, where I was almost buried six feet deep at the beginning and then I was suddenly raised up to the heavens — this tremendous experience gave me the opportunity to consider the phenomenon called: success in life. I never had blind faith in myself, so therefore I assured with the greatest precision that the holy work I do should be carried out cleanly and neatly, with all the sacredness demanded of a genuine representative of the community.

I never approached the pulpit without having first gone through for myself my own improvisations, or the compositions that I was to sing with the choir. In my fifty year *khazonish* career I never arrived by as much as sixty seconds late for my functions and divine services. I always devoted my greatest efforts to understanding the character and the psychic nature of my listeners and and endeavored with all my strengths to fulfill their needs.

I never sought out defects in my community or president, I did not seek to cause them pain. If I sometimes required something of them — I tried to achieve it with tact and honor, and not with insolence. And it is a fact that in this way I always achieved everything that I requested. And quite often I requested far from easy things that were quite difficult for them to provide.

I valued and honored my community and also benefitted from the same valuation from their side. When I stood at the altar — I forgot about all the minor, earthly concerns and desires to attain still more, to assure an ever-better future, as is common among people. I surrendered myself one-hundred percent to “know before Whom I stand” and sought to give the strongest and fullest of which I was capable.

The New York lesson was for me unneeded evidence that one must never exceed one’s own strengths, that an artist must, before appearing in public, listen carefully to the voice of his own heart and not to the boasting of the *menedzhers* that the ticket booth is crammed with money and that the newspapers drum the artist’s name. If the inner voice of the heart advises: do not appear — this voice must be obeyed. And when I did not obey one time, I failed very badly and paid for it very dearly.

The three-month furlough in America that I had been granted by my Budapest Community began to approach its end. I decided to dedicate one of the last Sabbaths to my Hungarian fellow-countrymen in their synagogue, where Yosele Rozenblat, peace to him, was the appointed cantor. I received permission from that great *khazn* to take his place on a Sabbath, and the entire income for my chanting, some twelve hundred dollars, I assigned to the officials of my Budapest Community. I knew that this Community was deeply impoverished after the First World War and that its officials suffered need. The best evidence was the heartfelt letter of thanks that I received from them for the aid I’d sent.

I later became aware of how highly my modest gesture had been appreciated in Budapest by the president and all the Community representatives. It was the gesture of an Eastern European Jew who was entirely incomprehensible among the *yekes* [Germanized] and *magyarn* [Magyar, Hungarian] Jews of my temple. I was pleased that perhaps I had thereby exerted influence to change their opinion about the Russian Jews, which was never too high among them.

When I was three weeks before the conclusion of my three-month furlough, I was still contractually bound for ten more concerts. I doubted whether I would be able to return in time to my Community and

my conscience began to plague me lest I fail to keep my word to them. And as though by spite, a flood of offers came from *kongregeyshons* and temples that wanted me to chant on the Days of Awe and to recruit me for year-long positions. The amounts of money being offered from all sides were huge.

My *menedzhers* as well as my relatives began to argue that it would be the height of foolishness for me to leave now before the Days of Awe while so many rich offers were pouring down. I then wrote to my Community in Budapest [asking them] to allow me another three-month furlough because they won't let me leave here and I really do want to make use of my presence in America to travel across the country and to become better acquainted with local Jewish life. I had firmly decided for myself that, should my Community not grant me the additional furlough — I would make no delay, pack my things and return home.

So God came to my aid and the Community in Budapest allowed me to remain away from home for three more months. At that moment they did not know that by this genteel decision on their part they had done themselves evil, because — they lost me as Chief Cantor forever. Events determined that my paths no longer led to Budapest.

First of all, I received a letter from Budapest, from my son Shloyme, that conditions in Hungary after my leaving had worsened considerably. The terror of the Horthy régime rages across all the land and is aimed primarily against Jews. Jewish government employees, such as: judges, professors, teachers, are being fired. A quota limitation on Jewish students at the universities was enforced, as in the worst Czarist times in Russia. In addition there is a full-fledged economic crisis. The land is ruined and impoverished due to the war- and revolution-events. Especially struck were the Jewish merchants and the Jewish middle class in general. This greatly affected the Tabak Temple and all its employees. Salaries were cut and the employees suffer poverty.

My late elder son who [then] lived in Vienna described a similar scene in the life of the Austrian capital, and both continued to advise me that I should not dare to think of returning to this ruined Europe when I find myself in America and — as they hear — I have great success here. And they also did not forget to add that I should not waste any time but to see to it that they might come here, too, because they see no future whatever for themselves in Europe.

Too, my disappeared daughter, Clara, who was imprisoned by the Rumanians during the war, returned to Vienna and, upon learning that I was in America along with her elder sister — she began bombarding me with letters [stating] that under no circumstances should I dare to return to Europe, but that, rather, I should see about bringing her here, to the new world.

Lest all this was insufficient — one extremely important factor was added that completely tipped the scales toward America against Europe. My eldest daughter, Ana, who came with me to America on my tour of concerts and Sabbath chanting, found her predestined mate here.

When my American cousin, Abie Kwartin, made me his first offer about coming to America and he described his fabrication of paper boxes, how he established his own factory, he then added that he had been forced to take on a partner, a young lawyer who understands the minute details [of business] better than he, Avreml from Khonorod. He then described to me that this is a fine young man who is concerned with all the outer connections that a [English] *fektori* in America must have while he, Avreml, takes care of the physical labor and together, they both do not at all badly.

Avreml had also written to me that this same business partner of his had expressed his readiness to become a partner, as well, in the great enterprise of bringing me to America. He invests money and helps in working out all the necessary papers and does what he can to assure that my arrival should be successful. When we finally arrived in New York harbor exhausted and broken on the “Adriatic,” and were barely able to see our cousin, he introduced us to his partner who called his name: Mr. Shulman.

This Mr. Shulman later became my son-in-law.

This event finally bound and knotted me to America. I felt more and more that my future is bound to this country and I began to make preparations to bring over my other children who were still wallowing in a destroyed Europe, unable to obtain higher education due to limitations on Jews.

A third moment that spoke to my tying my further fate to the amazing land called America was — the overwhelming feeling of freedom that I encountered as soon as I trod upon the local soil. I traveled across the country for months on end without anyone ever asking me about a passport, who I am, where I come from. The country also pleased me because anyone not too lazy to work finds here the opportunity to rise up, to develop all his abilities.

But when the end of the second three-month furlough that I had obtained from my Community in Budapest started approaching, I realized that my innards were grumbling; somehow I had an unclean conscience over the sin I’m about to commit against my dear Budapest Jews. They had treated me as well as anyone might imagine. They had paid my children my full salary during the time I was in America, knowing quite well that at the same time I was earning fistfuls of money. And they did this during the time when, prior to my leaving, I had specifically told them that they need not pay my wages during the furlough.

I must declare here before all my people and community that the Budapest Cult Community was one of the finest Jewish communities in the world. Despite the semi-Reformed *rabiners* who exerted themselves to change its truly Jewish appearance, it yet remained a Jewish community with the finest of Jewish traditions, with strong ethical principles, with a system of “anonymous charity” that would be an honor for even such a community as New York. Hundreds of fallen families that were once rich were helped out by this community in a quiet and gentle manner, so that no one might have guessed how these families manage to live. I have hidden in my heart the most beautiful feelings for them and their work.

There were Jews there who put their Hungarian patriotism higher than their Jewishness, who were sometimes even ashamed of their Jewish origin and treated one of our Jews from Russia, Poland or Lithuania with the deepest distaste and hatred. But I must still say that they were negligible in the sea of dear, hearty and upstanding Jews who carried high the banner of Jewish traditions and were distinguished by the most genteel Jewish traits.

My conscience tortured me over my having to repay them thus for their noble dealing with me, that I will not even come to them for the Days of Awe. My old friend, Behm, wrote to me from Budapest that the community’s situation is very dire and that his advice is that I remain in America for as long as I can. But precisely because I heard that their situation is dire, I wanted to be with them, and perhaps my presence with them during the Days of Awe might somehow improve their situation.

But life was stronger than all my hidden desires. Seeing that I will not to be able to return to my community for the holidays, I wrote them and explained the full truth that they [the locals] do not allow

me under any circumstances whatever to leave for the Days of Awe and that I hope in time to compensate them for the unpleasantnesses that I am creating for them by not returning promptly.

Their reply was that they accept in deep regret the news that I will not be with them during the holidays, but since I present them with a completed fact that they are unable to change, they wish me great joy and they hope that I will return to them right after the holidays. This reply, too, contained gentility and fineness beyond limits that I had to recognize. Sadly, I was helpless to give them practical aid. All the events militated against my ever being able to return to these genteel people and fine Jews.

Meanwhile, my *menedzhers* did not rest. They saw that it had been quite difficult for me to decide not to return to Europe, so they wanted to surprise me with the large sums of money I was about to earn by chanting during the Days of Awe in America. They declared that they plan to rent the huge Masonic Temple in Brooklyn for this purpose. Up until the final moment I struggled against this idea because in my heart I considered my treatment of the Budapest Community as a deliberate betrayal.

It was not only about the Days of Awe. I specifically felt that my entire future is at stake; do I remain in America or do I return to Europe [?]. My children kept bombarding me [urging] that I bring them over soonest, and my material situation in America promised to be more secure than [it would be] in the old home. So all that remained was my sentiment toward the Budapest temple, for their fine and noble behavior toward me. Life had proven that merely this sentiment was insufficient to change the further course of my life.

I finished chanting the Days of Awe at that cited Masonic Temple and had, it seems, succeeded very well with Brooklyn's Jews, because right between *rosheshone* and *yonkipur* [Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur] a committee came to me from Temple Emanuel in Borough Park, led by their president Frank, and offered me the year-round post of Chief Cantor. When I asked: who is their current cantor, they replied: yes, they had had a *khazn* over the course of thirteen years, but now they have decided to dismiss him.

I was so enraged by this reply that I told them right then and there that a *kongregeyshon* that can dismiss its *khazn* of thirteen years cannot negotiate with me about taking on a position with them. They left me as though I'd spanked them. At the same a *menedzher* turned up who wanted to "buy" me for twenty or twenty-five concerts, but I put all this aside until over the holidays when I will finally decide whether I remain here or "there."

My cousin, Avrom Kwartin, wasn't asleep, either. One fine day he announced that he is negotiating with the Brunswick Gramophone Company [Record Corp.] about my making records, and that he hopes to conclude the matter successfully, and this is no small matter: a sum of tens of thousands of dollars is involved. In one word: America smiled on me in all its thousands of hues, she enticed and entranced me with her greatest magic: well-being and success in life.

After the tremendous success of my Days of Awe chanting at the Masonic Temple, there was no longer the slightest doubt that am remaining here as a local. All that was left was for me to formally notify my Community in Budapest that, because of my children, one of whom is soon to be married in America, and the others are struggling to come here because they cannot continue their education in Europe — because of all this I am forced with a heavy heart to permanently resign my position as Chief Cantor of the Tabak Temple.

Hardly a few weeks passed before a committee of Temple Emanuel in Borough Park, this time with their new president, Herr Hipp, came again to me about taking over the position of Chief Cantor. They ignored the fact that I'd already sent them off once before, because they had the gall to dismiss a previous *khazn* who'd been with them for thirteen years. Since it was a matter of "*biznes*" — they figured that finally I would not bring up that "foolishness."

This was a temple of rich Jews, but it could accommodate only eight hundred people. So they had decided to enlarge the temple to sixteen-hundred seats, which had driven them into a great expenditure of one hundred and twenty thousand dollars. *Nu*, so they were now seeking a "name" to help them recover the money that they'd spent on the building and to crawl out of their debts.

Since Herr Hip was a good *biznesman*, he quickly got down to brass tacks. "How much?" he asked me, "What salary per year do you require of us?" My answer was clear: If they will not guarantee me that the *khazn* who has been with them in the course of thirteen years would remain with them as Second Cantor and would be assured of an income, I will not speak with them and they will never hear my [other] conditions. The truth was that I had never seen that cantor with my own eyes. It was a matter of principle not to violate someone's boundaries, as we were used to in our old Europe.

My wardens fixed their eyes upon me: they were not used to such words, and they almost asked me "Why is that your *biznes*?" but I was firmly determined not to retreat.

## My *Khazones* Job in Brooklyn

I instructed my future employers at Temple Emanuel that in all the Jewish communities of Europe there was an accepted tradition that, when a cantor is engaged for a year's time and they are pleased with him during that first year — he then remains at the job for the rest of his life. Therefore, I cannot allow myself to take over their *khazn*'s job, leaving him without an income.

I then asked them how much is paid to their current cantor — so they replied that [it is] fifteen hundred dollars per year. To my second question, as to for how long they wish to engage me, the answer was, for five years. So I then said to them: My first condition is that they pay the current cantor not fifteen hundred, but eighteen hundred dollars per year, and to give him a contract for five years, and he would remain at the temple as Second Cantor, and possibly also obtain another employment that they may find it needful to give him. If they accept this condition, we might then proceed to consider my further demands.

The Jews regarded each other and thought to themselves: What sort of “oddball” is this Kwartin who has come from Europe to teach wealthy Americans how to deal with their communal employees? What does it mean if an American president and his [English] “*trustis*” and all his “*members*” should not be able to throw out an ordinary *khazn* whenever they find it necessary?

I provided them with a parable about someone who wed a young, pretty woman, used her beauty and youth and then, seeing a fresh new young woman whose youthfulness is enticing, he would decide to throw away the first and to marry the second. How would society regard such a person? Wouldn't it condemn him in the harshest terms? — So if an individual is forbidden to do this by unwritten moral laws, why should a Jewish community be able to deal thus, since it must be a model for the individual?

The Jews sat there. Something stirred in them upon hearing such moralistic speech from me, but they could make no reply. Finally they went into another room and consulted for a few minutes. Returning, they shamefacedly reported that they accept my first condition, but they are desperately eager to hear what are my actual conditions, meaning: How much?

I declared that I demand fifteen thousand dollars per year in salary for chanting three times per month; they must provide a first-class choir and must also give me a furlough (in the local language, *vekeyshon*) that should begin right after *shvues* [and last] until the first *slikhes*/Slichot [pre-new year service].

It seems these were not such difficult conditions for them, because right on the spot they offered me twelve thousand dollars per year. We separated [on the basis] that they would call a meeting of their congregants and see what might be done about fulfilling my conditions. We in my family meanwhile decided that it would be far healthier for me to take over a permanent position rather than to travel constantly, and that it is time to establish a home and to bring over my children and to again be all together.

Within a week Herr Hip and his *trustis* returned and they reported that my base salary cannot be greater than twelve thousand dollars per year, but they undertake to arrange for me an annual Hanuka-concert and assume the task of selling all the tickets. I accepted these conditions. I demanded only one other thing: to write into the contract that the other *khazn* was to chant the final prayer on the

Day of Atonement so that his feelings might not be hurt and to provide him with moral satisfaction. They accept this condition, as well.

So I was, that is, a Brooklyn *khazn* with a firm salary. But this did not interfere with my closing a contract with a *menedzher* from St. Louis regarding a series of twenty concerts at six-hundred fifty dollars per concert, and I had to finish off the entire series in the course of one month's time. Those were plentiful years and it is with no small feeling of envy that I look back on them today.

On the first of January, 1921, I began to chant at Temple Emanuel, in Borough Park. I had the aid of a wonderful choir under the famous conductor, Zavl [Zanvl] Zilbert, who succeeded in establishing a shining harmony between us. Our success was extraordinary and I believe that the Brooklyn Jews had every basis to be satisfied with the "match" they had concluded with me.

Awaiting my children from Europe, I prepared a large dwelling of seven rooms in Brooklyn. And in that same dwelling it soon came to me to lead to the *khupe* [wedding bower] my first-born child, Ana. Right after the wedding I undertook the concert-tour that I had contracted with the St. Louis *menedzher*. But I must confess that through this concert-tour I did an unconsidered thing that I later deeply regretted. In the course of barely a month's appearing and singing twenty-six times — that was beyond the strength of even such a powerful and well-feeling person as I was then. As an example I note here that I had to sing: Friday evenings at the Sabbath greeting; the next day, early morning and supplemental Sabbath prayers; Saturday evening — a concert, and on Sunday, two concerts in two separate cities. But thank God that one was in good health and could carry this out. I returned from the tour a broken person, and promised myself that I would not do that again...

Meanwhile my sons came from Europe and began to study English in order to be able to attend the American universities. By contrast, my younger daughter, Clara, remained in Vienna, where she was accepted into the folk-opera company there. I devoted myself body and soul to my temple service. I chanted that first Passover to the great delight of the thousands of congregants. A large part [of the credit] for the huge success was owed to the conductor Zilbert and his wonderfully rehearsed choir. It was a prideful joy and delight to sing with this choir and its director, but sadly the enjoyment did not last long. Though Zilbert was a good conductor and musician, he was simultaneously a nervous, impatient and jealous person.

He occupied the finest position at Temple Emanuel that a Jewish conductor held in America at that time. His salary was three thousand dollars per year, besides large side incomes. He had under his control a choir of the best voices, but he constantly went about ill at ease and always complained to the wardens of the Temple because Kwartin earns more than he does. This ate at him. He also complained to me for not standing up for him with the wardens, the president and the *trustis*, that he be paid at least five thousand dollars per year. In total honesty I assured him that I would have no objection to his earning the same sum as I. I spoke on his behalf many times, but I was unable to achieve anything.

The end was that Zilbert put an ultimatum to the temple, and when his demands were not met, he stood up and left. This was a great loss for me and I regretted it very much. To fill his place they engaged as conductor Professor Braslavski, a first-class musician and good conductor and over time we grew close and worked together in complete harmony.



But it seems that it is human nature: to envy him who attains a better position in life. And, quite often, this feeling of envy is not a peaceful feeling; it is not limited to asserting that things go better on earth for this or that person for specific reasons that had been created by fate. O, no, the feeling of envy quite often takes on the sharp forms of not begrudging, of disliking him who had ascended to a higher level on the social ladder of life, and from there it's but a short step to beginning to undermine the person one doesn't begrudge, to trying to harm him and, if possible — to destroy him entirely and thereby to be rid of the ghost always standing before one's eyes that doesn't allow attaining one's own life.

I encountered this unwholesome phenomenon dozens of times in my long communal and social career.

What could I do if fate smiled upon me and always raised me above the commonalities that surrounded me [?]. This was, after all, the gift of God that shined like a jewel, enthralled those near and distant, made me the ruler where others walked subserviently, with quiet steps, and often feared to open their mouths.

Just such a painful case of jealousy and deep envy accosted me at the time I was the Chief Cantor of Temple Emanuel in Borough Park. One might think that among Jewish clergy, non-begrudging and jealousy would have no place, but this evil spirit actually entrenched itself deeply in those circles and this brought no shortage of harm to Jewish communal life.

This time it wasn't the Second *Khazn* or the conductor who bitterly resented the fact that my salary was greater than his. No, it was a *rabay*, the official *rov* [rabbinic leader] of the temple who should have been the spiritual leader of his Community, but who, in fact, through his deep hatred, went so far as...throwing old prayers out of the prayer-book so that I might not chant them. So delusional was he toward me.

## **A *Rabay* Who Seeks to Circumcise the Old Jewish Year-Round and Holiday Prayer Books**

I will not name the *rabay* so that in case he is still alive and active somewhere in America, he need not be ashamed should he happen to read these lines. It can be said that from the very first moment that I crossed the threshold of Temple Emanuel, he set himself against me and begrudged me the moral and material position that I occupied in that temple.

There was an established principle in America that the *rabay* stood above the cantor. Whether this was because the cantor wasn't an outstanding personality who forced him to provide the greatest attention, or because the *rabay* was truly the proper spiritual guide for his community, thereby placing himself at the highest rank — it is a fact that this was how things were in America for many long years. When I came to the temple that had agreed to all my conditions and immediately occupied a leading role [where] my every word was heard and glance observed, that displeased this *rabay* and he began to agitate against it.

He began to lead intrigues against me and, seeing that he could not prevail, he put an ultimatum to the wardens of the temple: him or me. So the *kongregeyshon* did not deliberate for long and replied: me...that is, if the *rabay* is displeased with how the *kongregeyshon* relates to me — he may go. And he did, indeed, depart.

So new *rabays* began to apply: with beards and without beards, with a doctorate or without a doctorate, the learned and the unlearned, reputable ones and quite-fine bluffers, genteel and modest ones as well some very great braggarts. Until there arrived a young man of thirty-something years who had memorized a half dozen [English] “*spitshes*” [speeches] with which to impress the common folk. He was, heaven forfend, no great scholar, but the address he delivered was well [Yinglish] “*oysgefikst*” [tricked out] and it led him across a solid bridge. So he spoke in my temple on a Friday evening and conquered the synagogue's Jews with a single shot; he was congratulated on all sides and was immediately engaged as the *rabay* of the temple.

I must confess that I, myself, fell under the spell of his fiery speech in the synagogue and although I did not understand much English at that time, I was caught up in the general enthusiasm and when he was finally hired as the *rabay* of the temple, I congratulated him heartily on his appointment.

The new *rabiner* spoke every Sabbath at the synagogue and his popularity grew still greater, because he also did not fail to include in his speech a witticism, or a “*dzhok*” as it's called here, and the more common crowd enjoyed the witticism more than the Torah-teaching that it barely understood.

We became close friends and he did not spare me any compliments, that it is a great honor for him to find himself in the same temple as the famous, etc., Cantor Kwartin, and the more compliments he paid me, the more foul an odor there arose from that sweet talk. I once told him that instead of paying me compliments, he might better draw my attention to errors I make, so that I might learn something from him, because I am laden with compliments, may no evil eye appear, up to my ears.

He was quickly convinced that I could not be bought with compliments, that I am not the right person for such things, so he withdrew from me and decided to try to build his future career at my expense. He

began going from house to house, from householder to householder, everywhere the sycophant, in order to create friends for himself. He figured that this would be useful for him in the future. When he would enter a house he would begin to tell witticisms to the housewife, stroked the children's heads; he convinced the young boys and girls that a blessing from him was as good as one from the heavens, and in this manner he won over naïve people.

After a few months, when it appeared to him that he was seated firmly in the saddle, he thought to himself that the right time had arrived to begin to do something to undermine the position that I occupied in the *kongregeyshon*. At first he began a movement among the *trostis* and among the congregants generally, [urging that] we must somewhat reform the prayer-service, and that certain prayers, rather than being sung in Hebrew, would be better if "said" in English.

At one of the meetings of the temple *trustis* he said that at an intelligent *kongregeyshon*, as is Temple Emanuel, it is not fitting that, when removing the Torah Scroll from the Holy Ark, the *khazn* should lead the way and the *rabay* following; it should be the reverse: the *rabay* in front with the *khazn* dragging along behind him, carrying the Torah Scroll. And this *rabay* came up with many more such "reforms."

The majority of the [English] "*members*," unlearned Jews, who were very weak in navigating the "little letters" [of the holy books], nodded their heads at everything that the silver-tongued *rabay* proposed. But there were also Jews of the old style, bound to the traditions of their old home, who sharply raised their voices against any reforms whatever.

When proposed changes were discussed that didn't affect me I paid no attention and thought: May he be well served by his Reformism and his desire to be considered an expert scholar. But when he began to target me and my style of prayer, here I could not be silent. I never allowed myself to be pushed around by various *rabiners* and other busybodies, and this time, as well, I spoke up sharply in defense of those traditions that were holy and dear to me.

This *rabay* undertook no more and no less than to deprive me of such prayers as "Lay Us Down," "Love of the Universe" and others, and instead of my singing them in the original, as has been done by Jews for generations, he simply wanted them to be simply murmured in English. I could also not agree to such dishonoring of our old, Holy Torah, by letting it be dragged behind the *rabay* who insisted on parading as the first among the temple's congregants.

Once, on a weekday, when I was observing *yortsayt* [annual commemoration of a familial death] and came to the temple for afternoon prayers, the *rabay* asks me to come into his office at the temple, [because] he needs to discuss something with me. When I entered, he would have me understand how important it is to democratize the *kongregeyshon* and to reform the prayer-service. I replied quite sharply that, as to me and my prayer-service, he had better let it be, he should not attempt any reforms and should better see to building up the *kongregeyshon* as it is, in the old Jewish-traditional spirit. The *rabay* said nothing, but I could note that he is not giving up his evil objectives and that he had decided to continue undermining me.

After *shvues*, when according to the contract I left on summer vacation, I was replaced by the other *khazn*, Herr Nosn [Nathan] Cantor. This *khazn* had never forgotten what I had done for him, that I had not even wanted to hear about accepting the job unless his future were secured by a five-year contract and an increase of his salary. He appreciated my humane treatment of him and was devoted to me in body and

soul, he was as loyal to me as to a brother and didn't allow a bad word to fall upon me. He called me "Father Kwartin," though he was much older than I.

I, from my side, did everything [to assure] that his situation should be further improved. I gave him all the fees from weddings and *bar mitsves* [bar mitzvah — coming of age ceremony] for which I was not anxious, because I lacked the time and health to earn [more than enough] at side concerts and appearances. He also received all the emoluments connected with [individual's] being called to read the Torah. He put together several dollars for which I couldn't be happier.

Sitting there during the summer in my [English] *kotedzh* in Loch Sheldrake where I prepared for my first Days of Awe at the temple and where I also began to write my first liturgical work, "Songs of Zebulon," and wanted to organize my own improvisations — I receive a letter from the Second *Khazn* [saying] that it would be well if I were to come for a day to Brooklyn, because the *rabay* is working busily, he's moving mountains to carry out his reforms. The Second *Khazn* wrote in jest that the *rabay* had become a "*moyel*" [circumcisor]...he wants to cut off not only me and him [the Second], but he wants to do the same to the old Jewish daily and holiday prayer books.

This cited *rabay* made use of my absence to forcefully carry out his evil plans against me personally, and his insolently-directed reform ideas against the ancient prayers that he wanted to literally "cut out" of the daily and holiday prayer books and switch them over into English. Toward that end he had called a [English] *ritshuel komite miting* of the temple where he argued at length with the ordinary Jews there present that they had to without fail "rescue" the youth of the temple and that the road to that rescue is: to use less and less prayers in the Holy Tongue and more and more in English. For the youth, he wanted to convince the "*members*," this would be a true salvation, they would quickly become loyal and pious Jews and will be bound eternally to the Jewish people.

When I had been in America somewhat longer, I later saw how easy it was for our unfortunate "reformers" to convert the ignorant Jews of their communities into "reformed" Jews, heaven help us. It was enough for such a minimally educated little *rabay* kid to stroke the chins of his flock and to tell them that they are the very cream of the crop, that they are the foundation not only of the *kongregeyshon* but of all Judaism — and he easily won them to his side with this sycophantic, saccharine talk. He bluffed them with the false luster of a foreign, Christian world, wanting to convince them that the more they imitate the Gentiles, the more respect they will gain. In truth this was the path to the denial of Jewish roots, to the alienation of our children, rather than bringing them closer to the old Jewish source.

## The Rabbi Seeking “Reforms” in My Temple Gets a Well-Earned Punishment

When I received that letter from the Second *Khazn* [saying] that I must urgently come to the city because the *rabay* does not rest and leads intrigues against me — I calmed my colleague. The old prayer book — I wrote to him — will defend itself against the new *reformers* moving against this life and that as long as I remain at the temple I hope that I will have enough power to protect the honor of our old customs, traditions and sacredness.

But a few weeks later I again receive a letter from the Second *Khazn* with an alarm that the *rabay* of our temple had succeeded in passing his demand through the *ritshuel komite*. They adopted his new, circumcised daily prayer book and the “reformed” holiday prayer books, and he had the gall to notify me and the Second *Khazn* which prayers we may chant and which we dare not, and that he had excised the most beautiful prayers so he could mutter them through in English. Even the prayers at *nile* [close of *yonkiper*/Yom Kipur] which I had specified in my contract were to be chanted by the Second *Khazn*, he cut out because so it pleased him.

The Second *Khazn* also warned me that the new daily and holiday prayer books with their “circumcised” parts were about to be sent to the press; an English text would replace the prayers in the Holy Tongue. He begs me therefore not to delay coming to town and to see what I have to do.

Two days later I received a letter from the *rabay* [saying] that he would like to see me because he has several important things to discuss with me, and he asks that when I arrive in town I should visit him. I shortly [thereafter] came to Brooklyn and called the *rabay*, telling him that if he has something to speak with me about, he should be so kind as to come to me [my home]. He even hesitated over whether it befitted his *rabay*-honor to go to visit a cantor, but lacking another option, he did come.

He came loaded with a full pack of papers under his arm and, laying them out on the table, he began to point out various sections of the Days of Awe prayers that had been underlined by a red pencil. This meant that the underlined portions had been ritually invalidated by our *reformer* and I will have to cross them out of my chanting-repertoire. In that way he paged through the entire holiday prayer book and I observed and was silent.

When he came to the *yonkiper*/Yom Kipur prayer book, I saw that he had cut out a third of the prayers, my most beautiful compositions, and took them for himself to “recite” in English. He also eliminated the main prayers of the other two-thirds [of the ritual], leaving for me something by which neither I nor the audience might derive the slightest enjoyment. In so doing he informed me that all of this had been confirmed by the *ritshuel komite* and that he is informing me about it formally in order to get my approval of this actual pogrom against the ancient Jewish prayer books.

I maintained my silence, but I took the pencil from his hand and, using the blue end, marked everything that he had underlined in red. When he wanted to ask me in amazement what I was doing — I pursed my lips: sh-sh-sh, as if to say it would be better, little *rebe*, if you were to keep still.

When I finished my work with the pencil I said to him: “Listen here, my friend, I am still a follower of the old Jewish God, I am still a great honorer and follower of ALL his prayers, as they have come to us

across the bridge of generations of Jews who preceded us. I will not permit anyone to touch these hallowed prayers and to take them from me. Your effort is useless, Herr *Rabay*, all will remain as of old, as long as I stand at the altar in this temple. If you wish to live with me in peace — that is my advice to you, that you abandon this dangerous act that you have begun and you had better guard your honor and your income. And if you continue to undermine me I can assure you that you will merely be undermining yourself.”

I also told him in jest: “Herr *Rabay*, don’t become a ‘*moyel*’ because in that way you are taking away the income of our Second *Khazn*, who is a better craftsman [at that] than you, and thereby he says the blessing ‘upon circumcision.’ But when you try to circumcise the holiday prayer books, that will be a wasted blessing and you will derive nothing good from it.” And I demanded of him that he give me his word that he would abandon this evil play and that he would assure the rule of peace among the servants of the temple.

He was somewhat shamed by my severe words and he even made no further efforts to convince me that he is in the right. It appeared that I had convinced him, because he stretched out his hand in a sign of peace and friendship, and so we parted. I went back to my summer home that same day and forgot about the whole thing.

A few days before the first *slikhos* [pre-new year observances] I received a letter from my president, Herr Hip, who asked me to return to the city somewhat earlier, as he has a very important matter to discuss with me. He came to [see] me as soon as I was back in my dwelling, and then he told me that the *rabay* had passed through the *ritshuel komite* all that he wanted, and that he [the president] is against it but that he can do nothing to oppose the committee’s decision. Now, he believes, I am the only person who can foil the *rabay*’s evil plans. Since there will take place, within a few days, a meeting of all the *trustis* about determining the order of the worship service during the Days of Awe, and they will certainly deal with the non-kosher plan of the *rabay*, therefore he asks of me that I come to the meeting to help him bury the plan.

I told the president about my last conversation with the *rabay* and that I had the impression that I had influenced him to discard his silly ideas about reforming Our Master of the Universe, and that therefore I do not understand what has suddenly occurred here. Could it be that the *rabay* had fooled me?

I came to the *trustis*’ *miting* at which was also represented the *ritshuel komiti* that had adopted the sorrowful decision. I noticed, however, that the *rabay* was dashing about nervously, as though he had some non-kosher thing on his conscience. Soon the *tsherman* of the *ritshuel komiti* arose and reported that, as proposed by the *rabay*, the *komiti* had decided to eliminate certain [chanted] prayers from the *rosheshone* and *yonkipper* prayer book and that those prayers will be said by the *rabay* in English, and simultaneously he points out to me which prayers the *rabay* had assigned to me. He also confirmed that the *rabay* had taken for himself the *nile* prayer that had been assigned to the Second Cantor.

My innards began to boil as in a [heated] barrel. I addressed the *rabay*: “I ask you to look me straight in the eyes! Do you not recall anything of the conclusion that we reached several weeks ago at my home? How you extended your hand to me [as a sign] that you will leave alone Our Lord of the Universe and His prayers and that you would devote yourself to more productive things?”

He began to explain himself circuitously, that this is, after all, the decision of a *komiti*, but a blind man could see that it was he who had twisted-up the whole thing, confusing the minds of the simple Jews who sit on the *komiti* and wanting to convince them that by trimming the holiday prayer book he would turn them into modern and forward-looking Jews.

I cursed the members of the *ritshuel komiti* in the harshest terms for not having called me as soon as the *rabay* had brought them this non-kosher project. At the end I told them that if they believe that the *rabay's* program for a worship-service suits them better than mine, then they should be so kind as to put the *rabay* up to chant durng *rosheshone* and *yonkiper* and to leave me alone.

A huge tumult arose. The first to spring up was the president, Herr Hip, who warned the *rabay* that such intrigues against the Chief Cantor, who had so greatly helped to raise the *kongregeyshon's* prestige, can only undermine the existence of the temple, and in the future, if he wishes to make plans or introduce changes in the worship-service, he must first come to an understanding with Chief Cantor Kwartin. And he demanded that the decision of the *ritshuel komiti* be revised and that everything remain as of old, because what was old had not all been bad. Also, the *nile* prayer was to remain with the Second *Khazn*, as I had arranged for him at the start.

This was my first conflict in America with the "reformers," heaven help us, who wanted to turn our homey Jews into clumsy cripples, not fit for God nor for other people. I wanted to utilize the fresh energy I had brought from Europe to teach the above-mentioned *rabay*-kid to release our sacred ways, not to seek to improve them and not to confuse the minds of the Jews who descend, finally, from the same *shtetlekh* from which we came, and had been imbued with the same traditions and the same adherence to our embedded lifestyle.

The Days of Awe arrived, my first Days of Awe in America. My voice was at its fullest strength and the congregation of Jews that heard me knew how to appraise it. Hundreds of people were turned back because there were no tickets left to sell them. In the language of numbers, my chanting during the Days of Awe brought the *kongregeyshun* the sum of thirty-five thousand dollars. One must recall that this was some thirty years ago in order to appreciate how significant this amount of money was.

I grew still more important in the eyes of the president, all of the *trustis* and all the other big shots. They were convinced that they had not made bad business with me. With all my heart I did not begrudge them anything and I, myself, was satisfied that at the bottom line America was not disappointed in me, although my first venture into this land was not so fortuitous.

When I speak of the time when I was the *khazn* of Temple Emanuel in Brooklyn, I must particularly refer to the conductor and my dear friend Herman Zalis. We worked together for three years, but the friendship that was forged between us during that time continues to this very day.

Herman Zalis, who has been conductor at that same Temple Emanuel for almost thirty years, is a person of innate intelligence, an outstanding musician and a master at controlling and leading the choir. At the same time he is an unassuming, modest and dear person.

Conductor Herman Zalis helped me personally in completing my three musical works, *Zebulon's Songs and Prayers* and in preparing them for publication. He was also my accompanist in making records and at numerous concerts.

## I Travel Back to Europe

This is the manner in which I wandered about all alone in my seven rooms in Brooklyn. My elder daughter, Ana, had already been married and was on her honeymoon journey in Italy. My younger daughter was engaged as a singer in the Vienna Folk Opera. My two sons spent their days studying and I did not often see them. So, as is customary in such cases, there were good friends who began to give advice that it is not good for a Jew to sit there all alone, and it would be well to rebuild a home and a family.

When my sons once caught on to what my various friends were telling me, they were the first to tell me that I should remarry. They began to argue that I needed a friend who would take care of my needs and protect me, that I have worked much and hard in my life and still work quite hard and I have great need for someone to come to my aid at home. They also argued that they themselves feel the need for a mother despite being adults. Our home would be more homey and joyful if a woman's eye and good heart were to pay attention to everything and her good words were to be heard.

In addition, they argued, they plan to return to Europe shortly to continue their studies, because they were somehow not too pleased with their studies in America. So what sense would there be to remain [here] all alone? The rest of my family in America also gave me no peace, urging ceaselessly that I am not too bad an earner, may no evil eye befall, and could use my earnings to support not one but all of three families, so why sit there staring eternally at the bare walls?

I began to be contacted by matchmakers who were certainly being sent by the above-mentioned family, but I paid no special attention to their talk. My mood was so embittered because of the long and difficult illness of my late wife, that the thought of being married a second time was remote from me.

In the midst of this I decided to take a trip to Europe. My daughter, Clara, was not pleased by her appearances with the Vienna opera and she wanted to travel to Italy to complete [her training] in the art of singing. And my younger son had firmly decided to travel back to Vienna to study because he felt that he was at least three or four semesters ahead of what is taught in the American universities. So I went off to Europe to [Yinglish] "*setlen*" all these matters.

I received a six-week furlough from my temple in Borough Park and traveled with my son Shloyme. I stopped over for a few days in Berlin, where I visited a professor. It had been several years that I suffered from an open wound in my throat that remained after an operation, and no matter how many doctors I visited in America, none of them could help me, although they demanded to be paid quite substantial fees. To my great joy this professor cured my wound with ultraviolet rays in the course of four days, and I thought: this alone had made my trip to Europe worthwhile.

When I arrived in Vienna I first, as a dad, went to hear my daughter in the Folk-Opera. She had quite a small role in the opera "*Carmen*," but her singing was clean, graceful and fine and I could notice that she is making a good impression on the public.

As is customary backstage at all theaters and operas — intrigues are developed between individuals. My daughter already had a fine repertoire of several operas, but those greater and stronger than she would by no means permit her to take on larger roles, and this caused her great anxiety. I decided to make use of



my presence in Vienna and have a talk with the opera's director. He explained what the thing was: there are older and more experienced female singers than my daughter and he would do them an injustice if he were to take away their roles and give them to my daughter, who has only been in the opera for a short while.

His explanation was quite logical, but it cannot satisfy the person involved who is impatient and wants to grow continuously. Seeing that my daughter would not have much of a future here, we decided to ask the management to release my daughter from her contract before its expiration. It was not easily done.

Arriving in Vienna was a repeat of the New York story: Dad, get married! Here, joining the choir of friends and acquaintances was my daughter Clara. They argued that since I must return to America in a few weeks, and I will be all alone there, all my children will be in Europe, there is no purpose in wandering around the empty rooms, not having anyone with whom to exchange a word.

I had been a home-person in Vienna for many years, so there were many friends to be found there who considered it their duty to set me up with in the "finest" and "genteel" marriage-match to be found in all the world. They began introducing me to young women, widows or divorcees, as well as to spinsters who had not been married due to the years of war and general disasters.

But I felt a strange fear of a second wife, I did not believe that she might bring me joy; most of all I feared whether she could be a mother for my adult children who were in need of the warmth that a mother brings into the house, but could a stepmother bring such warmth?

Once my former Second Cantor, Yosif [Joseph] Grob, came to me, a devoted friend of mine and worshipper of my singing, and says to me that he has an acquaintance from a very fine family from Galicia, a woman with a grown girl. The father, who is no longer alive, was one of the finest Jews in Galicia, and during the war they had emigrated to Vienna. He wants to introduce me to this family, especially to the girl, who is unusually intelligent and genteel, and it seems to him that she would be the right match for me.

When, a week later, I came to *khazn* Grob's home and he introduced me to the girl with the deep blue eyes — I somehow shivered. Speech left me and I felt like a foolish young boy who cannot open his mouth. I saw that she is svelte, with a genteel look, [that] she must be intelligent and understanding and of good character.

I quickly saw that everyone had left the room and we had remained alone. Our conversation convinced me further that before me is a very well-read and intelligent person. On the next day we met in a café where my daughter was also present and remarkably she made the best impression on my daughter, as well. The girl began to win my heart more and more. I began to wait impatiently for the next day so I could see her again.

We went to the theater often and my new acquaintance showed great understanding of the acting, her expressed opinions were to the point and of a high grade of intelligence. With her permission, I visited her one morning at her mother's dwelling. This was an old house in Schifs-Gasse; the dwelling was poor and I saw that this greatly stresses the mood of my female friend.

She told me that when, because of the war's events, they fled Galicia for Vienna, her father died within a year and they remained in the unfamiliar city, as though at sea. In the course of a short time she

learned the skill of making corsets and through that she supports the family which also includes a twelve year-old little girl. The tidy poverty seized my heart.

We met again and I asked my new acquaintance two questions: would she want to live in America and does she feel that she might be a mother and a friend to adult children. She quickly replied to the first question in the affirmative. As to the second question she said that she could not make me any guarantees at the present moment. I remained confused. I at once had the thought that should, heavens forbid, my second marriage lead to a rupture between myself and my dear children — I would not want such joy at any price.

Although I was very pleased with the girl and I could note that genteel feelings were beginning to develop toward her, her reply set me so back on my heels that I became totally lost. I felt that I would not be able to maintain this acquaintanceship for long. We agreed to meet the next day, but after a sleepless night I decided to write to her, that due to certain reasons I can no longer see her and I wish her much joy.

I must confess that a wound remained in my heart, I could simply not find a place for myself after having tried to stifle by my own hand my feelings toward this girl whom I had seen only a few times. But I felt stronger as time went by, that I must put understanding above all else, that she would not be the right mother to my children, and [that] this must be the determinant over all else.

In that manner Vienna broke my heart when I again returned here after so many years of absence. But soon I was to meet my truly predestined one, really the true friend and the tender mother for my children and all my previous experiences were paled and forgotten, as it so usually occurs in life.

## **I Find My Truly Intended One in Vienna and Am Married at the Empress Elizabeth Temple**

In Vienna I met a school colleague by the name of Shapiro, who was also related to me by marriage, because he was my brother's brother-in-law. Beyond that he was a devoted good friend with heart and soul and I kept no secrets from him. So I opened my heart to him and told him all that I had lived through in an acquaintance with a fine girl from Galicia who had broken my heart because I had been forced to separate from her against my will.

This good comrade of mine bitterly derided what a person can take to his heart. "Don't be a fool," he argued, "as young a person as you are, talented, with a golden job in America, an earner with no equal — you should break your heart over an introduction there with some girl from Galicia? — I will arrange a dozen other introductions that will be more appropriate for you and you will finally find your predestined one."

And speaking thus he tells me that he knows a young woman, a widow from a highly fine family; he must simply find out where she lives, and if she might not have gotten married during the time that he hadn't seen her...But he quickly stipulated that the woman has a little girl from her first husband and would I agree to marry a woman with a child [?].

Truth be told, I was tired of all the "seeings" and "introductions" that good friends had arranged for me. I was already thinking of returning home quickly to New York, because my furlough from the temple was coming closer to its end. But perhaps it was determined by fate that I should seal this acquaintance, an acquaintance that denoted a new chapter in my life, an acquaintance that brought me the truly loyal life's companion, a friend and a mother for my children.

By brute force my friend Shapiro imposed upon me this acquaintanceship that later had such meaning in my life. This was in a café on the Vienna "Ring." I came with my daughter Clara and with my friend Shapiro. The young widow came accompanied by a woman of her acquaintance. I saw before me a healthy, powerful young woman, with natural tones in her complexion, who looked like the daughter of someone well-possessed. A healthy naturalness shone through her entire being.

My first impression was mixed and undetermined, she gave her name, but I did not secret it in my memory. We quickly remained alone, and the conversation assumed an entirely different direction. When we began to speak of our own lives, our own children — healthy colors appeared in her complexion; I sensed that I have before me an intelligent, honest mother, and that spoke to me at that moment more strongly than all other arguments.

It did not take long before we became more enlivened, hearty, we told each other our life stories and we began to feel a start of weaving of a bridge toward a common future. She told me frankly that many young and even rich people are reaching for her hand, but because of her child she is careful in selection, because she wants to also find a father for her early-orphaned child, and not every man can be a father to a child not his own.

We went to the Folk-Opera where my daughter again appeared as Micaëla in "Carmen." That evening she sang especially well. My friend was enthused by her and when she came out to us after the

performance, our new acquaintance heartily embraced her and tenderly kissed her. I was moved by this scene and felt instinctively that — she will be a second mother to my orphaned children.

Our next meeting was at the home of a cousin of hers, to which she came with her pretty, sweet little girl of about age four. I took the child onto my lap and strangely she clung to me at once as though I had been familiar with her for years. Her large blue little eyes lit up for joy and the child did not retreat from me for as long as I remained at that house. I felt an indescribable pleasure for the trust and bonding that the child showed me.

My [new] acquaintance then called me into another room, where she assured me that it was an unusually good sign for her that the child immediately liked me, because generally she does not quickly accept an unfamiliar person, and that she is full of joy that this had happened thus.

Our next meeting was the decisive one: I asked her if she were willing to become my wife. Her answer was that the way in which her child reacted to me had determined her destiny to become my wife. We celebrated this event modestly at a Jewish restaurant where we toasted our future and the future of our children. I immediately informed my children in Vienna about this, as well as my daughter and son-in-law in Italy and they participated at a distance in our joy.

In the course of three days, I obtained a promise from the American consulate, on the basis of my first [citizenship] papers and the contract with my temple, that I would receive a visa for my future wife and her daughter, as soon as I submit the marriage certificate and all other required documents.

Because of the short time remaining before my departure, we decided to have our wedding one week later. For the place of the wedding ceremony we chose the “Empress Elizabeth Temple” where I had taken my first steps as Chief Cantor and where I had lived through such wonderful years of glory and advancement. My cantorial colleagues did not spare their talent in making the ceremony most celebratory and impressive.

Armed with a [civil] marriage certificate, a [traditional] marriage contract and some dozen other documents, we went off to the consul to obtain the visa. But how great was our surprise when the consul suddenly declared that there had arrived that week a new order from Washington halting the issuance of visas. I did not want to believe my ears and my consternation was beyond limit. I had only a few days and had to be back at my post on time, and here, in the midst of everything, such unexpected difficulties.

Telegraphically, I summoned from Italy my son-in-law, who was an American [English] *loyer*, and I figured that he might possibly accomplish something. He offered all the possible guarantees in the world but it was if he were speaking to the wall. My bitterness knew no bounds. I had to travel back, and I feared traveling alone lest it be interpreted as one of the well-known “types” who turned up from America, went through a marriage match and then disappeared, to be enrolled in the “Gallery of Disappeared Husbands”...

But I had no alternative and my wise wife understood it. With a heavy heart I left my young wife and her dear child and arrived at my post on time. From the very first day I did not rest in trying to obtain the arrival visa for them and it did not come easily. I had the broadest support of the vice-president of my temple, the *loyer* Marx [Marks?] who connected me to various Congresspeople, but it was of little help; finally, he, with three other *trustis* of my temple, traveled to Washington, where Senator Copeland took

up the matter earnestly. After three months of intense effort, I was finally able to bring over my wife and her child.

I felt that I had added a dear friend, a genteel woman and a good mother for my children. My house grew lively, it grew warm and bright in all the rooms which, until now, I had wandered in loneliness and worry.

During the time of my absence the *rabay* had a good opportunity to further stir things up and to attempt to “modernize” his congregation of Jews. This time there was no one to seize his hand and stop him. He utilized all possible means to diminish my authority among the worshippers, which was like a thorn in his eye.

Here is a small characteristic episode that demonstrates with what this spiritual leader lived and breathed, about what sort of minuscule matters he thought, instead of devoting himself to the spiritual elevation of his community. It was accepted practice at the temple that when I had finished chanting, the president and all the other officials came up to the altar and wished “*gut shabes*” [good Sabbath] and said “thank you” to the *khazn*. Simultaneously they said “*gut shabes*” to the *rabay*. But it developed that they spent more time with me and their thanks were more hearty. I had actually provided them with prideful joy through my chanting.

This little *rabay*-kid could not abide [the fact] that the leadership of the temple render more attention to me than to him. So he thought up this plot: As soon as I concluded chanting, he stood up from his seat and was the first to descend to the president and the officials and presented them with “*gut shabes*” and thereby kept them from ascending to me. This involved a clear denigration to the shame of a spiritual leader, but he was so blinded by his envy of me that he considered it right to bury his own prestige if only not to permit the audience to demonstrate its admiration of me. But his end came on quite quickly; he brought upon himself being driven from the temple in disgrace.

## My Seven Happy Years in America

Here is the story of how the self-stupidized *rabay* was finally ushered out of my temple: On one Friday evening that happened to be a free day [*i.e.*, no required ritual] and [but?] a greater number of prayers had to be chanted, the *rabay* says to me before the service in an almost commanding tone: “Today, Herr Chief Cantor, you should cut the worship-service very short, because I am about to give a long [English] “*spitsh*” and the crowd can’t be held for too long.”

I was pained by the tone of his words, but I did not reply and thought to myself: Wait, wait, you’ll be bringing misfortune on yourself. The synagogue was packed and there were present many strangers, invited guests. At the request of the president I had chosen for the Friday night some of my finest compositions as well the finest choir numbers. I began to chant at a quarter past eight and would usually have to conclude half-past nine, but because of the great number of prayers the worship-service lasted until a quarter-past ten. I presented the finest and heartiest [chanting] of which I was capable and the audience sat there, enchanted, not moving.

The enthusiasm at the temple was extraordinary, but I could notice the *rabay* gnashing his teeth, almost bursting in impatience, [willing] me to finally conclude and permit him to orate. When I concluded and for the wine blessing the *rabay* was to take the floor, movement began in the temple: the audience began to dribble out. The movement continued for so long and [until] a hundred people remained, with, at the head, the president, all the *trustis* and the other officials.

The *rabay* came up onto the tribune and was seething in anger. He looked out over the sparse temple and blustered in English that, “It is below my dignity to speak to so small an audience.” Well, well, don’t ask what followed. It was a slap in the faces of the president and all the wardens that had still remained in the synagogue despite the lateness of the hour. The end was that the next day, on the Sabbath, the *rabay* was not allowed to take the floor. And on Sunday there was called a special *miting* of the leadership of the *kongregeyshon*; the *rabay* was also there and he was unanimously told that only one road was open to him: to immediately hand in his resignation of his position.

It was of no use his begging pardon, any talking and pleading; he was paid his compensation and left. And so I rid myself of a pest of a *rabay*, a creature who dishonors the self-chosen term “spiritual leader” of American Jews. Only the bewilderment and confusion of the first Jewish immigrants in this great and powerful country made it possible for such creatures to appear and to take a place in Jewish life.

After him, my temple didn’t want to hire any *rabay* over a long period of time. Rather, there were invited as guest speakers such truly great and worthy Jewish leaders as: *Rabay* Stephen Wise, *Rabay* Silverman of Temple Emanuel in New York, and others. Their speeches truly enthused the Jews, bound them to the great past of our people and with its hopes for the future.

\* \*

\*

My house, under the leadership of my wife, truly grew lively. I felt something that, sadly, I had never felt before in all my life. This was the warmth of a friend and of a smart, enlightened person who understands the spirit of the times and how to adjust to it. It was bright in every corner; people who filled my house truly delighted in the sobriety and heartiness that ruled among us.

Quite soon, I was awaited by a great and joyful event of my life, of which every grandfather knows the sweet taste: my elder daughter, Ana, gave birth to her first child, a little boy, and I became a *zeyde* [grandpa]. It was summertime and all of us lived in the [Catskill] Mountains. My wife was as a loyal Momma to my daughter and to her newborn child; she was so in love with the grandchild that she often neglected her own child and me. This filled me with boundless joy that my intuition had not failed me and I had found the right friend of my life, something that happens, sadly, so rarely.

With a calm conscience I can aver that the years in New York from 1922, the year of my second marriage, until the year of 1928, when I lived in the Land of Israel, were the happiest years of my life. My recognition grew greater from year to year. My talent developed then to its fullest strength and beauty. People loved me, hoisted me up in their arms, venerated me. My personal yearning for joy was fulfilled through the entrance of my wife into my house. I did not imagine that there could be a happier person on earth than I was then.

During those years I helped my brother Gedalye to accept the job as a *khazn* in Philadelphia and later in Denver, Colorado. A short time later my third brother, Bernard, came from Riga [Estonia] and took on a very prominent job in Wynnefield, Phila. My second daughter, Clara, after completing her vocal studies in Italy, received a contract with the German opera in Prague. My elder son, who later died to my great calamity, graduated as a medical doctor with high honors. He specialized as a pathologist and was later assigned as [English] *asistent profeser in post-gredzhueyt hospital* in New York.

At that time I closed a three-year contract with the Brunswick gramophone company [Brunswick Records] to make records, which brought me over thirty thousand dollars in income. Accordingly, I had nothing of which to complain.

A bit more of paternal prideful joy was destined for me. My daughter, Clara, who by then was singing in the Berlin Opera, during a visit with me, became engaged to Dr. Fridman [Freidman?], the son of a fine and intelligent family, and very soon thereafter we celebrated her wedding.

And here I come to tell of a significant event in my life that occurred in that unforgettable year of 1926. I refer here — [to] my first and long yearned-for voyage to the Land of Israel. Here were realized the most intimate aspirations that had nested within me since my earliest childhood. This visit of mine to the land of our fathers and of our future generations was the crown of all my achievements up until that moment. That is why I said that those years were the happiest of my life. Without the visit to the Land of Israel I would truly not have known the meaning of joy on this earth. I was surfeited with warmth that lasted for me for the following years and gave me the strength to live, to create, to carry the eternal Jewish song among the broadest masses of our people.

## **An Invention By a Jewish Young Man That Earns Millions**

I must return for a while to the time just before the First World War in Budapest. This was in late July of the year 1914, when a young man named Yuzefovitsh [*i.e.*, Josephson], the nephew of a close friend of mine, Vishnyak, came to see me. Both of them descended from Russia. It was already being felt in the air that any day war would break out between Russia and Austria-Hungary, and as a Russian citizen, he feared being interned and he wanted to get out of the country in time to return home.

This young man vouchsafed to me the secret that he has been engaged for a long time on a certain invention that would cause an upset in the field of photography. This was a sort of photographic camera in which one would deposit a coin and within a few minutes the apparatus would deliver ten developed pictures.

Since he is a Russian citizen and the air smells of war and he fears that as an enemy alien he might be interned in a camp, he had therefore decided to leave at once. But he has no money for expenses, he also has no relatives whatever who might come to his aid, so he has, therefore, come to me as a close friend of his uncle, for me to provide my help. He implores me to take over his invention and to have it patented in four countries: Germany, Austria, Italy and Hungary, and he is ready to give me a certain percentage of his invention when he fully develops it after the war. And that the war will be short and will last hardly a few months — of that, no one was in doubt.

I listened to the story and explained to the young man that I, myself, understand very little of these things, but I have a friend, an engineer and simultaneously a [English] *loyer* and knows about patents of new inventions, so tomorrow I will go to him along with the young man and we will hear what he has to say about the whole thing. If his opinion is favorable, I will certainly help out the young man with whatever I can and as to my participation in the earnings, we will talk later; let us first be convinced as to whether there is something logical and accomplished here.

The next morning we went to see my friend, Engineer Neufeld; he began to examine all the drawings and plans that the young man spread out before him. My opinion was that the idea itself was quite good, but as the drawings are at this time, no patent office of any country would agree to a patent. They must first be worked out in a craftsman-like manner by an experienced engineer, brought to order, and only then might we talk about patenting them.

Engineer Neufeld himself undertook to do that work and we agreed that he would be paid 500 *krone*. In addition, we would have to pay the patent-offices for the registration of the invention. The young man, as said, had no money, so it turned out that I had to advance it. Altogether, my expenses were to amount to the sum of two thousand *krone*. The young Yuzefovitsh even promised that he assures me ten percent of the sum he would obtain through the invention because I am advancing the money and will have to be involved with the various governments in obtaining the registration certificates. But I did not think about this then. I knew that this is the nephew of a friend of mine, that he is in need and needs to be helped.

A few days later the young man came running to me breathlessly: [“]Herr Kwartin, I must leave Budapest and in not a matter of days but of numbered hours, if not I am lost. Since the only route to



Russia is through Rumania, because it is not yet at war, I beg you to obtain for me through the Cult Community a visa to Rumania, and from there I'll beat my way back home.["]]

I immediately went off with him to the Community and in the course of a few minutes he obtained the required introductory letter to the Rumanian consul. He quickly obtained the visa and rode off.

A few weeks later Engineer Neufeld advised me that Yuzefovitch's invention had been accepted for registration in all four countries, and that the expenses amount to 200 *krone*, and that all the governments had been given my address as that to which one must refer on all aspects of the invention.

I paid the noted sum, received delivery of copies of the patents and, since the war was proceeding on its gruesome course — I quickly forgot about the whole story. Only once a year did the patent offices of each of the four countries separately remind me by letter that I must submit the proper annual tax for the patent. All four taxes together came to around ninety *krone*, so I paid and again forgot about the whole story.

During all the years of the war I did not hear from either the young man or his uncle, Vishnyak. I thought: Who knows what may have happened to them there in the great blizzard that had descended on Russia. For three years running I had regularly paid the taxes for the young man's invention, but when I saw that the war was about to end and nothing is heard from him, I grew tired of the thing and stopped paying the tax.

When I came to America in 1920 in my concert tour, my *menedzhers* conducted the required promotional campaign and ads about me, as well as my photo and even the address of my lodgings appeared in the "*Nyu York Taymz*." This newspaper, as is known, circulates across all the world and it also blundered into Shanghai, in China.

On one fine day, in 1921, I receive a thick registered letter of perhaps twenty pages, written in Russian so closely that I could barely crawl through this *megile* [*lit*: biblical scroll, written mess]. While reading I still didn't catch on to where the writer was heading, until I finally reached the signature: Yuzefovitch. Ha! This is my old inventor-acquaintance of some seven years ago, in Budapest. I was overjoyed to hear from him and then began to read the letter more attentively.

This was an intriguing story that the young man had gone through since he had left Hungary en route to Rumania and Russia. How he had beat his way from Rumania to Odessa and then he wandered all across Russia until he arrived at Tshita [Chita], in Siberia, where his uncle, Vishnyak, lived then. There Fonya [derogatory term for the Czar] wanted to turn him into a soldier, but he felt no special sense of patriotism toward Russia, so he hid, beat his way to the Chinese border, and finally reached the Chinese port city, Shanghai.

There, too, he licked no honey [*i.e.*, did not do well] until he finally began to work in a photography store and in time beat his way to owning his own small studio where photos were developed quickly. Simultaneously, he worked day and night to complete and make ready the machinery for his invention.

He writes to me, therefore, that in Shanghai he is unable to obtain the proper materials and tools needed to go on with his work. He had to make some machinery from wood, rather than steel. If he were able to create a proper workshop with the needed machines and materials, he is certain that in the course of a half-year he would complete the invention on which he has been working for a total of ten years.

The bottom line of his long letter was that there was no purpose to his remaining in that remote Shanghai and to struggle for every minor thing that was needed for his work. If he could come to America he would truly be renewed and he would much more quickly finish his apparatuses and patent them and proceed to exploit them and — become a rich man. He stresses, as well, that completing his invention would necessitate several thousand dollars and he asks me whether I would be willing to finance him through to the end. As to his uncle Vishnyak, he notes that he lives and is in Tshita, Siberia. But if he, Yuzefovitsh, will succeed in coming to America, his uncle would also smuggle himself out of Russia to China and would accompany him to America.

I was happy to hear that my friend Vishnyak was alive and quickly responded that I am ready to give him the several thousand dollars that he needs and I will do everything that depends on me for all [s/b both?] of them to come to America. There was no airmail yet then, so it took a half-year until I received an answer to my letter. This time Vishnyak also wrote that all [?] of them are preparing to make the journey. And truly, within a few months, Yuzefovitsh was the first to arrive and, quickly following, his uncle as well.

We celebrated with each other and quickly thereafter we concluded the following contract: Yuzefovitsh commits himself to complete his apparatus within six months and to patent it. And I, from my side, commit myself to pay him one thousand dollars each month for those six months. All together, I had to invest six thousand dollars in the business in addition to all the *krone* I had previously put into the business while still in Budapest. For my [English] *investment* I receive ten percent of all the profits that the apparatus will earn.

Since the contract had been worked out by my son-in-law, the lawyer Shulman, and he was to oversee the whole thing, I ordered that there be included in the contract that he is a full partner in the business and in the profits that it will bring. Who could have expected then that this would be no joke but a very large business with millions of dollars of income [?].

## A Venture That Buries Its Investors in Gold

America is truly the most blessed land in the world. The story of the invention by the Jewish young man Yuzefovitch convinced me of this again. He could not, in any country on earth, achieve that which he achieved in this land of unbounded possibilities. Here they love it when someone does something with their own mind and their own hands and don't depend only on that which others have already done. Here they appreciate the courageous and spirited ones who have the required patience and perseverance to bring their thing to its end.

Yuzefovitch was really richly rewarded for his efforts and exertions until he finally lived to the day when his invention was accepted and properly appreciated. But let's here describe how this all occurred. After we concluded the contract among ourselves and he was certain of one thousand dollars a month to cover all expenses involved in the further development of his invention — he quickly turned to intensive work.

He established a large workshop in New York with countless apparatuses and machines. One month succeeded the next, I paid him the thousands, but no concrete results were yet to be seen. The truth was that the inventor, Yuzefovitch, actually knew what he wants to achieve, but since he himself had never been an engineer, it was very difficult for him to convert the theory of his plans into actual practice. He went about with his plethora of little papers, [English] *sketches* and drawings, and struggled over how to bring it to life.

He feared entrusting again his plans to an experienced engineer and technician, lest the latter steal his heritage, leaving him a fool. But this young man's tremendous stubbornness saved him. He struggled days and night but he did not entrust anyone with anything. He worked twenty hours a day, not eating nor drinking, did not see the light of day, but he did not give up the hope that he would beat his way to his goal.

Meanwhile, the months passed on, I paid the thousands, but no invention was to be seen before one's eyes. Yuzefovitch was still at the beginning. His uncle, Vishnyak, was very upset; it was unpleasant for him because of me, since he had assumed the responsibility for the money that I invested. Especially as Yuzefovitch had promised to complete the work much earlier than the six-month period. The young man, too, was as black as earth out of regret and concern.

I began to regret my few pennies. I thought: "[Unclear Hebrew phrase.] Had I thereby ransomed all my sins?" I had almost given up the hope that I might ever see my money again. But Yuzefovitch himself did not for a moment give up the merest detail of his hopes. And he was right.

This was in the eighth month since we had concluded our contract. I had paid him all the agreed-upon money. One afternoon he calls me on the telephone [saying] that I must come at once to his workshop. Along with my son-in-law, the partner, we immediately went off there. As soon as we crossed the threshold, the young man embraced me and began to hug and kiss me. With tears in his eyes he shouted: "Well, Herr Kwartin, the miracle has occurred! We have lived to see it!"

He led me to an apparatus, told me to sit on a chair that was placed before it; then he told me to toss a [English] *kvoder* in the apparatus's slot, to peer into the mirror before me and to make various facial

grimaces. I obeyed it all as he instructed, and how amazed I became when, a few minutes later, through the side of the apparatus there appeared out of a little box of water a ribbon of eight photos [showing] the same grimaces that I just made before the mirror.

I myself understood little of the tremendous invention that had been made here. But I saw that my young man was literally glowing in joy; there is no one that might be compared with him in good fortune. Life had proven him right. His great joy spread to everyone and we congratulated each other. Now the question arose as what was now to be done.

Understandably, the first thing was to send the invention to Washington to be patented so that no one else could somehow appropriate it, and otherwise we could not go on further with the business. And it must also be submitted for patenting in all other countries. Then we held a meeting of all the current “stockholders” and we came to the conclusion that, in order to produce this Photomaton machine, as the inventor called it, a factory must be built, if even a small one, employing at least two skilled engineers and experienced workers and to begin production.

But we calculated that in order to accomplish this, there must be an investment of at least a sum of four hundred thousand dollars. Only with that sum could we build the little factory and produce at least two dozen machines that might be shown as models of the new invention, and when they gain acceptance in the market — only then could there be talk of greater production.

Well, none of us were that wealthy. And the “stockholders” unanimously decided that, in order to develop the business in good order, we had to involve real capitalists with large funds. Yuzefovitch also had contact with the two cousins from whom he had also taken money and promised a certain percentage of the profits. The “stock society” thereby became enlarged, but we still did not have any money of our own, and every one of us went out onto the streets seeking real capitalists.

It took no little time and effort until we could interest people with money in an enterprise that was still “pie in the sky,” [lit. Yidd.: *not arisen, not flown*] a cow on the roof. However, as we said above, America is a golden land with many risk-takers. So two people turned up who were ready to pour into the business the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, in real ready cash.

The large stockholders’ association was formed with shares amounting to the sum of two million, four hundred thousand dollars, each share selling for one dollar. The work quickly began on a large scale. A workshop was built —almost a factory; appropriate people were hired and work began on the production of the first machines which were still to be samples to interest great America in the new invention.

However, we had to exhaust our eyes until we lived long enough to see the first “production” of our factory. The new automatons that we were to produce were of a sufficiently complicated character. More than once, completed units had to be disassembled and reworked from the bottom up. Instead of three-four months, as was planned, it took a year-and-a-half until we lived to see a bit of a machine.

Many of the holders of stock in the new enterprise lost patience and belief that something might yet come of it. They sought the means to rid themselves of the shares they had bought. Instead of the dollar they had paid per [English] *sheyr*, they were now ready to sell, instead, for twenty-five cents. But even at that cheap price, customers were not eager to seize the bargain.

I, too, was one of those disappointed. I just happened to be in need of cash, so I therefore decided to sell half my shares. But there were no buyers, so I might have given them away for free. The year-and-a-half of struggles and torment meanwhile devoured the entire capital of 250,000 dollars that had been put into the business.

Despair was great. Neither money nor merchandise. Business people will understand what we lived through then. But quite quickly our enterprise grew bright. Finally, after long struggles, instead of the planned two dozen apparatuses, they managed produce barely five. Let it be five, as long as we have something with which to enter the market. Once and for all we must be convinced about what it is we're dealing with. Is this really an article, or simply hot air on which we've pitifully spent our money and our nerves.

When the machines were finally finished, they had to be shown somewhere. So they rented a [English] *stor* in the most crowded and noisy part of Broadway and there installed three of the automatons. One machine was installed in Coney Island and the fifth went to Chicago where it was placed at a point in the very center of the city.

Americans are well-known to always love anything new. *Nu, nu*, don't bother to ask what happened on Broadway and Coney Island on the very first day on which the machines were emplaced. A wild uproar and a jammed crowd to the *stor*; people stood on long lines with *kvoders* in their hands so that they might finally photograph themselves in the "box" without any help of human hands. The greatest attraction was, of course, to the youth that stood for hours on end on the long line until they finally beat their way to the apparatus.

During the first few days after the apparatuses had been installed on Broadway, each machine brought in from nine to eleven hundred dollars a day. They worked from eight o'clock in the morning until three o'clock before dawn. A blind man could see that this is truly a goldmine, both for the inventor and for the "capitalists."

## Henry Morgenthau Joins The Venture

Our eyes grew bright at having finally lived a bit of prideful joy after all the long years of doubt and disappointment. Coney Island reported the same results as on Broadway, as did Chicago. Customers for the apparatuses began to appear at all sides. People came from the most far-distant places in America, having learned of the new invention from the newspapers, and shoved thousands of dollars into [our] hands to get hold of the new “magic boxes” that could make one quickly rich.

Others wanted to rent the machines; still others wanted to buy a concession to assure a monopoly on their exploitation in specific [English] *steyts*. But how to sell when we have nothing to sell [?]. We had yet to begin producing the machines on a large scale, and here our stockholders had not a cent of money, just as before. The corporation’s shares could still not be sold on the market, even at cut rate, because they had no established price on the stock exchange.

Seeing that we had again blundered into a blind corner, our shareholders’ group, which had been converted into a [English] *korporeyshon* with a [*bord ov direktors*] and with the main inventor, Yuzefovitch, as president, held an emergency *miting* in which we also involved expert engineers. After long consideration, we reached the decision that in order to be able to produce one thousand apparatuses, which were needed just for the American market, we would need capital of five to six million dollars. A truly large factory must be built with all the newest equipment, in the American style.

Where to find such sums of money? And where does one find the willing person who, even if he has such sums, would be ready to invest his millions in our little boxes? We came to the conclusion that we could in no way go on with the work alone and that we must seek a capitalist who would buy up the entire business and its patents both for America and for the other countries where such an invention might be exploited among the masses.

And every one of us again set out across the land, seeking the proper financier. So just imagine that after long exertions the entire matter succeeded in interesting no lesser person than Henry Morgenthau Senior, the former ambassador of America in Turkey and the father of our current president of the “*Yunayted Dzhuish Apil*” [United Jewish Appeal].

Henry Morgenthau was a major businessman, especially in [English] *ril esteyt*, but he did wave off other businesses that came his way. When the business of the photo-automatons was proposed to him he said that he would provide his answer within a week. In the course of that week he, himself, secretly and anonymously, visited the store on Broadway where the apparatuses kept on increasing their success. He saw the long lines of hundreds of people holding their *kvoders* in their hands, awaiting their [English] “*nekst*” [turn].

With his experienced eye of a big businessman of broad scope, he quickly caught on to what a huge business this is. After the week he called our president Yuzefovitch, along with two other [English] *direkters*, among them my son-in-law, Shulman, And they began to talk *biznes*. It is understood that Morgenthau was quite cautious not to reveal that he had caught on to the scope of the invention, lest he be asked for who-knows-how-much.

After drawn-out negotiations it was decided that Morgenthau buys the patent of the invention for America and also for all the other countries of the world. Simultaneously, he buys the entire inventory, which means the factory that had been built to produce the sample apparatuses. For all this he pays in the sum of one-and-a-half million dollars. He insisted on one condition, that the inventor, Yuzefovitsh, first give him an option of three months' time.

In fact, this meant that Morgenthau wanted to hold back for three months until he finally concludes the business. But the stockholders decided to agree to this, and Yuzefovitsh required payment for the option in the sum of sixty thousand dollars. Morgenthau declared his willingness to pay the sixty thousand dollars at once, but he required of Yuzefovitsh that in the course of the three months, until the business is finally concluded, Yuzefovitsh should undertake to buy up for Morgenthau from the various shareholders a minimum of half a million shares.

Now you can see how one comes into money in America. Morgenthau did a wily bit of work here. He knew that as soon as he had the business finally concluded, he would not get the shares so cheaply into his hands. But when the poor and beat-down Yuzefovitsh would go out onto the street to buy the shares, he would get them for next to nothing. And that is what happened.

## My First Journey to the Land of Israel

However, the greatest event in my life during that epoch was certainly that I finally was able to fulfill the dream of all my years, beginning in my earliest youth, and to travel to see with my own eyes the Holy Land of Israel.

I recall that when I was yet a small boy, between the ages of eleven and twelve, that is, not less than some sixty years ago, the word “Zionism” was not unfamiliar in my home *shtetl*, Khonorod. At that time, from my home town there emigrated two seventeen year-old young men as pioneers to the Land of Israel. One of them was named Leybele Khayim Feyges [son of Feyge, Khayim’s daughter], a carpenter by trade; the other was called Nokhum the “Odeskes,” meaning that his mother came from Odes [Odessa]. He had no trade in hand, but he was inspired by the idea that then had begun to spread across the Russian *shtetlekh*.

I remember what a furor there had been over the emigration of these two young men. The entire *shtetl* accompanied them out with tears in their eyes, as one accompanies out one’s own children on a distant, unknown road. On the one hand they were pitied over traveling to the land of the “little red Jews” [fabled descendants of the ‘ten lost tribes’] and God alone knows what may happen to them on the long trip. And on the other hand, every little boy accompanied them with an envious feeling over their traveling to the land about which one learns in the *khumesh* [Pentateuch, five books of Moses].

Long after their departure, Jews continued to talk about the event: whether they had arrived in the Promised Land, had they really had the opportunity of being at the Western Wall and at Mother Rachel’s grave and at all the other dear places about which the *rebe* [teacher] had told us so much in the *kheyder* [religious school]. The fantasies glowed especially among us children and every one of us made a vow that, as soon as he grows up, he will certainly follow in the footsteps of those two idealistic young men.

The years passed by and did their will: dragged people into continuous other concerns. So my joy was therefore great when finally I was given an opportunity to actualize the vow of my childhood-years. The year of 1926, when I undertook my first journey to the Land of Israel, was significantly different than 1886, when the young people of my *shtetl* had gone there. During those forty years a modern *yishuv* [settlement] had arisen, England had obtained the Mandate over the Land that it had promised to convert into a Jewish National Home, a promise that it had not kept.

The first Jewish city grew up, Tel Aviv, about which wonders were told, that it is a small Paris. The first Hebrew University was already open in Jerusalem, something that could not even have been dreamt of in my childhood.

I must emphasize that in all the years that I wandered among the various capitals of Europe, when I matured and obtained honor and fame — I never lost sight of our ancient homeland for which I sang the most beautiful prayers, for which I aroused yearning and love among the thousands and thousands of Jews who came to the synagogue, or to the temple, to hear me. The “and our eyes will be glorified” was always a part of my life. I always sang it out [the phrase] with my heart’s gaze directed to those ruins that will yet during my lifetime be glorified in youthful revival.



Jews especially began to tremble in yearning for the Land of Israel in the years immediately following the First World War. I was then, as is known, employed as the Chief-Cantor in Budapest, but it was reached by the reports of the terrible pogroms on Jews in Ukraine and of the destruction of the once so wonderfully developed Russian Jewry after the war and revolution. Lest that were not enough, we ourselves quickly had to live through all the horrors of such a revolution in our own land. After the collapse of Bela Kun's revolution, Jews began to be victimized by pogroms no less than in Russia. Jews began increasingly to come to the conclusion that it should be enough to stop dragging along behind the revolutions of the various peoples, pouring our own blood, and it is now the highest time to think about our own corner under the sun.

However, sadly, Zionism in Hungary was then very undeveloped, despite the fact that Jews were suffering greatly. Therefore my amazement was great when once on a Friday night, after I had finished chanting at the temple, a Jew comes to me and gives me hearty congratulations for my beautiful chanting.

Somehow the Jew didn't appear as a local to me and he quickly introduced himself: Amdurski, a Jew actually from the Land of Israel and from Jerusalem itself, where he is a hotel owner. He tells me that the records of my prayers had also reached the Land of Israel, and that Jews there know of me and that it is a great pleasure for him to meet me personally. He cannot finish praising the prideful joy he had derived from my Sabbath-welcoming.

Hearing that I have before me a Jew from the Land of Israel, I somehow grew warmer, as though I had met a close relative from my old home. I invited him into my service-room at the temple and we spent a long time together. I simply drank in his descriptions of the Land, which revived in me the dream-enwrapped yearnings to see it all with my own eyes.

The opportunity for that first arrived after I had been in America for several years. When the *kongregeyshon* of Temple Emanuel in Borough Park, at the end of 1925, proposed that I renew my contract with them for another five years, I had nothing to object to, in principle. I had grown used to the people and even got to like some of them. But I placed a condition before them: that I would remain longer with them if they give me a [English] *vekeyshon* of three months so that I might make a visit to the Land of Israel.

Despite the fact that the president himself and also all the *trustis* were willing to agree to my request, at the general meeting of the temple members there arose a resistance to my demand, mainly about the time in which I want to take my *vekeyshon*. They argued that they could let me go during the period from *shvues/Shavuot* until the Days of Awe, but absolutely not during the winter months.

For me, though, it was more interesting to visit the Land of Israel especially during the months of winter, when the climate there is mild and when Jews from all over the world travel there together, and not during the hot summer when it is difficult to survive there. So we were unable to come to an agreement and I resigned from my job at Temple Emanuel.

I suffered no great loss, because a few days later I was visited by several Jews who concluded a contract with me for the Days of Awe in the sum of twelve thousand dollars. Therefore, it was in a very good spirit that I began to make preparations for the great event of my life — for my first journey to the Land of Israel.

As the best indication of the friendly attitude in which I left my temple was the fact that, one day before my journey, the president of the temple, all the *trustis* and many friends of mine arranged for me and my wife a [Hebrew] “Go in Peace” banquet where a heartfelt mood of true friendship ruled. The unforgettable Joseph Barondess was the toastmaster and Rabbi Tsvi-Hirsh Maslansky, our people’s leading preacher, was the *tsherman* of that unforgettable gathering.

On the way to the Land of Israel we stopped for twelve days in Paris to visit the city and its remarkableness. But Parisian Jews quickly found out that I am in the city and at my hotel there turned up the president of the synagogue on Rue d’ Pavé [?] and insisted that I not shame Parisian Jews and chant on a Sabbath with them.

At that time Paris had a large population from our Eastern European homelands: Polish, Lithuanian, Russian and Rumanian Jews. They all knew me well through my phonograph records and the synagogue in the very heart of the Jewish quarter in the neighborhood of Rue de Roze [?] was packed. I felt here, too, as I would at home: the Jews’ enthusiasm warmed me and I did not shame them.

I was not allowed to leave Paris so quickly. The “ORT” Society [Organization for Rehabilitation and Training] became aware of the great success of my chanting; it conducted major work in Paris as well as in other countries of Eastern Europe and was in need of funds. They thought of using me to raise a large amount of capital and for my concert they rented the huge “Trocadero” hall that seats thousands of people.

I proposed to them that, for the concert, I bring my younger daughter who was then connected to the Prague opera, and that, together, we would present the evening’s program. They gladly accepted my proposal and the Society went efficiently to the task of selling tickets. In five days they managed to sell some four thousand, five hundred tickets. It was a very successful concert and, too, the income for the Society that performed such useful work was far from negligible.

Other societies began to come to me that envied the great success of the “ORT” concert. But I had to, sadly, refuse all of them because we had to visit one other country on the way to our destination — that was my old Vienna, where my son, Shloyme, lived, as did my wife’s parents. We hadn’t managed to cross our relatives’ threshold than there appeared a delegation from the Budapest Community. I wondered greatly about how they had learned so quickly of my arrival.

They proposed to me that, as I find myself so close to Budapest, I should come over to the city in which I had lived so many fine years and that I should gratify them with a Sabbath’s chanting. I was deeply moved by this invitation but I had to postpone it to my return journey and we finally embarked on the ship that was to take us from Trieste via Alexandria to the Land of Israel.

## Afternoon Prayers On The Train to the Land of Israel

It seems that, in order that my pleasure in visiting the Land of Israel might be greater, the trip had to be enhanced. It had been quite a few weeks that I'd been traveling and when we arrived in Egypt and intended to continue our journey, it developed that we had to stop for a while in this land where the fathers of our forefathers had labored so hard and bitterly until Moses led them out of here to the "promised land."

It just happened to be the time when they had just discovered the grave of Pharaoh Tutankhamen or Rameses the Third. Thousands of tourists from all over the world traveled to Egypt to view the wonder of how, after thousands of years, they had unearthed an ancient emperor, dressed in all his golden glory. We could not avoid the temptation and also traveled to Cairo to view this amazing sight.

It was truly a rare scene that we came upon in the Cairo museum. Under glass in a golden coffin there lay — not a corpse, but, I would say, a person resting after hard work, so fresh was the appearance of this ancient satrap and conqueror of neighboring peoples. He had all his hair on his head, beard and whiskers, all the aspects of his face were normal and were indistinguishable from that of a normal person.

We were amazed by the tremendous art of embalming that was known to the Egyptians three thousand years ago and which present-day science cannot in any way reach such perfection as was shown in those far ancient times. Proof: the embalming of Lenin's body in Moscow that was performed just a few years ago and which did not succeed in keeping the body from deterioration.

The golden casket and its ancient emperor was a masterwork of artistic mosaic. According to the customs of thousands of years ago in this land of Egyptians, they put a dead member of the royal family into the grave that usually consisted of several rooms, a complete equipage of his royal palace. In the first place he was given his royal throne, a seat of ivory decorated in gold. Then he was given all the tools that he had used in his daily life, such as: dishes, spoon-and-fork and chalice, all of pure gold.

They even feared that, heaven forbid, the emperor might get hungry in the dark grave, so he was given foodstuffs of sufficient quantity, such as: meat, fish, fowl and bread. And the wonder of it was that all these foodstuffs, after so many thousands of years, still looked fresh, as though just out of the oven.

Thousands of people from all the corners of the earth wandered about the museum where all these wonders were on display, rubbing their eyes, not knowing exactly where in the world they were. The Jewish visitors could not free themselves from the thought that here lies a pharaoh who in his time drove the enslaved Hebrews to hard labors.

We also visited the pyramids, or as some scholars would have it that these are the Pithom and Ramses that the enslaved Jews had built, and then the most powerful Sphinx-figures that it is very hard to imagine having been built by human hands. Every stone of the pyramids is as large as a half-house and weighs thousands of pounds. And all around [them] is the desert, so these heavy stones had to have been dragged from somewhere. And this had to have been done by the hundreds of thousands of slaves who had sown the desert with their own bones until their remnants had brought it here to build these monstrous memorials that are a remembrance of human enslavement and nothing more.

We were also deep in the desert where are to be found the graves of the [unknown term], or of the prehistoric oxen-gods which the peoples then worshiped. They buried the oxen with no less honor and splendor than their royals, and embalmed, so that we could observe them. But I must say that this was not much of a pleasure. We had enough of the stink of millennia and quickly returned to Cairo.

Here a great honor awaited me. I received an invitation from the Chief Rabbi of Egypt, R' Nahum Pasha, to visit him at his home. It was more of a palace than a home. The sage received me heartily, asked about how Jews were living in America and in the European lands. He had heard that I am a prominent leader among Jews. Even in the Jewish homes of Egypt one could hear my prayers on the gramophone. The governor of Cairo was also present at the reception. So I had the opportunity to become acquainted with a high official of this country.

Finally we took the train from Cairo, through Kantara [?], to the Land of Israel. The train was packed with tourists of whom ninety percent were our Jewish brothers, Jews of all the lands on earth. They quickly began going through the cars seeking familiar faces. But everyone very quickly became quite friendly among themselves, even if they had never known each other before. Everyone was united by the land to which we were all traveling.

It is no wonder that, among so many Jews, there were many who were overjoyed upon hearing my name, that they were meeting an old acquaintance, though they had never before seen me before their eyes. They began coming from the other cars and when the time for afternoon prayers arrived there were to be found enthusiasts who offered me the honor [of leading the prayers]. The car was jammed with Jews when I turned my face toward Jerusalem and, at the improvised pulpit, I began chanting with the crowd.

I recall only one [other] time of such an afternoon prayer's chanting. This was at the time when I was to go serve in the Czar's army and my father had taken me to the rabbi for him to contest the ruling. Back then, in the small-town House of Study, I also chanted with as broken a heart as now, on the way to our yearned-for land.

I chanted the high Eighteen Blessings and when it came to "Regard our misery" — I poured out all my heart over the pain and suffering of our people wherever it is scattered. Therefore "You will restore with compassion your holy city, Jerusalem" sounded quite hopeful across the Sinai Desert which our train just happened to be traversing then. Jews wiped a tear from their eyes, but this was more a tear of true joy; they forgot the troubles back home and everyone united in the belief that a new life will arise there, in the land to which we all are traveling.

The crowd in the train consisted of the most varied classes of people. There were also many pious people from Poland, where there was then awakening a pressure to settle in the Land of Israel, and there were also many *khalutsim* [pioneers] whose songs of strength and conviction resounded through the cars. After the drinking of a toast the atmosphere became still warmer and the crowd launched into a Hasidic dance, to the extent that was possible in the close quarters of the train car. The small number of Christians traveling with us joined in our celebration and wished that we would live to see the resurrection of Zion.

So we didn't at all notice that the night had passed and at dawn the conductor told us that we were approaching Lod, where the English would inspect our passports. A shudder went through each of us at the thought that in a short while we would stand on the ground that was enshrined for Jews during all the millennia in which they were exiled from here.

Upon dismounting from the train at Lod, many of the pious Jews recited “*shehekiyonu*” [prayer of thanksgiving] but even those who did not recite the blessing were trembling with inner joy that they were in no way able to express in words. During the time of the trip those passengers had become truly united as one, as one great family. Therefore, they heartily took leave of each other and each went his own way.

I didn’t need to think before deciding that the first thing I do is to travel to Jerusalem. How many times in my *khazonish* career had I sung “...return with mercy to Jerusalem...,” so I wanted to, myself, to realize this moving prayer. I could not wait for the moment when I would actually with my own steps tread upon the holy earth of our previous splendor.

To my great amazement, I was welcomed to Jerusalem by my old friend Sholem Amdurski, whom I had met in Budapest years ago and who had, in fact, ignited in me the yearning to come and with my own eyes admire how Zion is rebuilding itself. At the very first greeting he told me that the Land of Israel had known for several months that I was to arrive and more than one association searches for me, as though with torches, for my arrival soonest to rescue its budget...

We, of course, rode to Amdurski’s hotel and as soon as we crossed the threshold of the restaurant to drink a glass of tea, I was immediately surrounded by various *komitis* from yeshivas, old-age homes, and orphanages and all of them wanted to be the first to arrange a performance for them by me in concerts or to chant on a Sabbath.

It was especially pleasant for me when the two leading *khazonim* of Jerusalem, Zalman Riblin and Yisroyl Bardaki, came to greet me as a colleague. They described for me the state of *khazones* in the Land of Israel at that time and I was moved by their attention. Thus began my visit to the Land of Israel, which was [to prove] sufficiently stormy.

## I Am Assigned A Mission That is Beyond My Abilities

Where does a Jew go when he arrives in Jerusalem for the first time in his life if not at the Western Wall, at the only remnant of our past glory? So we went there, on the very first morning, along with Amdurski. We barely pushed our way through the narrow Arabian streets where the spicy aromas of the street-kitchens and the droppings of the donkeys on which the Arabs ride right into your face — where all of this is an un-homelike prelude to the profound experience that awaits you.

We approached the “Wall” on which scores of Jewish men and women [?] were leaning their heads and bitterly sobbing into the stones. Some were sitting on the ground, rocking over little books of psalms and prayers. And right next to it your gaze falls upon the proud and gilded cupola of the [Arabic?] *omar-metshet* [Temple Mount] that is based on one of the walls of our ancient greatest sacredness, and here you feel the full tragedy of a people that was defeated.

Never before had I so understood the import of the words: “Our city has been destroyed, and our Holy Temple has become desolate, and our dear one has been exiled, and honor was taken away from the house of our life,” which so often in my life I had had the occasion to sob out at the pulpit in our ancient prayers. It is a deeply upsetting scene for those who see it for the first time. I could barely contain my feelings, so I also picked up a little prayer-book and, along with all the others, leaned my head against the ancient stones that could tell of how differently things appeared in the years of our glory.

Our next visit was to [Chief] Rabbi [of Jerusalem, Abraham Isaac] Kook, ז”ל [may his memory be a blessing] who paid me so much attention despite the fact that he just then had a conference with a number of rabbis. He led me into his *yeshiva*, where he introduced me to the teachers and students. I witnessed a lecture and was astounded at the depth of devotion with which the young men sat and studied. One student especially caught my eye; this was a man of some thirty-something years with a head of long blond hair that fell as far as his shoulders. He had an especially gentle appearance and one could see that he was somehow removed from this world.

Later Rabbi Kook told me that this young man had, by now, completed degrees at three faculties, that he is a major mystic and cabalist, living the life of an ascetic. And after all those universities he had come to the *yeshiva* of Rabbi Kook to devote himself to the Torah that has no limits at all because it is [Aramaic] “Study it [the Torah] and keep studying it for everything is in it” — one can study it all one’s life and never be done.

On route to the Land of Israel, while in Cairo, I met a very distinguished Jew from Budapest, a certain Von Prediger who, despite the feudal title “Von” occupied a very illustrious position among the pious Jewry of Hungary. He was the president of the Orthodox Community in Budapest, as well as the leader of the *Agudas Yisroyl* [Religious Zionists]. He was in Cairo on the return trip from the Land of Israel and he complained to me, as an old friend, about the conflicts then taking place in the Land of Israel between the two opposing camps: the camp of Rabbi Kook and the camp of the old Hungarian rabbi, Rabbi Zonenfeld.

As a pious Jew and as a patriot of Rabbi Zonenfeld he, it is understood, was on one side. Still he asked me that, when I would be in Jerusalem and would visit Rabbi Kook, I should attempt to see whether it is possible to avert the profanation of The Name [presented by] conflicts between the two greatest

rabbinical authorities in the revived Land of Israel, [that they] should reconcile and work out a common program of activity on behalf of the *yishuv*.

I fulfilled the request of my Budapest friend and in the course of the conversation with Rabbi Kook I touched upon the question of the sharp controversy with Rabbi Zonenfeld and what pious Jews in other lands think of it. He declared that he is always ready to make peace and is even ready to make certain concessions, but that Rabbi Zonenfeld's side doesn't want even to discuss peace, and not so much the Rabbi himself, but his advisors who insist upon their stance as immutable law and therefore it is impossible to reach a compromise.

On that same day I visited Rabbi Zonenfeld. Despite his profound age, close to eighty years, he was truly quite young and fresh in his thinking. He demonstrated broad knowledge of worldly matters and spending time with him was truly a pleasure. Let me also add that he spoke in fine German and was very lively in conversing, questioning me precisely about the life of Jews in Hungary, from which he originated.

Finally we arrived at the painful question about there bring no unity among the religious Jews in the *yishuv*. I transmitted the request of his great follower and admirer, Von Prediger, as well as what Rabbi Kook had told me today about this issue. And this is what Rabbi Zonenfeld, ז"ל, replied to me: He has nothing personally against Rabb Kook. To the contrary, he values him very greatly for his great knowledge and because of his high and pure ethical personality.

"But here there arises the question," Rabbi Zonenfeld continued, "of the education of the young Jewish generation in the Land of Israel." He cannot agree to the manner in which the Jewish youth is being raised. And the education given by the camp of Rabbi Kook (he meant the "*mizrakhi*" — Religious Zionists) does not satisfy him. In addition, he is not happy with the attitude toward Jewishness of the Jewish Labor movement in the Land of Israel, with which Rabbi Kook's camp goes hand-in-hand on many issues. The Holy Sabbath is violated and many other commandments are not observed, though they certainly should be fulfilled above all in the Jewish land.

In general, he concluded, Rabbi Kook is a *makil* (which means he takes lightly [is too liberal]) in many matters, he has taken too modern a road, while true Judaism means that one must be more strict. Nevertheless I felt through his words that the Rabbi himself would be flexible in the name of 'peace at home.' But then there appeared in the room Rabbi Zonenfeld's son-in-law, Rabbi Bloy, who was the head of the *yeshiva* and one might say the "foreign minister" of the politics conducted by Rabbi Zonenfeld's camp.

Now one heard far different words: he thundered against Rabbi Kook with flame and fire. "We will never unite with sinners and apostates!" — those were his words. Now I understood whom Rabbi Kook meant as the advisors who do not permit religious Jewry in our old-new land to be united and serve as an example to the Jews in other lands.

I spent an hour-and-a-half in the home of the old, highly respected rabbi, but in the end I saw that all my talk was to no avail, and I bade farewell. Rabbi Zonenfeld accompanied me through the front door, which I considered to be a great honor for me.

Upon returning to the hotel I was informed that I'd had a telephone call from Menakhem Mendl Usishkin [Zionist leader, head of the Jewish National Fund], an old friend of mine from my youthful days

in Ekaterinoslav, when I was both a tradesman and a *khazn* in the Soldier's Synagogue, and he was then taking his first steps into the Jewish-National sphere. I called him back and he apologized to me for not being able to come to see me now, but he would be delighted if I were to visit him at the building of the *keren kayemes* — Jewish National Fund.

He were heartily overjoyed upon seeing each other and recalled those old times when neither of us even dreamed that we would meet in Jerusalem. Soon committees from tens of Jerusalem institutions came to my hotel and all of them insisted on one thing: "Help us! A concert, a Sabbath's chanting — and we will emerge from the debts in which we are over our heads!" There were not enough days in the week for the concerts I would have to give if I were to accede to the entreaties of all the organizations.

On one day I had to experience a profound discomfort that was created by the exaggerated concern over me on the part of the hotel owner. At around seven in the morning I was visited at the hotel for a return visit by the highly respected Rabbi Zonenfeld, and the people of the hotel told the old and honorable rabbi that I could not be seen until ten o'clock. When I became aware of this I was almost consumed by regret. I immediately called Rabbi Zonenfeld and profoundly apologized to him for the crassness he had endured at the hands of the hotel employees. Too, Amdurski himself explained to the rabbi that an oversight had occurred, which he regrets with all his heart.

During my first days in Jerusalem I was visited at my hotel by the former Chief Cantor of Moscow, Guzman, whom I had met some time earlier in New York. He was a genteel, intelligent and also highly musical person, although somewhat eccentric. In addition, he was very pious and god-fearing, but sadly he suffered from a certain megalomania that interfered with his relationships with other people.

He looked very bad and told me nothing about how bitter life was for him in the Land of Israel. Only after he left did Amdurski tell me that Guzman was simply suffering from hunger, along with his wife and sick son. I took it upon myself to do whatever I could to improve his situation. Meanwhile I invited Guzman to come with us the next day to visit Mother Rachels's tomb on the road to Bethlehem.

When we entered the monument above the tomb and began to say the required prayers — the hearts of each of us filled with an indescribable sadness and tears on their own began to flow from our eyes, but what happened to Guzman — I cannot describe to this very day. He sobbed unnaturally, began to let out such cries, beating his hands and head against the walls of the tomb, that we thought he might collapse at any moment. It was with great effort that we managed to take him out of the monument.

This scene with my elder and so helpless colleague deeply devastated me. It was on a Friday and I began to prepare myself to welcome the Sabbath at the Ruined synagogue of Rabbi Yehuda Hakhosid [the Hasid].

I believe I will not forget my first Sabbath in Jerusalem until the last days of my life. Because what one feels on a Jerusalem Sabbath — is not felt and cannot be imagined anywhere else in the world. On Friday evening I went with Amdurski through the narrow alleys of the Old City to the Ruin of Rabbi Yehuda Hakhosid. On the way we passed Jews headed for the Western Wall to welcome the Sabbath. Jews in felt pointed hats and colored long coats, their earlocks shampooed and curled into little corkscrew-shapes. Jews with faces glowing at having lived for the joy to be able to welcome the holy Sabbath at the remains of the wall that has remained to us from the [Second] Temple.



They did not see the ugliness around them, the stinking muck that the Arabs had spread here around our greatest sacredness. They even ignored how the Arabs stood around on the roofs of their huts that are quite close to the Wall, jeering at the Jews who put their entire hearts into the prayers in praise of the approaching Sabbath.

In the Ruin that Friday evening, the Sabbath was welcomed by *khazn* Yisroyl [Israel] Bardaki. Among the worshipers one could see the most honored Jews of Jerusalem, led by Rabbi Kook, z"l. I was pleased to be, for once, an ordinary worshiper, an observer who can consider my neighbors in the synagogue, to listen to the fine *khazn* and breathe in the air of eternal Jewish life that came clearly to expression in this ancient synagogue.

Upon returning from the synagogue to the hotel I was overwhelmed by the fine, patriarchal Jewish table that was prepared in Amdurski's house. Amdurski made the wine blessing and I enjoyed his nice tenor voice. All the children sang along with the *zmires* [Sabbath-night songs] and distinguished among them was the youngest girl, Nekhamele, a child of nine or ten years who sang a solo number with special charm. It was a pleasure to listen to and I, unwillingly, recalled my childhood-years, the Friday evenings at my father's table, when in the *zmires*-singing there was the indication of my later determination to be a *khazn* for Jews.

At the morning Sabbath prayers I was awarded with chanting the final prayer. My heart was saddened by my visits to the memorials to our past greatness and by witnessing how our neighbors express hatred toward the Jew and seek to humiliate him — so I unwillingly poured out all my feelings in the blessings over the prophetic reading. When I began to chant "Pity on Zion" — against my will there streamed out a prayer in which could be heard the prayer of millions of Jews in the world that we be freed of shame and that greatness be restored to Zion and Israel.

It was not even my intent at all to bring the Jews to tears in the Ruin on Sabbath, but it would be hard to find in that synagogue a Jew without tears after my chanting. I was surrounded at all sides, greeted with a hearty "*borekh habo*" [blessed be he who comes] and so, in crowded circles, we left the Old City.

On Saturday night we visited with the wardens of the Ruin. They brought me hearty greetings from all the worshipers and at the same time they told me that the roof over the Ruin is broken, rain comes in and they do not have the means needed for its repair. If it is not difficult for me — they would ask me to chant on a Sabbath for the benefit of the synagogue and thereby provide it with a roof over their heads.

I did not hesitate for one minute and immediately promised it to them, but I asked for a choir at my side so that my first appearance in Jerusalem might really be most joyful. They invited the *khazn* and musician Reb Zalman Riblin to conduct my Sabbath chanting with his choir. A fine Jew, he also did not hesitate for one minute and the wardens began making the preparations for the Sabbath, so that it might bring the desired income to benefit the synagogue.

I recall that Sabbath in the Ruin when Jews hung on the windows [sills, frames] and on the surrounding roofs, where the crowding in the synagogue itself was so great that I could barely catch my breath. I was in the best of spirits and the Jerusalem atmosphere especially warmed me up. So I rocked the Jews and my warmth was quickly transferred to them. Nobility ruled in the synagogue when I concluded my chanting. I had a joyful feeling as my first appearance in this holy land was for [Hebrew

phrase] a sacred thing, not in order to receive a reward. The income provided enough for building a very solid roof over the synagogue.

The warmest critique of my Sabbath chanting at the Ruin was actually written by Reb Zalman Riblin himself, who had conducted the choir. In his appraisal he revealed a craftsman's great knowledge and his review itself was a pearl of liturgical literature. Reports of this unusual Sabbath chanting in the "Ruin" spread quickly across all of the Land of Israel.

*Menedzhers* of concerts and Sabbaths began turning up, countless and unending. I closed an agreement with one of them, a certain Yaskiel, for two Sabbaths, three concerts and for the first days of Passover. The first concert was to take place in Tel Aviv in the old exhibit hall (Terukhah), which contains some three thousand seats. My *menedzher* greatly enjoyed my first concert in Tel Aviv, as indicated [by the fact] that — he came to me at once and wanted me to commit that I would not appear for anyone other than himself.

I immediately rejected his proposal because, first, I had promised Usishkin a concert for the benefit of the Jewish National Fund; further, I had already promised a Sabbath's chanting for the benefit of the Tel Aviv synagogue that had only four walls standing without any hint of a roof. For the Sabbath on which I was to chant, they placed a linen tarp that served as a temporary roof...

My second concert in accordance with my agreement with my *menedzher* was in Jerusalem in the large hall of a movie theater, attended by very distinguished guests: the High Commissioner and the English Governor of Jerusalem. Here, too, *khazn* Riblin and his choir stood alongside me and, for the secular numbers, they had invited as accompanist the famous pianist and composer, Prof. Vaynberg [Weinberg]. After the concert, the Governor, Stors [Stores?] honored me with a backstage visit and brought me the greetings of the High Commissioner who was very pleased by the concert.

Since we had two weeks' time before Passover, I decided to use the time to travel a bit with my wife across the country. We visited Shechem, the Arabic fortress in the Land of Israel, the nest of the greatest hatred against us on the part of the open and hidden murderers and robbers. But when we came to Emek Izrael, a light arose in our eyes. We saw before us honest Jewish labor on earth that had only recently been covered by condemned swamps from which people withdrew because they harbored a disease.

Now almond trees bloom here and the shepherd who tends the sheep holds a religious book in his hands: might he not be studying a chapter of Isaiah? The houses are pristine and illuminate the entire area. We visited several colonies, entered the *beth okhel* (dining room). The meal that was then served to the *kibutsniks* [collective farmers] was quite modest but this did not in the slightest degree impact the idealism of the builders, all of whom had come from the little Jewish *shtetlekh* of Russia, Poland and Lithuania and who had to remake themselves in order to adjust to the new, difficult life.

In Tiberias, at the grave of Rabbi Mayer Bal Hanes [Master of the Miracle], we encountered many Oriental Jews who had come on pilgrimage to the grave many weeks earlier before the death-anniversary of that great Jewish saint. We entered the *yeshiva* named for Rabbi Mayer and saw pale Jewish young men among the oldest inhabitants of the land studying a page of the Talmud to the old, homey melody that I recall from my *kheyder* years. And they studied it actually as translated into mother-tongue, into simple Yiddish, and the sound of their studying resounded warmly in my heart: there is one Jewish world with the same yearnings and dreams of liberation and renewal.

We had intended to travel further past Migdal to Safed and the last colony on the Syrian border, but unrest just happened to break out then between the Druze and Arabs and people urged us not to make the trip now. So we only stopped at the Sea of Galilee, mirroring ourselves in its blue waters that are truly enchanting, and in their stillness we forgot all the big-city clamor that we had brought with ourselves.

We headed on the road back to Jerusalem through Haifa. After Tel Aviv, a visit to Haifa is the strongest of experiences. You feel somehow that here is the main nerve of the Land. It is here to which the ships of immigrants come, from here the Land of Israel products are exported to all the countries of the world. Haifa will one day spread far and wide the name of the Land of Israel.

And when we drove up on Mount Carmel to rest up a bit from the trip in one of its gorgeous *pensions* — our own eyes could not at all believe that such beauty was possible in the Land of Israel. The view of the sea and the fine little woods calm you down and fill you with blessings for the Land. I then adopted the thought that when the One Above helps me and I will carry out my desire to settle in the Land — the first thing I will do is build a home for myself on this mountain.

Only nine years later, during a later trip of mine to the Land of Israel, I was destined to fulfill that wish.

Finally we were back in Jerusalem and needed to begin preparing for Passover. Together with the *khazn* and conductor, Riblin, we put together the program for the festive chanting. I had only two rehearsals with the choir and everything was in the best order. The Ruined synagogue was surrounded on the holiday as it had been during my first chanting. Again people hung on the windows and on the nearby roofs. My *menedzher* had every basis to be pleased.

I must also mention the “struggle,” that went on over where I should conduct the *seder* [ritual Passover meal]. As soon as I had arrived in Jerusalem, Sidurski had me promise that I would be his guest at the first *seder* (actually, at the only *seder*, because the second *seder* is not observed in the Land of Israel). Later, though, Usishkin came to me on a return visit and appealed for me to be his guest at the *seder*, which will be attended by the most prominent Jews from all the corners of earth who had gathered that year in the Land of Israel.

I was truly very sorry, but I did not wish to break my promise to Sidurski. Therefore I told Usishkin that if he were to arrange a second *seder*, as takes place in the [lands of] Exile, in honor of the multitude of foreign guests, I would then come and conduct that *seder*. He obeyed me and arranged a second *seder* in the large auditorium of the National Fund, which was attended by some five hundred people. An unusually lofty atmosphere ruled at the *seder*, a true Ingathering of the Exiles in miniature, which is only possible in the Land of Israel.

After the first day of Passover in the Ruined synagogue, where my voice was sparkling and my chanting of “and we have sinned” at the supplemental prayers deeply moved all present. At the end of Passover I chanted in the huge hall of the Tel Aviv museum. Thousands of Jews were inside, and again, as many encircled the building and listened to the chanting through the open windows. During all my years in Vienna and Budapest and later, even in America, I never encountered such warmth and such profound readiness to welcome the old Jewish prayer style as here, in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv.

If, in America, Jews had become somewhat distanced, and in addition, the various ignorant *rabays* had lent their hands to undoing and totally dulling down their Jewish feelings — here everything flowed

as from a fresh source. These were, after all, our brothers who not long ago come here from the old lands: Russia and Poland, from which they brought along their adherence to all the Jewish traditions. And here no one was ashamed of it, as in America; no one here strove to become “humanized.” To the contrary, the more Jewish, the more human. [Truncated citation from Dr. Khayim Zhitlovski, philosopher of Secular Jewishness: “The more human one is, the more Jewish; the more Jewish, the more human.”]

Therefore, my journey across all the cities of the Land of Israel was a triumphal journey. Jews presented me with their hearts and I sang out their innermost yearnings. The prayers about the Return to Zion and about the rebuilding of Jewish glory could not have such deep resonance anywhere else but in the Land of Israel, where at every turn one could still then see what we yet lack to be independent and to be the masters of our own destiny.

On the first Sabbath after Passover I traveled to Petah Tikva, the mother of the Jewish colonies in the Land of Israel. The synagogue could accommodate some four hundred people, but there were some eight hundred wanting to hear me. So actually great arguments broke out at the entrance and there was even one domineering Jew who, along with a group of accomplices, on Sabbath [!] tore open the doors that had been locked because of the terrible crowding of the audience. It took quite a while for the tumult to quiet down and I could begin to chant.

Later I was told that the cited domineering Jew was on the next day, Sunday, brought before the “*mishpat shalom*” (peace court) for disturbing the peace of the worshipers on the Sabbath and he was sentenced to pay an eighty pound fine and to cover the costs of repairing the doors of the synagogue. That shows that not anything goes in the Land of Israel.

After the Sabbath in Petah Tikva I had a whole week before my next public appearance. So I decided to make use of the week to take a look at what it was I had bought in the Land of Israel during the time I was still in America. The story of my buying land in the Land of Israel is as follows: Back in 1924, in New York, I was visited by a Jew by the name of Shvif [Juiv?] who offered me land for sale in the Land of Israel.

At that time it was a very popular thing, that Jews in foreign lands who had the means and were not yet ready to settle in the Land of Israel, meanwhile prepared land there on which to build a home when the time arrived. The cited Herr Shvif told me that the land was in the Migdal colony and the owner of the land, named Glikin, wants to sell part of his own land.

I then bought, through this Herr Shvif, twenty-three *dunams* of land [approx. 5.75 acres] that I had not, it is understood, ever seen with my own eyes, but I believed his word that I would probably not be fooled. How could it be that Jews in the Land of Israel would take a Jew in the Exile and simply fleece him? Such a thing was simply not to be believed. Now I was happy that finally I would have the possibility of taking a glance at my own piece of soil and to see what sort of home might be built there.

I telegraphed Herr Glikin and asked him to be so friendly as to come out to Tiberias to meet me and together we will ride out to the place where my property lies.

As soon as I arrived in Tiberias and was there for half an hour — as though from under the earth, Jews became aware that I had arrived and delegations began to come to me at the small inn at which I had stopped.

The first to come was the Head of the Community with two other members, who asked me not to shame their town and to chant there on a Sabbath. And right after there came a delegation from the Maccabee [sports] Club who told me that their aim is to build a healthy Jewish generation and asked me to help them raise the means through an appearance. These fine young men made the best impression on me and although this was in no way among my plans, I could find no strength within myself to deny them and that Sabbath I chanted in Tiberias, dividing the income among the Community and the Maccabee Club.

I cannot go on and fail to mention how these young Maccabees welcomed me, with what fanfare they led me from the hotel to the synagogue and back again. From the hotel, twelve heroic young fellows encircled me on both sides, dressed in white with blue scarves thrown across their chests. One of their eldest marched ahead and in the same way an eldest closed the parade from behind. I was placed in the middle of the “package,” and with the singing of “Be Happy and Rejoice, You Heroes of Valor!” In this manner I was led through the streets of Tiberias.

Of course, the street was dark with Jews who watched the joyful spectacle and followed us to the synagogue. I was deeply moved to have lived to have such honor in our land, an honor I could never have experienced in any other land in which Jews dwell in larger numbers. I gave this Sabbath chanting with the juices of my heart and the far-off hills around Tiberias surely echoed with my prayer of “And you will restore with compassion your holy city, Jerusalem!”

When on the next day, Sunday, my wife and I traveled to Migdal, a pleasant surprise awaited me: on that same day there arrived there the then-president of the World Zionist Organization and current President of the State of Israel, Professor Khayim Vaytsman [Chaim Weizmann] and his wife. They were accompanied by other distinguished guests, such as the banker Varburg [Warburg] from Berlin, and a large group of agronomists who were to consider various land issues. And in the center of all these transactions stood that same Glikin who had sold me the plot of land.

We all had lunch at Glikin’s house and later visited the fair orchards belonging to Sir Alfred Mond (later Lord [Baron] Melchett) and Nayditch’s [?]. I could not get my fill of seeing the beautiful panorama surrounding Migdal. And it was a day of great enjoyment for me. The next day my wife traveled with the Vaytsman family and with Herr Varburg to Nahalal where they were celebrating the dedication of the agricultural school for girls, and I remained with Glikin in Migdal in order to finally see with my own eyes the plot of land that I had bought.

He led me and I followed until we finally arrived at the very peak of the hill that encircles Migdal. Then he pointed to a tall pile of stones on the hill and said: “There it is...” I began to rub my eyes: Is this the fine piece of land that I had bought through Herr Shvif? I began to recall how the same Shvif had unrolled a map of Migdal before me, on which were so colorfully shown the handsome tree-lined paths that would cut through Migdal up to the hills, and on those paths there would be built handsome hotels, schools, a library and, of course, a synagogue for prayers, and a handsome theater was also indicated on the map.

My plot on the peak of the hill, I was then persuaded by Herr Shvif, would be the most attractive in all of Migdal; it would be the splendid view-site for the Sea of Galilee and of all the blooming *yishuv* that would spread beneath my feet. I will sit up there like a sovereign and will do nothing but sing [religious]

songs and praise to the Creator of the Universe for the goodness He did with me by bringing me to Migdal, and [I would] gaze down at the valley that would be flooded with flowers and with tempestuous life. The picture was so captivating, and the language with which he spoke was so iridescent that one would have to be an evil-hearted Jew to not be entranced and not to seize and close the deal.

So I did actually pay five hundred dollars then and the remaining fifteen hundred was paid as soon as I received the “deed” on the land from Herr Glikin. Now I stood and gazed at the hill of stones that was my property instead of the enchanted palace that the clever Herr Shvif had drawn for me two years ago in New York.

## Tel Aviv Jews Storm the People's House

Gazing thus on the hill of stones that was to have been my dreamed-of palace — my heart felt quite gloomy. Glikin, himself a refined and expert tradesman, quickly noticed what is going on with me and he did not wait at all for me to start saying something. He got ahead of me and says to me: “As I understand it, Herr Kwartin, you are not very satisfied with the purchase you have made. So I must tell you that I, myself, am not satisfied and I will exert myself to exchange for you this piece of land for another that is closer to the highway, at the main road. But — you will have to pay several hundred dollars more.”

So they obtained from me another several hundreds of dollars and I made the exchange. Because the stones there on the hill still lie there until the present day and no palace of any kind has been built there yet. So I had a decent piece of land, without stones, and in a good location. What is now to be done?

That year the citrus industry in the Land of Israel distinguished itself with a large crop and the harvest sold well abroad and the orchard-growers earned well. So good friends of mine began to urge me to plant an orchard on my plot in Migdal. What sort of planter am I and what do I know of such things? So one has to have the proper person who knows of such things and who would want to deal with it.

So again they appeared — Glikin. No other person could have come into consideration. Glikin was then the sovereign of Migdal. He was a partner in all the land of Migdal and its surroundings and also held the civil power in Migdal, and in addition to all this he was also the great expert in agricultural matters and was the only one to whom I could turn to about using my land so that it would not lay fallow and that something would be attempted to do with it.

*Caption of photo on unnumbered page following p. 491:*

**Khazn Kwartin chants afternoon prayers at the Tel Aviv “Bet Am” — People's House — 1926**

Glikin took over the planting of the orchard and fulfilled by one-hundred percent the pledge that Land of Israel Jews had given themselves then that the American “idiot” who falls into their hands should be worked over to the fullest and in the most fundamental manner...

Therefore when I came to Haifa the second time and was so delighted by the landscape of Mount Carmel that I decided to buy a plot of land there — this time I looked with both my eyes at that which I'm being sold. This time I was not satisfied anymore with the colorfully drawn charts that I was shown, nor by the improbable stories that I was told. I took along an agronomist and he actually chose the best plot on the best land, and — why should I deny it, I did actually succeed in my purchase on the beautiful Mount Carmel.

In the meantime, my *menedzher*, Herr Yaskiel, advised me that I had to begin preparing for a major concert in Tel Aviv that would, this time, take place in the *beth ha'am* — People's House, but under the skies on an open field. This concert was to be a popular one, so that the common laborer and ordinary person might also enjoy it. Four thousand tickets at reasonable prices were prepared. When I arrived in

Tel Aviv, Herr Yaskiel advised me that all the tickets had already been sold out and that he had received permission from the police to sell an additional five hundred tickets to people who are willing to stand.

But here the tragedy arrived. My *menedzher*, as is the custom with all *menedzhers* worldwide, wanted to get rich at one shot, so that instead of the permitted five hundred tickets, [he] printed a total of all of two thousand tickets and quickly sold them all and did not even tell me about it.

It was on a Tuesday afternoon when the concert was scheduled to start at around half-past three. I drove up with my wife and with my guide, Professor Vaynberg. But when we reached three-four blocks before the People's House, we encountered such a thick mass of people that we could in no way drive any farther, and began to push through on foot. Soaked in sweat, we barely forced our way through. Here we heard terrible screams of people who had bought tickets and now the police were not allowing them through because there was no more room for even a pinhead to be forced in.

The crowd recognized me and from all sides they began to address me with complaints about the transgression that had been done to them. The excited people outdoors threatened not to allow the concert to take place if they were not allowed entrance. My wife grew very nervous and demanded of me that we return to the hotel because she feared that, heaven forbid, a tragedy might occur.

But going back was also impossible, so great was the press of the crowd of people. Finally we pushed through and, through a backdoor, entered the *beth ha'am* building. I saw an impossible mass of people, crushed together like herring in a barrel or as in a New York *subvey* during the roaring evening hours after work. It was, however, impossible to start the concert due to the shouts and screams of the people outside who constantly stormed the entrance. They simply resounded throughout the air. And they were right, as well. Fifteen hundred people had bought tickets and now the police did not allow them in.

I stood on the stage with Professor Vaynberg and we did not know what we might do. It was by now five-thirty and we had no idea what could be done. Too, the police outdoors grew helpless and fist-fights began to erupt. Indoors the heat was very high and some elderly people began to faint due to having stood on their feet for so long.

My *menedzher* was nowhere to be seen before my eyes and the director of the *beth ha'am* stood there shaking lest he catch some blows. Finally I ordered to be given a large tube, like those used on the old gramophones, and through that tube I announced from the stage that, on the morrow, I would give a special concert for all those who had bought tickets and hadn't been able to enter for the concert. The excited crowd outdoors heard this and calmed down a bit.

One old Jew who was standing quite close to the stage and who had already fainted in the great heat and was barely resuscitated, upon hearing my words, bent over to me and, in a shaking voice, whispered into my ear: "Long may you live, *khazn*; I will, God willing, also come to the concert tomorrow!" In his words I heard the significance of a *khazn* for a Jew of the old sort. It was a part of his life for which he was even prepared to make sacrifices.

By six o'clock in the evening I was able to begin the concert. The furor quieted down and the air was clean and clear, as often occurs in the Land of Israel at evening after a hot day. My voice, too, was clean and clear, and I opened all my heart for all these dear Jews who had gone through so much to come to hear me, and they answered with as much applause as they could manage.



Since Tel Aviv has existed, there has not been observed such enthusiasm at a public event. And I must confess that I never saw the like in my entire *khazonish* career, even in the largest cities in America. This proves that in the Land of Israel, no matter how small the land may be and how few Jews there might there be found, there is gathered the extract of our people's life; there lives and will eternally live the true enthusiasm for all that our people has created in the course of the generations of its wandering among the nations.

My excitement over this greatest concert of mine in the Land of Israel was so great that all night afterwards I lay drained and exhausted and could not close an eye. And early next morning the real heavy stuff began. At around eleven o'clock a policeman came to me in my hotel, bringing a letter from the Police Chief of the Haifa District [warning] that I must not dare to appear again at a concert for those who were unable to enter the hall, as I had promised publicly yesterday, because I had broken the law.

My crime against the law consisted of the fact that I had not obtained written permission from the police for the concert, and application for such permission must be submitted at least a week in advance of the planned concert. And, again, during last night's concert there arose scandals and fist-fights in which several policemen were also injured. And most importantly — my *menedzher* had broken the law in that he had sold fifteen hundred more tickets than had been approved. Therefore he is being called to court but, meanwhile, until all is resolved, today's concert may not take place.

I was in a quandary because I had given my word to hold the concert and the crowd would not disperse and would conclude that I had fooled them yesterday. I called the Police Chief on the telephone and asked him not to place me in a difficult position and to allow today's concert to take place. His reply was a categorical 'no.' I then went off to the Mayor of Tel Aviv, the late Mayer Dizengof, and asked him to intervene with the Police Chief not so much on my behalf as for several thousand Tel Aviv Jews who had paid their money and could not enjoy anything for it.

He explained to me that the Tel Aviv city authorities do not consider it necessary to mix in the affairs of the English Police Chief. Still, he agreed to call the Police Chief on the telephone. I listened to their conversation and the result was the same — categorically: 'no and no.' I did not know how one might deal here so that I might remain a man of my word to the Tel Aviv Jews. In any case I firmly decided that I would absolutely come to the concert and there it would be seen what one can do. Should I not succeed in appearing — let them see in any case that the disruption did not come from my side.

## A Conflict With the English Police Chief in Tel Aviv and How He Apologizes

At two in the afternoon, that is, an hour before the scheduled start of the concert at the Tel Aviv Peoples' House for yesterday's "victims," I, together with Professor Vaynberg, was already in place. All the [streets] leading to the People's House were again packed with people. I mounted the stage and explained the situation to the crowd. I read them the letter from the Police Chief, told them about my visit with the Mayor Dizengof, and that all his efforts to have the concert permitted have been unsuccessful until now.

Those assembled decided to delegate from among themselves a delegation of three people to [go to] the Police Chief and again to request of him, in the name of three thousand assembled Jews, that he yet permit the concert to take place. In less than an hour they were back with the same reply: 'no and no.' The Gentile had dug in his heels and there was nothing to be done. It went on thus for almost two hours; I was just as aroused as the huge assembled crowd. I still didn't know whether I will be singing here today or will I have to shame the huge crowd of Jews, may no evil eye befall, and go back home.

Suddenly, a thought occurred to me: I may not actually concertize, but to chant *minkhe* —the afternoon prayers — who can forbid Jews to hold a religious service to God in their ancient land? No Englishman has yet been born who might dare to do such a thing. And right then, with no introductions, I told the crowd that whoever has a hat, or a *yarmulke*, should put it on his head and who doesn't — should cover his head with something or other, because I will join the crowd in *minkhe*.

I send for my *talis* [prayer shawl] at my hotel; they improvised a sort of lectern on the stage, the crowd began covering their heads and began to fervently applaud in a sign that the idea pleased them. At "God is righteous in all his deeds," I was already warmed up. The People's House was at once converted into a real Jewish *shul* [Orthodox synagogue]; Jews stood for the Quiet [standard version of the] Eighteen Blessings; everyone was swaying as in the old Houses of Study in Russia and Poland.

I had not for a long time had the opportunity to observe such a scene. Not in Vienna, not in Budapest and not even in recent years in America, did Jews take so seriously their coming to a holy place. Everything has been standardized and desiccated. And here, just as once in our old homes, there erupted a well of old traditions. Even if it is a [secular] People's House, but *minkhe* — is *minkhe*. All in attendance took it in total seriousness, despite the fact that among the attendees there certainly were no lack of Jews who did not hold with piety [Orthodoxy].

I felt that my audience was much different: Jews who actually know the meaning of the holy texts, who know every word of their prayers, and when I chant the High Eighteen Prayers [including a supplement] they will actually follow verse upon verse and understand what every prayer means. Where, in which country — even [one] with millions of Jews — can you achieve this?

All these thoughts during the Quiet Eighteen Blessings brought me to a truly uplifted spirit, and never have I chanted such a High Eighteen Blessings than that evening under the blue skies of Tel Aviv...I paused with special intonation at almost every verse and chapter. Most of all, when it came to "Regard

our misfortune,” “Heal us,” “Sound the *shofar* [ram’s horn]” and “Jerusalem will restore” — here I improvised and devoted my whole heart. I felt as part of the entire mass that now truly finds itself in its own land, but which lacks quite a bit before true liberation, complete redemption. And in all their names I prayed that there be an end to Jewish pains, and that the inimical Gentiles may no longer have the say over us.

Some three thousand Jews stood there, entranced. They drank in every note. Such a sacred quiet ruled that one could hear the flight of a nearby fly. The blue sky above our heads was clear and pure, the air was warm and enjoyable — one’s soul was almost caressed and the singing and praying came from themselves. I felt myself to be tremendously upraised and I thanked God for not having abandoned me at this very moment and I could provide to the gathered Jews the entire — “All my bones will proclaim...”

When I concluded with “The One Who blesses his nation with peace” — I heard a thunder of joyous expression around me. A huge crowd of people reached toward me to express their thankfulness. The greatest curiosity was that I saw at once, near me on the stage, the English Police Chief, who reaches out his hand to me with a warm “*tenk yu!*” He tells me that he had been informed at his office that I was conducting the concert against his forbidding. So he left his office in wrath to teach me not to dare breaking the law.

But approaching closer to the place of the People’s House, and hearing the religious prayers that I perform and observing that the audience is virtually enchanted — he himself was so stunned that he totally forgot why he had come, and began himself to listen with the deepest interest. He assured me that he would never in his life dare to interrupt such a divine service, and that he regrets the incident that had occurred between us, and now I may continue singing whatever I wish. I did actually sing and “chanted” some of the Days of Awe prayers, accompanied by Professor Vaynberg.

Again there was wild enthusiasm and, at the end, a couple of strong young guys grabbed me into their arms and, in that way, carried me from the stage onto the street. I was entirely enchanted by this tremendous experience and when I was finally back at my hotel, dead-tired and drained, I considered that this was one of the most beautiful days of my life, in that I was able to avoid deceiving the faith of thousands of Jews whom I had, yesterday, given a promise to sing for them, and really that I was so full and strong in form that I had not disappointed their expectations.

The next morning I had a telephone call from Usishkin from Jerusalem, who informed me that there were now there great numbers of influential Jewish tourists from all over the world [and] he wants to utilize this opportunity and he begs me to hold a concert for the Jewish National Fund about which he had spoken with me earlier. Despite my unusual tiredness and exertion I spoke not a word of objection and promised to present that concert the following Tuesday in Jerusalem.

The concert took place in the largest movie house in Jerusalem in the presence of high government officials and of thousands of Jews. The Jewish National Fund gained significant income and I received the great honor that Usishkin himself took the trouble to visit me in my hotel and brought me the certificate of the “Golden Book” of the Jewish National Fund into which my name had been inscribed.

That same evening, after the concert for the Jewish National Fund, another great honor fell upon me: The worthy Rabbi Kook, ז”ל, came in order to hold a return visit with me. He excused himself for somewhat delaying in paying off the debt of a return visit. In modest words I depicted how dearly I hold

the honor that he was providing to me. The following conversation revealed that the yeshiva under his leadership suffers a shortage of funds. He asked whether it might not be possible for me with one of my *minkhe-mayrev* [afternoon and evening] prayers to contribute something to the strengthening of the yeshiva. I immediately promised that to him.

The very next morning there appeared leaflets on the streets of Jerusalem, [announcing] that I will pray *minkhe-mayriv* at the Ruin of Reb Yehuda HaKhosid for the benefit of the yeshiva of Rabbi Kook, *z"l*. The students of the yeshiva themselves set out to the various hotels at which the foreign tourists stayed, to sell them tickets to the *minkhe-mayriv*.

Jerusalem had already heard what had happened in Tel Aviv during my *minkhe* in the People's House, so the Ruin was overfilled with Jews from all over the world. Again they hung on the surrounding roofs and the crowding was so great that I feared that an unfortunate accident, may we be preserved, might occur.

But everything went on peacefully. The yeshiva had a significant income, which led to great joy for me.

With this *minkhe-mayriv* my *khazonishe* activity ended in the Holy Land. Delegations of tens of institutions both in Jerusalem and in other cities still beleaguered me and pleaded [for me] to appear on their behalf, but the time for my departure was drawing close and I had to, sadly, refuse them all. In addition, I was never so exhausted and tense as [I was] after my appearances in the Land of Israel. That was because nowhere else had I given so much heart and soul as in my concerts and prayers in the Land of Israel. No other country had so awakened the deepest depths of my entire being, as [did] the Land of Israel. I felt as though I am paying off an old debt to my homeland, a multi-generational debt, when we were exiled and could see the holy places only in [our] thought as we brought out the ancient prayers before the Ark of the Covenant.

I had to hurry to leave for another reason: a concert was awaiting me in Alexandria on my way back to America. Once I receive a letter from Herr Green, secretary of the Zionist Organization in Alexandria, who was the son-in-law of Baron Menashe, a famous personality and chairman of the Zionist Organization of Egypt, that I should not refuse them and on my way back I should present a concert for them, the entire income of which should go to the *Keren Ha'Yesod* [Foundation Fund — United Israel Appeal]. My *menedzher* quickly traveled there to make all the preparations.

I began to prepare for the journey, but I could not remain longer in Jerusalem. The various organizational representatives gave me no rest with their offers. So I decided to go off for a few days to Rehovot, so that no one might know, and there to rest up for a few days before my departure to Alexandria.

## I Leave the Holy Land

We arrived at Rehovot and went to a private dwelling that my friend Amdurski from Jerusalem had recommended. I did not even give my correct name and was certain that here I would enjoy a few days rest. As soon as we went out into the street and entered an inn to get some food and hadn't even managed to swallow the first bite — immediately there stood around us a circle of Jews who had recognized me. Even before we finished eating, half of Rehovot had gathered around the house.

Immediately the warden of the synagogue arrived with two other prominent people and requested of me that, as today is Friday and tomorrow is a Sabbath of the pre-new moon, it is no more than right that I should chant for them on this Sabbath and they will pay me as they are able. I told them the whole truth that I had escaped to Rehovot simply to hide from all the offers to chant, that I am dead-tired and am simply not in condition to fulfill their request.

Perhaps I might have dealt with their request somewhat differently, but I recalled that among the tens of colonies that had contacted me to provide them with a Sabbath chanting or a concert, Rehovot was not among them. And it so happened that, at that time, it was one of the richest colonies in the *yishuv*. It was even murmured about Rehovot's residents that they employ mostly Arab workers and that the few Jewish workers that do gain employment in their wine-grape fields and pastures are somewhat too greatly exploited.

All of this together made me unwilling to accept their request. But they did not desist and argued that this is a great insult to their colony, which is one of the oldest in the Land, and what will people say when they hear that the world-famous *khazn*, yet from America, was with them and did not even approach the pulpit. But I held fast to my [position], that I am not able to chant this time. So they asked that I should at least come to the synagogue on the morrow to be their guest. They certainly thought: As long as I am in the synagogue, they will certainly importune me in the proper manner, and I will have to chant at the pulpit.

I understood their intentions, yet I still accepted the invitation to come to the synagogue tomorrow, on the Sabbath. I was chosen to say *maftir* [reading from the Prophets] and the Jews began to insist that I should at least chant *musif* [the supplementary prayer]. Even saying *maftir* came to me with difficulty and I had, sadly, to reject their request. This was the only occasion in the Land of Israel in which I created discomfort for the local Jews. I want to believe that they forgave me.

At that time there lived in Rehovot the famous professor of zoology, Aharoni. I did not know him but he, apparently, had heard of me, and on the same Friday when I arrived in Rehovot he and his wife visited us and invited me to visit his laboratories. We accepted the invitation with appreciation and we did not regret it.

Professor Aharoni, in our presence, carried out several experiments on living insects, minuscule creatures that can only be seen through a magnifying glass. It was edifying to the highest degree and we spent many long hours there. Most remarkable was that Mrs. Aharoni is also learned in the same subject. Both dear and very modest people, while at the same time of a very high cultural level. Both work energetically and love science, to which they dedicate their lives.

When we remained with them for supper, the table was of white marble. Not covered by any sort of tablecloth. The foods — vegetarian, all so simple and clean. After the meal Professor Aharoni sang several arias as well as some recitatives from the works of *Khazn* Rozovski. Born in Riga, he had heard Rozovski quite a bit and had an enthusiasm for that great Jewish musician.

Professor Aharoni had an outstanding heroic baritone voice, but quite unrestrained. He had great familial pride in his cousin, Yadlovker: one of the greatest singers in the Berlin Chamber-Opera. Later, Professor Aharoni asked me innocently if there would be a reason for him to train his voice. I was in no way ashamed and said that it would be better to remain at his fine, ideal and useful work and to leave the art of singing alone. He laughed and promised me that he would follow my advice.

A very pleasant finale of my visit to the Land of Israel were these few days in Rehovot in the company of an honored Jewish scholar. This was a new type of Jew that we in the lands of exile could never encounter. There were also there no small number of great Jewish scholars, often even internationally known, but they never lived a fully Jewish life; they didn't feel the pride in being a Jew and of being useful to one's own community.

And so there arrived the day of leaving the Land that had surfeited me with sun-lit juices. I felt with all my senses that I am not leaving forever, that it would not take too long before I return here, possibly to settle permanently.

Again I am in Egypt and while being in Cairo we were invited to the home of an old patriarchal Sefardic family with whom we had become acquainted while in the Land of Israel, and had forged close friendship. The name of the family was Btash, very prominent in Egypt due to their wealth, great benevolence and keen love for the Land of Israel. The elder Btash owned, in England, large manufacturing-factories and every year he would travel from London to the Land of Israel for Passover. En route he would stop in Cairo, taking along all his sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law and grandchildren and together they would observe a traditional, patriarchal seder in the Eternal City — Jerusalem.

The younger Btash, all of thirty-something years old, built by himself and supported with his own means a Hebrew school in Alexandria that bore the symbolic name "Learning Torah Well and Properly." In that school, in addition to all modern subjects, Hebrew, and Jewish history, they also taught the students various trades, such as: tailoring, cobbling, locksmithing and carpentry, so that the students, upon graduating, might immediately have a trade in hand and be able to lead independent lives. For each trade there were special teachers and equipped workshops.

I took great pleasure from my visit in that school that combined Torah and trade. I saw that even among such distant Jewish settlements there are individual good Jews who think of a useful outcome for the maturing youth of their people.

There arrived the day of my concert in Alexandria, which is one of the brightest memories of my life. I do not want to speak here about the honor that the Egyptian Jews bestowed upon me, how they drove me in an auto decorated with flowers through the streets, how they welcomed me into their private homes — true palaces with flower gardens and with tens of Black servants who, upon a nod from us, brought on silver trays all the finest and best that a person might desire. The salons of these Jews simply filled one's eyes with the gold, silver and crystal that shimmered in every corner.

But it would be false to say that these wealthy Jews thought only of living in luxury. I must mention here the Nadler brothers, whose house was a model of Jewish beauty and aristocracy. And, at the same time, they gave charity anonymously, not even mentioning their large contributions to all Jewish national causes. As soon as they heard that somewhere there was a Jewish need — they were the first to help with outspread hands.

My concert in Alexandria took place in the large opera house, which overflowed with the finest Jewish intelligentsia of the city. When I glanced at the hall it seemed to me as though I were at premiere at the New York Metropolitan, so sparkling were the jewels on every side. I was truly in a good mood and did not spare my strengths in satisfying the yearning of these castaway Jews for a bit of hearty Jewish melody. Their enthusiasm was, for me, unneeded evidence that Jews are the same everywhere: one need only be able to awaken in them their ancient and eternal attachment to Jewry, and they will present you with hearty thanks.

And so we left Egypt on the way back to Europe and America. From Italy, where our ship's voyage stopped, we went to Montreux, in Switzerland, where we wanted to visit our daughter, Shulamis, who lived there in a boarding school. It was a strictly Orthodox institution, directed by Fraulein Marcus, where Jewish daughters from every corner of the world received a truly pious Jewish education, as well as general education in the best European manner.

The next day I learned that this Alpine city also contained a yeshiva. And before I could look around, I was visited by Herr Botshko, who conducted the yeshiva. He asked me to visit this educational institution and I accepted the invitation with pleasure. I was interested in seeing a yeshiva in this remote corner of the mountains.

Two yeshiva fellows came for me and I was astounded to see the sumptuous villa, a true palace, in which the yeshiva was located. Such yeshivas, in such a magnificent surrounding, encircled by such flower gardens, could not be found in our old home. I went through the classes, led by the cited Herr Botshko, who devoted all his strength to [assure that] this Torah Center should be at the highest level of traditional Judaism, and I was totally astounded. The voice of the Torah resounded even more here in the mountains and filled one's heart with joy.

I was so deeply moved by this scene that I offered to conduct the *minkhe-mayriv* prayers for the teachers and yeshiva boys. And during my chanting, I was so warmed up that I almost felt as though I, myself, was a yeshiva boy...

## Just One More Sight of Budapest

After several pleasant days that I quite unexpectedly spent in that little village in the mountains, I then visited several European cities before my leaving for America.

Upon arriving in Vienna, where my wife's parents then lived, I recalled that I owe a debt to my old, dear city of Budapest, which I had promised a visit on my way back from the Land of Israel and perhaps also to gratify my very many friends there with a chanting. I at once wrote to my friend of past years, Behm, and, as well, to the Community, that I would visit them two days later.

I was awaited by my friend Behm and the Community Secretary, Herr Berger. But as soon as I arrived at the "Metropole" Hotel, Jews recognized me and the street was blackened by people.

Soon there arrived for me at the hotel the president of the Community, Herr Lederer, at the head of a large delegation. The point of the long discussion was whether there might not be a possibility that, as the cantor who had served this city for ten years, I might create the pleasure for them and remind [them] of the good old days before the war and to chant on Sabbath at the Tabak Temple. I told the the whole truth, that I have concluded a tour over the Land of Israel, where I appeared eighteen times on Sabbath and at concerts, that I am tired and exhausted and am rushing to get home. But this does not mean, may we be spared, a refusal, because the same sentiments that they feel towards me, I feel from my side to this city, where I had become great and famous. As long as my strengths allow, I will chant a Sabbath for them.

The next day all the Budapest newspapers reported that the darling of local Jewry, Cantor Kwartin, will *perhaps* chant on the coming Sabbath at the Tabak Temple. And based on that *perhaps*, some six thousand Jews came to the temple on Friday evening. The large surrounding courtyard, to say nothing of all the side entrances and corridors, was jammed full.

Two representatives of the executive led me ceremoniously into the temple, as I chanted "How good it is" while walking. The temple was illuminated in celebratory style, something that I remember just once during the long time that I chanted there. This was during the time of the First World War, when the temple was the site of a special religious service for the Austro-Hungarian army, attended by the sister of Emperor Franz Joseph and her entire suite of generals and estate-tenders.

The doors and windows of the temple were wide open to provide a possibility of hearing me to all the thousands who could not enter inside. I was deeply removed by this welcome that my old countrymen gave me, and I welcomed the Sabbath in the old style, with fire and fervor, feeling that my every note penetrates deeply into the hearts of my listeners who are at home with me, though they haven't heard me for some six years' time.

The scene was repeated on Sabbath morning. Though the stores of all the Jews were open, the temple was full nevertheless. On Sabbath evening the Community arranged a celebratory banquet in honor of my wife and me. And sitting there on the dais, between President Lederer and the vice-president, Herr Erlikh, on the other side, these two Jews began to [try to] convince me and my wife that I should again assume the job of Chief Cantor in Budapest.

Those Jews promised me the moon and stars, that they would even include the six years that I had been in America, in addition to the ten years in Budapest, in the retirement calculation, according to



which I would not need to be active and would be assured lifelong payment by the Community. Whatever my heart's desire might be I could then have requested of these ordinary Jews who loved me and wanted [me] to be with them for a long time, forever.

They [tried to] convince us that we would live more beautifully and easier with them in Budapest rather than in New York, even though the banknotes in which we will be paid will not be dollars but Hungarian *pengos*. They gave me all the possible privileges in the world to earn outside income by traveling to other countries, through concerts and all other means that I might, myself, invent.

The truth was that I felt very flattered by this offer, I felt great respect toward the Budapest Jewish community; one was dealing with gentlepeople whose word was word, who knew how to appreciate a talented person.

But there were tens of reasons that did not permit me to accept their offer. One [of them] was that I had already signed a contract in New York for the upcoming Days of Awe. So they replied to this that would accept me as well after the Days of Awe, if only I would come...

Before departing Hungary, the community representatives offered to lead us about the city and show the Jewish institutions that they had developed since the time that Hungary had become an independent state. There really was much to see. The Jewish community hospital, the recovery house for weak people, the institute for the blind, the old-age home, the Jewish high school — each institution on its own was a model of fine Jewish organization and the pride of the local Jews.

Toward the very end, the Budapest Jews found it necessary to express their recognition by presenting me and my wife with two honorary certificates that enshrined our names in the buildings of the Jewish hospital and of the Jewish high school. What more could they do to win our hearts so that we might yet agree to return here and live among them?

Thus we bade farewell to Budapest, the cradle of my becoming famous among Jews all over the world. Upon returning to Vienna I first realized how deeply the tour across the Land of Israel had exhausted me, and I decided before returning to America to rest up my nerves a bit in one of the numerous health resorts in Austria. I rode to Bad Alpentherme [?] Gastein that has outstanding mineral baths and is surrounded by wonderful nature.

My wife and her family were at a neighboring place, named Bad Aussee. When I returned to them my wife tells me that in the same villa, on the first floor, there lives the world-famous Sadigur *rebe* [Hasidic leader/rabbi] and that he had a few times sent his assistant to find out when I am returning, because he wants to get to know me.

Despite the fact that I had for all those years completely separated from the [Hasidic] rabbinical world. Yet I believed that it is my duty to go first to the *rebe* to wish him *sholem aleykhem* [peace be with you].

When I entered the dwelling of my neighbor, the Sadigur *rebe*, his assistant at once announced to him the name of the guest and within a minute the *rebe* came out. I saw before me a young man with a wonderfully imposing appearance, made gentle and spiritual. In conversation the *rebe* evinced much secular knowledge and even the subject of music was not strange to him.

I spent over two hours with him and was amazed to meet such an enlightened and highly-educated person in the rabbinic world. From that day on we met often and together took long strolls to the water

wells where the sick drink the healing waters. Through his genteel indications I surmised that he might have said: “I would very much like, Herr Kwartin, to hear you sing a bit of Jewish melody, but I don’t know how that may be done.”

Once the *rebe* mustered his courage and said to me: “You know, Herr Kwartin, [that] a Hasidic *rebe* must renounce many things of this world, even though they be spiritual things of this world. I have heard much about you, but I have, sadly, never had an opportunity to hear you.” I guessed what he meant to say by this, and I promised to give him an opportunity to hear me, and that he alone need determine the time and place, so I will gladly do it.

At the same time the Husyatin *rebe* and his entire numerous family of sons, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law was at the same spa; he was an uncle of the Sadigur *rebe*. Once on a Sunday afternoon during the usual stroll with the *rebe*, he informs me that, for that evening, he had invited to his house his uncle, the Husyatin *rebe* and his whole family, and he asks me to come, as well. In addition, the Sadigur *rebetsin* [*rebe*’s wife] invited my wife to come there at the same time.

Right then I truly felt myself to be in a *rebe*’s household. Despite the fact that the men sat separately and the young *rebetsins* merely peeked in from an adjoining room, one could see their wonderful beauty and genteel manners, but simultaneously a great interest in the secular guest who is in the house, and certainly, as well, in the singing-art that he embodies.

We spent some time in idle conversation, then I spotted a piano, so I sat myself down and, accompanying myself, I began to sing some of my own improvisations in the truly traditional Jewish spirit. Both *rebes* gave me hearty congratulations; at that, the Sadigur *rebe* asked if I would be so kind as to sing some modern thing, that I usually sing at prayers. I sang “God is a master in the sky” from the *slikhes* [pre-High Holiday period prayers] in a highly modern classic recitative.

The Sadigur *rebe* leaped up from his chair and pressed my hand. In the course of which he said that my two traditional improvisations really did delight him, but the little bit of *slikhes* enthused him tremendously. When the guests departed and I remained alone with the Sadigur *rebe*, he asked me to stay awhile, went into the adjoining room [and] quickly came out and began to shove into my hand two golden coins.

I broke out laughing and told the *rebe* that the way of the world is the opposite: that the follower [Hasid] puts a gift into the *rebe*’s hand after a meeting, and here there’s the total contrast: the *rebe* is giving me the meeting-gift. To this he replied to me that I had created great pleasure for him and therefore I deserve that, this time, the matter be reversed. He asks me to accept this in the name of his friendship and recognition. What could I do to avoid insulting the *rebe*? — So I put away the the golden coins as a keepsake of my recognition by a saint. Some years later I again met the Sadigur *rebe* again in the Land of Israel. With pleasure we, for a short time, renewed our old friendship.

## A Concert at The Berlin Philharmonic

The Days of Awe began to approach and it was time for me to be back in New York. The visit to the Land of Israel and Europe refreshed me greatly and encouraged me and I came to the New World as though reborn.

I chanted the Days of Awe in The Bronx on behalf of the Old Age Home in Harlem.

This cited society had rented Hunts Point Palace, which accommodates more than three thousand people. The gross income for the society was 29 thousand dollars, and after deducting all the expenses they remained with almost ten thousand dollars, net. I am not equipped to describe what took place there at *kol nidre* [Yom Kipur eve service]. There were no seats left to sell, so the management was not ashamed and took ten dollars for standing room in the surrounding corridors.

The executive body felt great thankfulness to me and after the Days of Awe a committee headed by the executive Zeldof brought me a silver vase as a sign of recognition and a special letter of thanks, signed by the old folks in the institution, who, thanks to the income, were assured a calm winter with everything they needed.

The year of 1927 was especially joyful for me. In that year my wife bore me the son of my latter years, Sholem, whom I named after my father. Rabbi Maslyanski, who was the *sandek* [holder of infant at circumcision ceremony] joked during the circumcision that he is certain that the boy would grow up to be a *khazn* for Jews, because since his father won't open his mouth until he is paid, so the little one doesn't want to scream for free, although he didn't doubt that the ceremony was certainly painful for him.

In that year I also succeeded in fulfilling my dream of many years and putting my musical creations into order. It took me a year to prepare for publication my first *khazonish* volume, "*Zmiros Zevulon*" [Songs of Zebulon], which contains fifty-two of my improvisations as those improvisations were mainly heard on the gramophone records and at my concerts and Sabbath chantings — so that volume reverberated well in the entire Jewish world. Despite the fact that the price for such a book was quite high, eight dollars each, nevertheless during the first year almost seven hundred copies were sold as far as in South Africa and Australia.

This gave me added courage and I began to gather material for the second part of "*Zmiros Zevulon*."

The directors of the German gramophone company meanwhile engaged me for a concert tour of 15 concerts across the largest cities of Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and other countries.

In Germany I was to appear in Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden, and then there followed such old well-known cities as: Vilna, Kovno, Grodno, Bialystok, Warsaw, Lodz, Riga, Prague and Budapest. I was to start in Berlin which was at that time the greatest musical center of Europe, whose critics drew the greatest universal attention. And I must admit that for a long time I had not had such stage fright over an appearance as [I did] that year in Berlin. The "what will the Gentiles say" penetrated deeply into my bones and I was dying to read what would be written about me in so world-famous a newspaper as the "*Berliner Tageblatt*" or the "*Fosishe Zeitung*" [respectively, Berlin Daily Newspaper, Vossisch (?) Newspaper].

My concert in Berlin was arranged for in the large Philharmonic Hall and the *menedzhers* were not ashamed to set prices that were no less than for appearances by Caruso. Also added to the concert was my younger daughter, Clara, who was then appearing with the Berlin Opera. Despite the unusually high prices, no tickets could be obtained two weeks before the concert.

I wracked my brain to think of an accompanist for my *khazonishe* improvisations. As for the classic [cantorial] pieces, where the accompaniment is written down, they can be assigned even to a Gentile who is familiar with these things, but for the improvised Jewish prayers — what would I be able to accomplish even with the most musical German? They are accustomed to Wagnerian uproars of drums and cymbals and trumpets, so how could they approach a Jewish minor-key prayer that is full of supplications to the Master of the Universe?

But a happenstance saved the situation. Once my daughter tells me that, among the Berlin Jews there is talk about a Yemenite dancer who had come from the Land of Israel with her husband, Nahum Nardi. The dancer's name was Brokhe Tsipora and her husband is a composer and a highly educated musical person who happens to accompany his wife on the piano. Their concerts of oriental music and dance had terrific success in the cities of Europe.

When I heard that Nahum Nardi is to be found in Berlin my eyes lit up. I knew this person well from my having been to the Land of Israel and I knew that he is an excellent accompanist, especially by ear, and that he catches the singer's slightest nuances and things do not need to be spelled out for him [Yiddish: place a finger in his mouth]. With such an accompanist, the singer feels as though he was walking on an iron bridge.

We lost no time and invited Nardi and his wife to my daughter's home and we came to an understanding that he will accompany me on my entire tour across the various countries. A weight fell from my shoulders and I did not even think anymore about what the great music experts might write about me in the Berlin newspapers. With such an accompanist I was quite reassured that nothing bad might come to me.

Two thousand Berlin Jews filled the Philharmonic Hall at my concert. Berlin at that time was the largest center of Russian emigration, and among those present one could see the most honored and worthy representatives from the once so-famous Russian Jewry. I began with "How great" by Levandovski, and then I continued with my popular improvisations that had by then captured the Jewish world. Such numbers as: "Eternal love," "Lay us down," "Rock of Israel" — acted as magic on that audience that was yearning beyond measure for heartfelt Jewish melody from the purest traditional source.

My daughter sang several songs and opera arias. During the time she was singing I was visited in the dressing room by the *menedzher* of the gramophone company [who] embraced me and began to kiss me. That was how he celebrated the success of my first appearance and he was certain that the entire concert tour would be a chain of unending successes and would be the best promotion for the company that produces my gramophone records.

In the second part I sang a European repertoire: two songs by Schubert, "Ezra" by Rubinstein in Hebrew, and closed with an elegiac number, "The essence of man is dust" in which, in the passage "and it will disappear as dust" I held a note breathlessly and with a continual trilling so that the audience in the

hall almost lost its breath. Wild applause broke out as a response to this deeply human motif that relates the senselessness of our daily hustle and bustle and about how everything passes by, like a sweet dream.

During the second intermission I was visited by the president of the Berlin [Jewish] Community and two other members of the leadership. They thanked me in the name of the Community for the spiritual enjoyment that I had provided to them and they took the opportunity to invite me to a concert at the Orienburger [?] Temple two days later, where the famous opera singer Yablakov was to appear, and the great Jewish scholar, Albert Einstein, was to play a violin solo. In deep appreciation, I accepted the invitation.

In the third and final section, my daughter sang again, and then we both sang in duet and I closed with “Our father, our king,” which again stirred up those present with its deep religious chord that is so characteristic of this creation. The hall roared and stormed and I had to sing unnumbered encores. I descended from the stage dead-tired, but I had a joyful feeling over having been able to enthuse such a tribe of Jews, may no evil eye befall, of the finest and most attractive intelligence to be found among our people.

The next day I had the long-awaited opportunity to read what the most famous music critics of that time in Europe had to say about my art of singing. They praised in the highest terms my original presentation and the power of my voice to awaken in the listener the deepest and strongest emotions. My *menedzhers* rubbed their hands in glee. They used these words of praise, in the first case, [to promote] the further tour across Europe. And if this were not enough — they right on the spot arranged with me for another such tour for the following year, 1929.

From Berlin we headed toward the cities of Poland, Lithuania and Estonia and then back to Prague, Budapest, etc. Everywhere Jews already knew me from earlier appearances and they brought forward not only their money, but also their heart for the enjoyment and spiritual uplift that a Sabbath chanting of mine or a concert brought into every city.

The year of 1928 was the last year in America of great *prosperiti* before the terrible economic crash that struck the country a year later. That year New York Jews were still able to pay for my Days of Awe chanting the sum of eleven thousand, five hundred dollars, something that in the later crisis years was no longer repeated.

I was hired at the Philadelphia *akademi ov myuzik*. The entrepreneur, a certain Herr Sheyfer [Schaeffer] had to provide the choir at his expense. Despite this he still had cause to refer to me positively...

## My Unsuccessful Concert at the Warsaw Philharmonic

In that same year, 1928, I also concluded a contract with the Victor Record Company about recording sixteen numbers at the price of eight thousand dollars. These were such popular prayers as: “Through your servant,” “Blow the ram’s horn,” “A night of watchfulness,” “Master of the universe,” “A psalm of David’s,” “Rabbi Ishmael said,” “The Master which is in heaven,” “May it be Your will,” “Flee, my beloved,” “The soul is Yours,” etc. They spread across the entire Jewish world, wherever there was the smallest Jewish settlement, and were received by Jews of all classes with the greatest enthusiasm. Evidence of this was in the many tens of thank-you letters that I received; among them were also two letters from Christians who thanked me especially for the classic record “The Master Which Is in Heaven.”

After the joyous year of 1928 there arrived the hard economic crisis that ruined thousands of Jewish families. The clearest sign of hard times was that, prior to my Days of Awe chanting in the year of 1929, I received only six thousand dollars, that is, half of that of the prior year. After the High Holidays I went out on my second concert tour through European cities [the contract for which] I had concluded a year earlier with the German gramophone company.

The first concert took place again in Berlin and in the same huge Philharmonic Hall. I was then in my mid-fifties, but the reaction to my singing was as though I were a newly rising star. The most famous music critics of the Berlin newspapers wrote that my voice is young and fresh, smoothly [moving] in the registers of the deepest to the highest notes, a tenor voice of rare beauty with a rarely deep, almost baritone timbre, very elastic with tremendous persistence, with an unusual coloratura and rare breathing technique.

After reading so much praise of myself — one’s head might have been turned. But I thought to myself: May no evil eye befall me, and the following events proved that I was right.

Somehow the start of the tour in Berlin was too good for the following path to go forth smoothly. My appearance at the large Warsaw Philharmonic was to take place four days later. On the way from Berlin to Warsaw I caught a bad cold in the sleeping car. Upon arrival at the Warsaw hotel I felt that my throat was burning like a fire. I had never in my *khazonishe* career felt pains in the throat. So I had never had anything to do with throat doctors and specialists.

I had my grandmother’s cure: gargling with bicarbonate of soda. I also used camomile tea. But this time none of the old-home remedies worked. My *menedzher* grew alarmed and, against my will, he went off and brought to me in the hotel a great throat-specialist who examined my throat and said that I have an inflammation and it must take several days before it passes. He proposed treating my throat with various medicines, but since I had never doctored my throat, I refused to have him treat my throat.

The whole business excited me terribly and made me nervous and I asked my *menedzher* to have the concert postponed. But *menedzhers* are accustomed to be more concerned with the box office than with the condition of the artist. Especially when they see that tickets are being grabbed up — then there is no use at all in talking or arguing with them. There were only two days left before the concert, so I began

placing cold compresses, gargled and sweated. It became somewhat better for me, but it was far from good.

With a feeling of vexation and deep regret I went to the building of the Philharmonic. I had an inner sureness that a failure awaited me, but I had no alternative at hand. When I came out on stage, without having asked my *menedzher*, I announced to the huge audience that I am not in the best of health and that it would be better if I were to be relieved of today's concert and I advised the attendees to ask the box office to refund the money for their tickets.

At a guess, the audience took this as a joke on my part, because they replied with a storm of applause and cries were heard that I should start singing. I could not help myself and began the concert with the greatest exertion. They even applauded after the first number, but it was felt that this was more applause out of respect rather than true recognition.

After the second number it was worse; the audience responded more weakly. The first section was thereby a full-fledged catastrophe for me. The Warsaw *khazonim*, though they came to my dressing room backstage and consoled me with the finest of words, that such could happen to everyone, I still felt that they are patting their bellies over my failure. This is the habit of people, to be begrudging and to enjoy seeing the other slip and fall.

But God willed that I should get a bit better precisely after the first section of the concert. In my excitement I had sweated a bit and my throat was cleared out. I tested my voice and saw that it was improving. My mood, too, grew lighter and in better courage I mounted the stage.

I was still not the Kwartin that the Warsaw Jews were expecting to hear, but it was no longer as catastrophic as in the first section. I receive large applause and thanked God that it ended thus.

The critique in the Warsaw Yiddish newspapers was, however, unjust toward me. This must especially be said of the well-known Warsaw music reviewer and folksinger, Menakhem Kipnis, who in the Warsaw *Haynt* [Today] published a very unfriendly and unjust reaction to my concert. He completely did not take into account the conditions in which I had to perform. Kipnis is by now departed, he was tragically killed by the Germans in the Warsaw Ghetto. But in the name of truth I must say that he wrote about me in an angry tone and that because of it I bore anger against him for many long years.

After resting briefly in Warsaw after this generally unsuccessful concert of mine, I again felt outstanding in my voice and I could undertake the following journey. The nearest point was Lodz, where upon arriving at the "Grand Hotel" which was the center for all foreigners and of the cultural life of the city, to our great amazement we saw huge placards [announcing] that on the day after my concert, the famous singer Batistini is to appear.

My *menedzher* grew somewhat fearful and immediately inquired at the box office where my concert was to take place what was going on? The reply was: There is not a single ticket left. Then he finally calmed down. My voice was at its full strength and in regret I remembered the Warsaw Jews who had to experience disappointment, not having heard the true Kwartin.

During the first intermission, Batistini came [to my dressing room] and greeted me warmly. In passing he touched upon the old query: why had I not preferred to go into opera? I replied to him that I had not lost anything in [following] my *khazonish* career.

The next day I experienced Bastini's concert. He was truly a God-inspired artist and I will never forget the impression of his singing. I regretted that the hall for his concert was not fully filled. Apparently, the Lodz Jews, who were the main attendees of concerts in the city, thought more of a *khazn* than of the world's greatest singer at that time.

After Lodz came Vilna, the hearty Jewish Vilna, which is so entranced with its poverty and with its veneration of every expression of spiritual Jewish life. Vilna bathed in Jewishness and leaving there one took along the faith that, despite the difficult economic conditions in which the Jews there lived under the Polish regime, they will survive thanks to their spiritual strength and their special rootedness in generations of Jewishness. To our great tragedy there came a terrible storm that erased Jewish life there from the face of the earth.

Then came such cities as: Kovno, Grodno, Riga, Dvinsk and Libova. All these Jewish communities venerated a Jewish *khazn* whom they considered to be the spokesman and song-presenter of all their yearnings and dreams. Every trip of mine across the Jewish cities filled me with joy and nobility and I was proud of being able to bring a drop of consolation and hope into that desolate Jewish life.

After completing the successful (except for Warsaw) tour, I traveled because of family affairs to Vienna where my wife's parents lived, and I began to prepare myself for my second trip to the Land of Israel. This trip of mine was to finally decide my future fate. I had earnest desires to make my permanent home in the Land of Israel. So I wanted to look about fundamentally [to decide] where to build my home and how things are going in the development of our homeland and what can I do not only for my own future, but also to assist in the development of the Land, which is the hope of so many thousands of Jews in the lands of their oppression.



## My Second Trip to the Land of Israel

On my second trip to the Land of Israel, I again stopped in Egypt. I was invited to chant on a Sabbath in the Conservative-Orthodox synagogue of the European Jews. It was a great joy for me to again encounter the most honorable Chief Rabbi of Egypt, Nahum Pasha, whom I already knew from my first visit to this country. He showed me great honor by walking by foot on the Sabbath for over an hour so as not to miss my chanting.

On Sabbath night I was invited to his home, where one might encounter the most honorable Jews of the Sephardic and European community. The sage presented me with [the opportunity to] perform the *havdole* [end of Sabbath prayer] and it was most pleasant for me to spend the evening in such a Jewish-spiritual atmosphere.

Where does one go in the Land of Israel if one wants to take the pulse of the land and to know how things stand with its development? — Understood, to Usishkin. He was one of my best friends, in addition [to being] wise and trustworthy. So that, upon arriving in Jerusalem, my first steps were toward him, to hear his advice about settling here permanently. I told him about the reservations my wife had over the climate, that it might not be suitable for our small child.

Usishkin advised me not to make a firm decision now and the best thing now would be for my wife and child to come here for a period of three months and then she would see for herself whether she might become accustomed to the new circumstances and how the new atmosphere and the hot climate will affect the child. I decided to follow Usishkin's advice.

On the very first evening in Jerusalem, before my feet had rested up from the trip, delegations began to come to me from yeshivas, old-age homes and orphanages [requesting that] I should perform chanting for them and strengthen their precarious budgets. But

**[Photo caption on following unnumbered page:]**

**Placing the corner stone for the “Harmony Neighborhood” housing colony in Tel Aviv, 1931. In the center one sees *Khazn* Kwartin (at right) and Mayor Dizengof (left).**

I had already promised my first concert to the *Keren Ha'Yesod* and then I chanted on a Sabbath for the benefit of the *Ets Ha'Khayim* [Tree of Life] yeshiva. I did not want to enter into any other obligations because I wanted to travel to Migdal to see how things were going with my bit of ancestral land.

As I have already mentioned in my earlier chapters, during my first time in the Land of Israel I arranged for the planting of a citrus grove on my property, which I owned still earlier near Migdal. But as the saying goes: “Others’ hands are suited to rake hot coals.” The Land of Israel's Jews still considered American Jews to be cows fit for milking, whom it is a commandment to exploit more strongly and more thoroughly. The land managers there, or directors, did not consider it necessary in any way to consider the owner's interests despite the fact that the owner, even though at a distance, related in the highest degree in a friendly manner to the demands of the laborers and of the director.

This was the case not only with myself alone. As an example I will here relate the following story. Twelve Jews from New Jersey, in the United States, became entranced at that time with the ideal of

building up the Land of Israel and decided to travel there and build themselves a piece of ancestral land in order to live in their own land. Among them were middle-aged and also elderly people, idealists, good and sincere Zionists who had decided to dedicate their labor and their money to the Jewish land.

These Jews, in the course of many years, labored hard in America, saving penny by penny and dollar by dollar with the thought that a time would come when they would be able to beat their way to their own ancestral land in the Land of Israel, in which they would build a little house, plant an orchard and thereby provide income in their old age.

The initiator of the project to build twelve little houses for these twelve New Jersey Jews was actually Herr Glikin, about whom I've told in my previous chapters. He was simultaneously the owner or the co-owner of the land as well as the director and the manager. It can be said that he was the entire ruler over the land in Migdal. It was to him that the Jews from New Jersey turned with complete trust that he would build the twelve little houses for them.

Glikin undertook that and simultaneously he sold each of them part of his own land for the planting of orchards. The New Jersey Jews still remained in America, saving penny by penny and wanting to bring as much capital as possible to the Land of Israel. There were some among them who later brought along twenty and even thirty thousand dollars. Even the poorest had between six and eight thousand dollars.

Upon arriving in the Land, the New Jersey Jews turned feverishly to work, as true idealists. They began tending to the orchards that Glikin had planted for them. The richer ones bought donkeys for the work, the poorer ones hired workers along with donkeys. Before the arrival of the New Jersey Jews in Migdal there were a few Jewish workers who had employment for only three days per week, but when the Jews from America arrived, more Jewish workers from surrounding areas began to appear.

At the beginning, all went according to plan, the best peace ruled between the workers and their employers. They planted and built and worked together.

But soon disputes arose. The proletariat [working class] began to organize against the bosses, the "users" and "exploiters;" every day the workers demanded new conditions, threatening strikes. A joint *va'ad* or council was elected, consisting of [representatives of] the entrepreneurs and the workers. But the workers could not carry out its decisions, because the owners held a majority in the *va'ad*.

In time the number of workers increased still more and then the workers obtained a majority in the *va'ad* and simply dictated their conditions. When their demands were not accepted, immediately a strike broke out, work in the orchards was halted, and the owners suffered great losses. Since an orchard cannot remain without water and cultivation in the summer months, all the work was lost that had earlier been put into the orchards.

In case this wasn't enough, soon there began the collapse of the little houses for which Glikin had taken good American dollars. It turned out that they had been built on a weak foundation of clay and water, and the walls were of paper that could be blown away.

The New Jersey Jews, who had come to the Land with the best intentions of building the Land with their saved pennies and also with their own sweat, quickly saw that they were in danger of losing everything that they had brought with them. In order to rescue the orchards they had to accept all the workers' demands, but the losses were so great that in a short time they became truly poverty-stricken

folks and some of them even lacked enough to eat and began thinking of returning to their little retail stores in New Jersey.

Understandably, such a case as that involving the New Jersey Jews quickly became known in America and did great harm to the idea of the Return to Zion. Many others, who had also planned to follow in their path, resigned from the plan of settling in the Land of Israel.

After I had completed my numerous concerts for the benefit of various charitable institutions, I decided to travel to Migdal to see how my ancestral land was doing and really to rest up a bit in the wonderful region of Migdal. And as soon as I arrived there things became so good and pleasant in my heart that I did not even want to think about [the fact that] every step here of an American Jew is so unjustly exploited. The blooming surrounding panorama could enchant the hardest person.

The orange and *greyp*-fruit trees that were already three years old, grew wonderfully. It just happened to be the time when the first blossom-sprouts began to appear on them. The sweet, aromatic buds of the blooming orchards flooded the entire area with an unusual and strong pleasant odor. You went about as though drunk and you forgot about the whole world and its worries and even its dishonest people who seek to utilize the weakness and the love of Jews for the Land of Israel for [enriching] their own pockets.

The bright moonlit night and its star-filled sky carried you over into an enchanted world. All materialism was divested from you and you felt [yourself] to be part of this calm, enchanting landscape. For an entire week I spent then in this uplifted atmosphere, and then subconsciously the decision was born in me to remain here as a local; the Land of Israel would be my permanent home.

From Migdal I traveled to Haifa, on Mount Carmel, where I was to look about regarding a larger plot of land according to a proposal I had received from a group of American Jews. About sixty-seventy well-to-do Jewish families had decided to erect a residential quarter on Mount Carmel, and their representatives had asked me, during my second trip to the Land of Israel, to assist them in locating an appropriate property.

I stayed at the “Teltsh” Hotel on Panorama Avenue, not far from the place on which were located my few *dunams* [each 1,000 sq. meters] of land that I had bought during my visit to the Land. At once they became aware in Haifa that *Khazn* Kwartin is seeking to buy a larger property, and [land] agents of all sorts began coming to me. I was no longer a *khazn* but a large entrepreneur to whom one comes to offer the most varied building projects. My hotel swarmed and teemed with sellers and agents, just as on New York’s Wall Street...

## The Year of 1929 — A Tragic Year For America and the Land of Israel

After long considerations and negotiations we settled on a piece of land of 200 *dunams* that actually belonged to an Arab, but a Jew held a *morgedzh* of five thousand [British] pounds on it. We settled on a price for the land of 120 pounds per *dunam*, but I requested an *opshon* [option] of four month's time so that I might show the plans for the land to his [?] my] bosses in America when I return [there].

I even wrote into the agreement about the “*opshon*” a point that, in case the Jew or the Arab owner of the plot should withdraw, they would have to pay a one thousand dollar fine. Everything was written down and signed at an attorney's [office] in full accordance with the law.

As beautiful as Migdal was, Mount Carmel was more beautiful. I could not get enough of the view of the Mediterranean Sea and of the surrounding little forests that covered the yet-undeveloped hillsides. But responsibilities called me to Tel Aviv, where I had to chant on a Sabbath at the Monument There [?]. The members of the “Lovers of *Khazonim*” group, after that chanting, literally carried me aloft with the very immodest calls: “Long live the King of *Khazonim*!,” etc.

On the first day of Passover I chanted at the large municipal synagogue in Tel Aviv, which this time had a roof overhead and was a very respectable synagogue — and on the last day of Passover, again at the Monument There [?]. On *khol amoyd* — the intermediate days, I also didn't sit with my hands in my lap; Usishkin had invited me to participate in the jubilant cornerstone-laying of the Jewish National Fund in Jerusalem. This was a very imposing celebration with the participation of Jewish representatives from all over the world. I also chanted on a Sabbath for the benefit of a yeshiva in the Meah Shearim [ultra-Orthodox] quarter, and with that I ended my *khazonishe* activities. I wanted to be a free man, on my own, during the last two weeks of my visit to the Land.

I had already forged a firm conclusion that if the One Above might give me strength and health, I will settle in this Land. So I wanted to more closely view the Land, to learn all its needs and requirements and to see what I can do in America among my numerous friends and followers to move them to add their hands to the upbuilding of our future Jewish state.

I came to the conviction that the best thing that an American Jew with love for the Land of Israel can do is to buy a plot of land and build on it little houses with little vegetable gardens around them, to settle in those little houses working families, or employees, for whom tending one's own vegetable garden would bring added income to that of their work in town.

Overfilled with joy that our Land is building itself and developing itself in the best manner, in the month of May, 1929, I left the Land temporarily, heading toward America in order to make the necessary preparations for traveling back here permanently. On the ship one might encounter very distinguished personalities of the Jewish world, such as: Felix Warburg of the Public Bank, Gelber and Pierce from Canada and other quite rich and distinguished personalities, all of whom had invested large [sums of] money in the Land of Israel.

The weather was fine. On deck one could hear the most fiery debates over the situation in the Land of Israel. But all were unanimous that, despite the political difficulties that the Mandate Power places in the

road, and also despite the strained relations with the Arab neighbors, the Land is still headed toward a shining future. If only the Jews in other lands do not tire and devote a share of their wealth for this cause — we will, with God's help, live to see with our own eyes the "Return to Zion in Compassion."

I delayed for a bit of time in Vienna and in Paris and then in the best of moods returned to America. Always, when I again set foot on American soil, I had the same feeling of thankfulness to this land that was good to me from the very first moment that I placed my first step. Here I came to such fame about which I could not have dreamt in even the best land of Europe.

My inner feeling of joy in America reached the highest height that a person could possibly wish for himself. I had great prideful joy in my children. My elder son became a successful medical doctor in New York; my second son was a doctor of philosophy [Ph.D.]; my elder daughter was happily married and also my second daughter, who was employed in the Berlin Opera, soon was happily married to Dr. Fridman.

My greatest joy was provided by the little child of my later years, Sholem, whom my second wife had borne for me. A fine and talented child who sweetened my life. I had reason to be thankful to America. My fame, my success and my wealth mounted here from height to height, still higher and higher, up until that memorable year of 1929 that was a turning point not only in my own life but also in the lives of thousands and thousands of Americans, and also in the life our people.

Right there on the ship from Cherbourg to New York, when we began to read the first bulletins about the chaos that had broken out on the New York Exchange, our hearts grew sorrowful.

The nearer we came to the shores of America, the more the ship began to seethe over the news that there had been a crash on the *stok market*. The extent of the catastrophe for tens of thousands of people who kept their savings in the banks — grew greater hour by hour.

And who at the time did not keep all his wealth in the *stoks*, *sheyrs* and *bonds* under various names? From the large entrepreneur or merchant to the poorest serving girl, all had bought papers on the Exchange, all wanted to grow rich on the *sheyrs* at a rapid tempo. And this tragedy had actually struck the broadest range of the people.

Disembarking in the New York harbor one could literally sniff in the air that a heavy catastrophe had happened here. One could read it in the face of every person whom we encountered. Understandably, I was one of the tens of thousands of victims. When I made a reckoning, I saw that I had fallen in to the tune of fifty thousand dollars.

But I didn't take it all too badly to heart. I recalled the time of thirty-something years ago, when I left my birth *shtetele* Khonorod and traveled to get married, obtaining eleven hundred rubles in dowry. And I said to myself: My dowry is still whole, you have nothing to be upset about...

But the surrounding mood was depressing. Wherever one went and wherever one stood, one came across tragedies of people who had lost the last cent they had saved for their old age, or in the event of illness.

It was an impossible thing to begin to talk with anyone about business, about investing money and buying land in the Land of Israel. And this upset me the most at that moment. I did not trust myself to call a *miting* of the Jews who had, upon my leaving for the Land of Israel, assigned me the mission of buying land for them on Mount Carmel, and to give them a report on that which I had achieved in that matter.

But despite the chaotic mood that ruled in town, I still decided to call those Jews together. Of twenty-one invitees, only nine came and not the wealthiest, but the middle people who had lost more in the crash. I reported on the conditional purchase I had made in their name. But their answer was that in this tragic moment when everyone is totaling up the disaster that has befallen him, it is quite impossible to think of investments in the Land of Israel, and the entire plan meanwhile fell apart.

In order to forget about the general disaster, I and my family traveled to the mountains, to our summer home.

My rest, however, did not last long. On one fine morning, when I took the mail from the postbox and opened a newspaper from New York — it grew dark before my eyes, when I read the terrible news that had arrived from the Land of Israel. The slaughter of the yeshiva boys in Hebron caused the blood to freeze in my veins, and I could not read further, fainting into unconsciousness.

Afterwards I read further about the Jewish colonies exposed to arson, about the destroyed Jewish properties, about the hundreds of young Jewish lives that were destroyed by the murderers. I have just come from there, I have just with my own eyes seen what the Jewish *halutzim* [pioneers] had accomplished in this abandoned land. They had converted swamps and deficient soil into blooming gardens. Not too long ago, the Arabs here had run about naked and shoeless, they were enslaved to the wealthy *efendis* [manor lords], labored from dawn to late into the night and could not feed themselves on their pay.

So the Jews came, with their sweat revived the soil and also created better working conditions for the Arab neighbor. The Jews healed the Arab sick. How many tens of thousands of them were healed without cost from the terrible eye-disease, trachoma, in the Hadassah hospitals? Thousands of idealistic Jewish youth risked their lives in draining the swamps of the land. Indirectly this was also a gift to the Arabian inhabitants of the Land. Now they paid for all this with the horrible slaughter in Hebron and with all the other horrors. I was devastated by what had happened and I could find no place to rest.

## The Tragic Death of My Young, Learned Son

Thus the year of 1929 was a year of double tragedies for all of Jewry. Here in America it was “There was no house where there was not someone dead” [Ex. 12:30]. It went so far that a Jew who had not even lost any money in the terrible crash was ashamed to admit that he had not lost. It had become stylish to brag about the scope of one’s losses.

The truth, however, was that the crisis of the cited year significantly undercut the well-being of a great portion of the Jewish population here in our country. It was even quickly felt in the field of *khazones*. I have already stated that, that year, for the Days of Awe chanting, I could only obtain half of that which I had obtained a year earlier. Right after the Days of Awe, the crisis in the *khazones* craft grew even stronger.

The large *kongregeyshons* began to invoke economy in their synagogues and the first sacrificial lamb [*lit. hen*] was the *khazn*. His salary was immediately reduced by thirty or even forty percent, the choir was reduced by half, or entirely dispensed with. A little later the *khazonim* were told that now they could not be paid any salary at all, because first of all the *morgedzhes* on the synagogues had to be paid lest the banks foreclose on them. Many synagogues actually could not pay the ongoing interest rates on the *morgedzhes* and they had to close.

The *khazonim* were simply and clearly told that if they wanted to remain at the synagogue and to fulfill all their functions — then, if you please, the synagogue is open for them, and as to payment they would have to wait until the One Above would come to their aid, the times would improve, but certainly no sooner than next year’s Days of Awe. They also had the option of leaving their post. There was true wailing in the world of *khazonim*. There could be no talk at all about giving concerts or chanting on a Sabbath. The general audience was badly impoverished and such things did not even occur to him [them]. So there was no lack of cases when *khazonim*, who had not saved for a “rainy day,” as the American says, simply suffered dire need.

When I reckoned up my final accounting, I saw that during the time between June, 1929 and October, 1930, I had lost due to the crisis in the land the sum of almost two hundred thousand dollars. It cannot be said that such a sum was not painful, but it still did not break me. I still, thanks to God, did not need to turn to anyone.

At that time a great tragedy struck my family. My elder son, who was a medical doctor, while performing an autopsy on a dead child, poisoned his left hand. This was that sort of poisoning that was very rarely survived. For three months he did not stop wrestling with death while in a constant high fever. He himself was a great diagnostician and knew quite well what his illness implied.

Despite his dire condition, he himself constantly instructed the doctors and professors as to how to heal him. His hand was cooked in boiling water, glass devices were inserted under his veins to drain off the poison. [?] His hand was operated upon thirteen times in various locations and after heavy exertions by the greatest professors in New York they finally succeeded in saving his life as well as his hand, although in a somewhat crippled state.

This tragedy of my son's death so absorbed my entire being that I entirely forgot about the difficult material losses that I had just suffered. I thought only of one thing: what could I do so that my gifted son might remain alive. And when I finally saw him standing on his own feet again, though with a bandaged hand, my joy was beyond bounds.

The situation of the *khazonim* still remained bad at the end of the year of 1930. This had a special effect on my making haste for the realization of my old decision about settling permanently in the Land of Israel. I slowly began to liquidate all my remaining affairs so that right after the Days of Awe of the year of 1930 [I might] head out without delay.

All my plans for the journey to the Land of Israel were completed but, it seems, I was not fated to fulfill my plan in a light mood. Heaven still had a reckoning with me before I could go off to the Holy Land. A sacrifice was demanded of me, a sacrifice of my blood that was harder for me to endure than if I were to have given up my own life.

It was on a Sabbath in mid-December of the year 1930, as I was chanting at the Montefiore Synagogue in the Bronx. I was very agitated and with troubled feelings as I stood at the pulpit. When I reached "Father of mercy" I became quite sentimental and chanted the prayer with special spiritual awakening. At the words "Beloved and cherished, never parted in life or in death" [II Sam. 1:23] — there was a stab at my heart and a wave of feelings began to choke me so that I barely kept myself from breaking into sobs.

I paid no attention to what is happening with me, but I felt a fear of something, not knowing why. When I concluded my chanting, the Jews congratulated me, especially lauding the "Beloved and cherished" of "Father of mercy" as being capable of breaking hearts. I went into the apartment where I was staying. This was [with] an unusually pious family where the telephone was not approached on the Sabbath, and I felt with all my senses that I must contact my home as soon as possible.

I barely made it to Sabbath night and went into the *subvey* to go home. The hour-long trip went on, for me, as though a year long. When I entered my home, my wife, as always, greeted me with a loving smile. But I recognized by her face that everything was not in order. So I ask her whether she feels somehow unwell; she replies that she feels quite normal, but [that] a small incident had occurred with my elder son, Boris, the doctor, while he was working at his laboratory in the hospital, but she reassures me that it is not of great significance.

But it was difficult for me to be reassured. I called my son-in-law, the doctor, and he explained that while my son was conducting certain experiments in his laboratory, something had exploded [and] he suffered some burn-wounds. He had just spoken with the hospital where my son is located and they reassured him that all was in order. I wanted to run at once to the hospital, but my son-in-law convinced me that this was purposeless, rather he will come to get me early next morning and we will together drive to visit him.

It was a difficult night for me and I barely managed to await the dawn. By seven in the morning we were already at the hospital. The chief doctor whispered something into my son-in-law's ear and I noticed that his expression changed. I was led into the room where my son lay and I saw that as large as he is, he is bound up in linens so that his mouth and eyes are barely visible.



My eyes grew dark at this sight of my son and I do not know what happened to me next. When I became alert I at once demanded that I be taken to my son's room; he just happened to open his eyes and, seeing me, he was so conscious that he said these words: "Papa, if I have sinned against you, I beg you to— forgive me!" And with those words he gave up his soul.

What words are able to relate what a father feels seeing his son leaving this world in great pain[?] Everything grew dark around me and only later, when I came to myself somewhat, I began to be aware of what I had lost. He was not only an honor to his family, but actually a treasure of medical science. He was only twenty-nine years old, but he had already become a famous pathologist, highly estimated by great scholars in that field.

While he was still studying in Vienna and Berlin his professors insisted to him that there was nothing they could teach him, because he knows just as much as they know. He was an unusual idealist with an open heart toward the needs of those around him. When, during his time of study in Vienna, I would send him a hundred dollars a month for his expenses, he used only half for himself and distributed the other half among his colleagues, needy students. He also distributed all he had of his own, and when he came to America from Europe he was truly in rags and tatters because he had distributed all his clothes to the needy.

Upon his arrival in America he was offered various positions in hospitals as a pathological specialist. He chose the "Beth Moses Hospital," although the salary was only 5,000 dollars per year, while other places offered him much more, only because that hospital promised him to equip a laboratory especially for him. He worked in that laboratory daily for long hours over his various scientific experiments. He was famous as a diagnostician and the greatest professors esteemed his diagnosis of an illness.

He was the true scientific scholar who sat days and nights over his scientific experiments in order to ease human pains and to extend human life. How tremendous a scholar he was and how strongly he aspired to devote all his strengths to suffering humanity, is shown by the following episode:

A few months before his death, he came to me from the hospital, hugged me and joyfully said to me: "Papa, you are really a great artist and the pride of the whole family, but I hope that very soon you will also be able to take pride in me and with the usefulness I will bring to humanity."

And he began to tell me about his work on a great medical invention for which there was a million dollar prize from the Rockefeller Medical Institute. He began to describe to me various medical projects and plans that I could not fully understand. But he was totally aflame during his descriptions. He only admitted that when he would win the prize he would himself open a research center where thousands of students from all over the world would be able to study completely free of cost for the benefit of humanity and against the dangers that threaten it.

So he dreamt and so he died at his post as a loyal soldier of suffering humanity. I cannot at all describe my devastation and loss after that tragedy.

## My Third Trip to the Land of Israel

Weeks went by after the tragic death of my son and I was still not able to come to myself. I was unable to look directly at people's faces, I began to hate New York, the streets on which I walked. The image of my departed son followed me at every step. I wanted to leave this city, where the tragedy had occurred, as quickly as possible. I decided to travel as quickly as possible to the Land of Israel where, I believed, the uplifted spirit of the self-building Jewish National Home would restore my strengths and my inner balance to me and I will be capable of again taking up my own life.

Consolation and refreshment in my great tragedy was in my little boy, Sholeml, whom I would press to my breast and flood his little face with hot tears. I thanked the One Above for this little son of old age who came into the world to make it possible for me not to collapse entirely into my middle years.

I felt that I have duties to my young child and this cheered me up a bit to go further into the course of life. I liquidated all my belongings in New York and Brooklyn and in the month of January, 1931, we traveled off with my wife and two children, Shulamis and Sholeml, to the Land of Israel. The air was clear and refreshing in Tel Aviv, and at the Hotel San Remo, at the seashore, we found a fine and comfortable home.

My nerves began to calm down and I decided to take some two-three months of freedom and not to engage myself in any appearances at all in order to come to myself after the terrible blow that fate had dealt me. When I rested thus at the seashore, various Jews began to come to me with the wildest projects to do business in the Land of Israel. One of these projects was to lend money for first mortgages. In the Land it was then permitted to charge nine percent [interest] annually, almost three times as much as in America. But becoming an interest-taker in my later years, and in the Land of Israel to boot — I had no great desire for that.

I rode around the country, looked carefully at the *kibutsim*, [socialist collective farming colonies] at their life style; I must admit that although these were idealistic young fellows and young girls with strong love for the Land of Israel and ready for the greatest sacrifices for the new life they are building, I was still not too enthused about this experiment. Somehow it smelled too much of Russia. I also did not believe that the Land might be built along this path. The human instinct for one's own bit of land, no matter how small, is too strong for him to be satisfied by the communal settlement life and that he might in such a society live out life with all its inclinations and aspirations.

I came to the conviction that there could not be a better solution to the social question in our future homeland than providing every worker with his own, no matter how small, bit of earth, with his own cottage and surrounding garden, which he and his family would cultivate and draw from it the total prideful joy derived from seeing with one's own eyes the fruits of one's labor. I believed with all my senses that this was a better way of connecting to the earth all those city-bred young fellows who had, during all their lives, observed their daddies' various harebrained enterprises.

The driving force of life, after all, is to strive higher and higher, to seek greater accomplishments through one's own efforts. And this could be realized by the worker only on his own bit of land that he

continually improves and celebrates all his new conquests. Is there any greater joy than to see the growth of one's own household, as one's wealth, the result of one's own labors, continues to grow larger?

In the cities, as well, I saw unlimited numbers of low-ranking, capable officials who must live on earnings of six or eight [English] pounds a month. If these people were to be given the possibility of owning a small cottage with its small vegetable garden, which they might cultivate in their spare time, and this would increase their income and also sweeten their lives — then there would be no place

**[Photo caption on following unnumbered page (between 537-538)]:**

**Mrs. Gitl Rokhl Kwartin with her little youngest child, Sholem, 1929.**

for the embittered mood I had observed and for all the ideas that had been imported from Russia.

I began to discuss the project of building such cottages and little gardens with various friends of mine and all of them recognized that this was a solid idea, but one must have the needed means to realize it. At the same hotel in which I lived there also resided a Brooklyn Jew named Kas, who was a great admirer of mine and who didn't miss the slightest opportunity of hearing me chanting or [singing] at a concert.

I told him about my plan, that this was a good idea even from a business standpoint and one might even profit thereby, in addition to doing a good thing, helping to build the Land and to put on their feet tens of small families that are now unable to beat their way to anything. I do not know whether the thought pleased him due to its practicality or if it was because he trusted in me, and if it is I who propose it — it must be good. In one word, he immediately agreed to invest the necessary capital, but with the condition that I be a partner.

He told me that, in Brooklyn, he had been a housing-developing entrepreneur, so that he well knows the trade, besides which it would be a great honor for him to enter into a partnership with me. And so we set up the enterprise partnership. It was a new idea in the Land of Israel at that time to build such a type of cooperative undertaking that was not centered on profit-making.

In the very first week, though we hadn't announced it publicly, there began to come to us workers, employees and small businesspeople, and each demanded that we build a cottage and a little garden for him. Of course, it would have been a wild thing to enter into building transactions with individual people. Therefore we proposed to all those who had come that they organize themselves into a sort of cooperative of fifteen or twenty families, and then it would be easier to work out plans for the construction work. It would cost far less and it would carry more of a social character.

It did not take more than three days for there to be organized a group of fifteen people; each of them just happened to own a few *dunams* of land on Mount Carmel in Tel Aviv. But their property actually belonged more to the banks than to them. For this sort of plot they had paid down a sum of fifty or seventy-five pounds and the balance was mortgaged to the bank. They asked that we, the two new building entrepreneurs, build cottages on their plots that would include three rooms and a kitchen and, for the materially weaker ones — only two rooms and a kitchen.

After long calculations and negotiations we agreed that a cottage of three rooms and a kitchen would have to cost 450 pounds, and a cottage of two rooms and a kitchen — 350 pounds. We required, however,

that the plots be free of debt. This required long negotiations with the bank that finally agreed to extend a second mortgage on the constructed cottages. We concluded the required agreements with the Bank of Credit and we also came to agreement with the owners of the plots that for a larger cottage they would have to pay four-and-half pounds per month, and for a smaller one — three-and-a-half pounds. The money goes toward paying the construction costs, so that after the payments are concluded, the cottage becomes the property of the inhabitant.

The entire undertaking was calculated over ten-twelve years, the annual toll was calculated at six percent, and at the bottom line, according to the plans, there was to remain for us, the entrepreneurs, even 35 to 45 pounds per cottage. But this was all in theory; in fact we had to add significant coin from our own pockets...

Negotiations with the architects and the contractors began. I insisted throughout that the foundations of the cottages be very solidly built so that the owner might in time, when he would have the possibility, add-on an additional story or two. This involved a greater expense, more cement [concrete] and other building materials were needed, but we carried it out and in a fortunate hour we approached laying the cornerstone of the new quarter.

Our wives, that is, Frau Kas and Frau Kwartin, prepared a fine repast [to be served] on the open space where the cornerstone-laying ceremony was to take place. To embellish our celebration there came the first Mayor of the Jewish city, Mayer Dizingof. Also arriving were both Chief Rabbis of Tel Aviv, Rabbi Aronson and Rabbi Oziel of the Sephardic community. The great national poet Khayim Nakhman Byalik [Hayim Nahman Bialik] also came, in admiration of the accomplishment by two private Jews in the development of Tel Aviv, and other personalities of the city.

It was a truly fine celebration because it was evidence that also with private initiative, much can yet be done in the Jewish homeland. This was actually brought out in the numerous speeches held on that occasion. I chanted “A song for the dedication” and other prayers and I was overjoyed that I could add my hand to the House of Zion.

It was decided to name the new settlement “Harmony Neighborhood,” and we suffered no few pains before we finally lived to see roofs on the cottages. As was the custom then in the Land of Israel, there began a series of strikes to raise the pay of the workers. The contractor was a needy Jew, so he had no means to add [to the wages], so it fell upon our pockets.

At the bottom line, when the cottages were finally finished and people could move into them, we saw that I and Kas had added into the affair one thousand pounds each. However — may they find favor in it! — each of us said and we thought: Would that there were many such Jews who, for so small a loss, enjoy so much joy and to see the joyful faces of all those who, thanks to us, had become big “masters of their homes” with the prospect of growing and to broaden out still more in the future.

## An Attempt to Found a *Khazonim* Seminar in the Land of Israel

I must confess that I had great prideful joy in my first “accomplishment” in the Land of Israel. Quite often I would stroll about in the “Harmony Neighborhood” and my heart would swell when I saw the young housewives cultivating their little gardens. The people felt themselves truly fortunate in their new, comfortable homes. Many of them even made a bit of money thanks to their new residences. These were those who had small families and could rent out a room or two. These [people] did not even want to wait the ten years to pay off their debt for the cottage but wanted to pay off their *morgedzh* at once.

Others began at once to add a second story, and some even two stories and became real “*lendlords*.” At the present their cottages are worth ten times what they paid and they certainly remember kindly the names of the two American Jews, Kas and Kwartin, who made it possible for them to come to “their own resting place.”

When Jews heard that *Khazn* Kwartin had become a “building entrepreneur” in the Land of Israel, they virtually beat down my doors and wouldn’t let me live [insisting] that I should go on further and build more cottages and little gardens. Once a Jewess with two children came to me. She had come from as far as Rehovot and began to tell me a story that her husband is a tailor and goes to work every day in Tel Aviv [so that] she suffers away her life, alone with the children. If I would want to build her a house in Tel Aviv and her husband might work at home — she would finally have a life.

Tens of other such businesses were proposed by Jews of various classes and the door of my hotel room simply had no rest. I had by then begun to forget that I am a *khazn* for Jews, but at once a matter arose that reminded me of my life’s work.

A short time before my coming to the Land of Israel for the third time to settle, an association was formed in the country named “Lovers of *Khazones* and of Hebrew Song,” that set as its purpose the development of the *khazones*-trade and as far as possible to educate young talents for the art of singing. When I had been in the Land just a few days, a delegation came to me from this association and asked me to place myself at the head of the association as its president.

I had always avoided public honors and therefore I explained to the delegation that I am very sympathetic to the association itself and I would happily become one of its members, but [that] they must choose someone else as president. I will assist them in the realization of their undertakings with as much as I can. I also told them that, in my opinion, a *khazonim*-seminary that would raise and educate young *khazonim* would be a fine and fitting purpose for this association, and that I would be prepared to make the greatest efforts to make this plan a reality.

However, sadly, things are easier said than done. We encountered tremendous difficulties in the realization of the cited plan. At my encounters with *khazonim* colleagues in the Land of Israel I gave them the following idea: When I left New York the last time for the Land of Israel with the intention of settling there permanently, I met with my old friend, the famous conductor Leo Lyov, and had a heartfelt conversation with him.

Lyov then confided in me that his most intimate wish would be to settle in the Land of Israel and to dedicate his work for the Jewish people in its old homeland. If he could earn half of that which he needs for a living, he would take that step, because he would somehow manage to come up with the second half.

When my ship was about to depart, Lyov came [aboard] to bid me farewell and we again spoke about his plan to settle in the Land of Israel. I promised him that I would be involved with his plans when I will be on site and will keep him advised about it. Now, in Tel Aviv, when I held a meeting with the administration of the “Lovers of *Khazones*” my memory recalled my old friend and his offer and I thought that there might be a fitting match here.

I told my Tel Aviv colleagues about this and told them that the only way to bring their association to a higher level and to convert it into a success would be to establish a good choir under the direction of a first-class conductor. In the choir, young talents and future *khazonim* could be developed, and in general, it would raise musical culture in the country. The only fitting person for the conductorial post is, in my opinion, Leo Lyov, who, in addition to his great knowledge, has warm love for the Land, which is a very important factor.

In addition, it was also important that Lyov had already once been in the Land of Israel, where he had great success with his choir concerts and his name was widely known in all the districts of the Land of Israel. My idea was very pleasing to all in attendance, but immediately the question arose: Where will they get the funds to pay Lyov a minimum of twenty pounds per month [?]. The association was quite poor and had absolutely no funds of its own.

The president of the association at that time was a certain Levin from the Herzliya colony, a great lover of *khazones* and music. He undertook to raise the required means to be sufficient to bring Lyov and to assure him his salary for a specific time. He, however, paced a condition, that I be engaged for the coming Days of Awe along with a choir actually under Lyov’s direction. He is certain that this would be the greatest success and would bring in enough funds for the later support of the choir and, generally, for the further activities of the association.

I actually wanted the association to begin to develop broader activities, so I agreed to the proposal. Meanwhile I had received a letter from a well-know Jewish conductor from Vienna who had already once been in the Land of Israel and, due to various reasons, had had to leave the Land. He declared himself ready to come and organize a choir for a salary of only ten pounds per month. The members of “Lovers of *Khazones*” seized upon this, because ten pounds is not twenty, after all, and the weight on their shoulders would be smaller. But, sadly, it was not possible to obtain a visa for the cited conductor and they returned to the idea of bringing Lyov.

Now the question stood: Who shall bring Lyov? Who shall take responsibility for him? He knew no one among all the Jews who occupied themselves with the association, so they approached me to send the telegram. They passed the appropriate resolution that I do this in their name and on their responsibility and a few days later there was a reply from Lyov [advising] that he is on his way.

On that basis they rented the “Monument of The Name” [auditorium?] for the upcoming Days of Awe. When Lyov arrived they began to put together a choir of children and grown men. But this did not come easily. Most of all there were difficulties in recruiting children with proper little voices. Lyov

declared that it would be very hard to rehearse the children in the quite difficult Days of Awe repertoire, and that therefore for the time being he would put together a choir of only grownups.

We remained with a men's choir of twenty-two persons. Lyov, the great master, quickly showed what he knows. In the course of the first week they already sang the first few compositions wonderfully well. But then an unexpected thing occurred: Four weeks before the Days of Awe my friend Lyov declared that he could not manage on twenty pounds a month and if he were not given a contract for three years with a salary of thirty pounds a month, he would be forced to travel back to America.

I was living then on Mount Carmel in Haifa, and on a pleasant morning I receive a letter from president Levin in which he informs me of Lyov's ultimatum and asks me to come at once to Tel Aviv. Possibly, from Lyov's material standpoint he was one-hundred percent correct, but knowing the financial situation of this young association of music lovers and dilettantes, I saw that it could not, sadly, agree to Lyov's request. My advice was to wait until after the Days of Awe and we would [then] see what are our financial circumstances. If there were even the slightest possibility, I would support Lyov's request with all my heart.

A few days later I was in Tel Aviv and met with chairman Levin along with Lyov and we again discussed the whole thing, making clear that sadly the association cannot meanwhile undertake such a responsibility. I returned to Haifa that same day, but later I learned that the president and the other members of the executive had agreed to Lyov's request, not knowing themselves where they might obtain the means of covering their obligation.

On top of all this, Lyov was accustomed in America to have all the necessary and quite fine things for his choir, while the Land of Israel was then a poverty-stricken country and could not stand up as generously as the rich New York *kongregeyshons*. The results did not take long to appear. A yammering of cats arose from all sides.

## “Kwartin Neighborhood” — A Reward For My Building Activities

We finished the prayers of the Days of Awe at the “Monument of The Name” which was an unusual success from both the artistic and financial points of view. The choir under Lyov had sung truly marvelously, but when it came to assessing the bottom line, it turned out that the *khale* [challah] did not suffice for the *hamoytse* [bread blessing — i.e., things didn’t go as they should have]...All the tickets had actually been sold at quite good prices, but the costs that the choir had expended were significantly high and there was barely enough left for paying the choir, the conductor and all the others.

There could be no thought that the results of the Days of Awe worship might bring the means to support the choir in the future. Meanwhile, Lyov had brought over his wife and settled into a fine dwelling, all on the basis of the contract that he had with the society, but the society, right on the first month after the Days of Awe, had to wrack its brains about where to obtain the means to cover its budget. It was painful to think that such a fine choir, with Lyov at its head, that was truly an honor for the Land of Israel and which was truly enjoyable to hear, would have to be given up.

We called a special meeting with the participation of several rich householders and the participants actually did, right on the spot, contribute as much as each could for the benefit of the society and considered it necessary in order to maintain the choir. But this could not be a radical solution and, sadly, the whole thing had to be given up. The Land of Israel had to wait [for] a certain time before its musical life there might be organized at the high level which now exists.

But then the wonderful choir was abolished and no choir existed for a long time there. Yet, for long years I remembered that Days of Awe with Lyov, which was a true enjoyment not only for us who participated in it, but also for the thousands of Jews in Tel Aviv who had filled the huge hall of the “Monument of the Name.”

A short time after we had completed construction of the “Harmony Neighborhood,” I walked past the corner of Balfour Avenue and Yehuda Halevi Avenue and noticed there a wonderfully beautiful fruit garden, surrounded by splendid palm trees. I became interested in [learning] to whom such a fine property in the center of the city might belong and quite quickly discovered that the fruit garden, which occupies a plot of 45 *dunams*, belongs to the German, Gintner, from the famous German colony, Sherunah [? Ramat HaSharon], near Tel Aviv. This Sherunah is now the seat of the temporary Israel government and carries the name Ha’Kriah —the capitol. But at that time it was a nest of bloody anti-Jewish enmity and future Hitlerites. And my heart was seized [because] such a splendid orange grove belongs to a German. Even at my first time in the Land of Israel there was talk everywhere about Sherunah which was like a vile enemy thorn in the very heart of the Jewish Yishuv [settlement]. Complaints were heard as to why, right after the First World War, when the Germans were the losers, the fruit gardens and houses had not been bought at next-to-nothing prices from the Germans who were then beaten and would have willingly sold them.

I was told that at that time [the properties] might have been bought as cheaply as thirty, thirty-five pounds per *dunam*. But Usishkin, as the leader of the Jewish National Fund, is said to have replied to these complaints: Why should we pay money to the Germans when we will be able to take over their



properties for free? It was a prophetic statement, but at that time the words sounded legendary and meanwhile the Germans in the Land of Israel remained sitting firmly in their saddles.

Even in the year of 1923 they could have bought from the German, Gintner, his fruit garden in Tel Aviv for fifty pounds per *dunam*, but when I, in the year of 1931, began to inquire how much he demands for the fruit garden, he was not ashamed to ask 900 pounds per *dunam*. Besides, he showed in black and white that he had been offered 800 pounds per, but he simply wants 900, and the smallest plot he wants to sell is ten *dunams*, while the offers are only for three *dunams*.

After long negotiations I bought from this German ten *dunams* of fruit garden land and paid him eight thousand pounds, which means eight hundred pounds per *dunam*. Then the Tel Aviv land-agents raised a great outcry over why I had paid such an exorbitant price. They almost condemned me as a speculator. In truth, however, I thought: Would that I had enough money to have bought all 45 *dunams* from him.

I knew with all certainty that if we did not tear the fruit garden out of the German's hands now, we would later have to pay him a tripled price, and only one year later this really was confirmed and the previous screamers argued quite differently. They said: If only we had obeyed Kwartin then and hadn't interfered with him. The tumult that had been raised when I finalized the purchase had brought things to the point that I had been forced to give up an *opshon* I had with the German on ten more *dunams*. Later, I could not forgive myself for that.

A year later the influx of wealthy Jews to the Land of Israel was very great and in the Land of Israel, especially in Tel Aviv, there was a big "*bum*" [boom] in land prices. The same land-agents who had condemned me as a speculator now ran to the German, Gintner, and offered him double what I had paid. But the German demanded more and the end was that, instead of the 800 pounds per *dunam* when I was buying, he now obtained 2,500 and even 3,000 pounds for one *dunam*. Thus many other Germans from Sherunah sold their land at the highest speculative prices, while not too long after, were they [Jews] a bit more forward-looking, that could have bought it for a third.

Sherunah was not only the nest of Hitlerites and enemies of the Jews, but it was also the hiding place of Arab pogromists. When, in 1936, the unrest broke out in The Land and in one day twenty-one murdered Jews were brought to Tel Aviv from Jaffa — then the Arab murderers began to take refuge among their loyal allies, the Germans of Sherunah. This was surplus evidence of how important it was to be rid of the Germans and to tear landownership from their hands.

Despite the fact that Herr Kas and I didn't make too-good of a business out of the Harmony Neighborhood, it still did not hold us back from undertaking further work that would be for the sake of the broadest sections [of people] in the Land and simultaneously provide us with income. I decided not to listen any longer to the various kinds of land-agents and simply ne'er-do-wells with which the Tel Aviv cafés were loaded then and who simply spread confusion having only their own interests in mind.

This time our enterprise was supposed to be — apartment houses, now without little gardens, because land was now too expensive for such a luxurious undertaking. Such a house contained eighteen dwellings and we dedicated ourselves to the work as it is truly said: with heart and soul, striving from the whole heart that the people who were to live there, again small craftsmen, workers and employees, might in the future recall our names positively.

The sound of our work reached the Mayor of Tel Aviv, Mayer Dizengof, who decided to thank me with something for my modest contribution to the development of Tel Aviv. A few months later, after the apartment houses were completed, the City Council of Tel Aviv, as proposed by the mayor, named the neighborhood that we had developed — Kwartin Neighborhood. This is at the corner of Balfour Avenue and Yehuda Halevi Avenue. It was truly a great honor for me to have lived for such prideful joy, that a corner of the first [modern] Jewish city should be called by my name.

My name began to become known in the land not only as a *khazn* and prayer leader but also as an entrepreneur in aiding the building of the Land of Israel. After the completion of the “apartment houses” in the Kwartin Neighborhood, I was approached by several Jews who had plots on Mount Carmel, that I should help them to build their own cottages on those plots. We concluded an agreement that the cottages need to be paid off within five years. But to my great amazement and joy all of them were capable of paying the building costs in the course of two years. These were by now larger cottages with five rooms and the income from the rented rooms gave the owners the possibility of becoming earlier full-fledged masters over their property.

At that time the tendency among the entire settlement in the Land of Israel to tear as much land as possible out of Arab hands. There was felt the necessity of enlarging Jewish agricultural land ownership, which was still sufficiently weak in comparison with the incomparable growth of the cities. I too was infected by this pressure and in the year of 1932 I managed to buy from an Arab 200 *dunams* of land not far from the Gederah colony, which was suited to orange tree planting.

I actually decided that I myself would plant the first orchard on this land. But here arose the question of water because, as is known, an orchard cannot bloom without a sufficiently rich source of water. We surmised that, since about half a kilometer past my orchard there was a large orchard with a well that delivered sufficient water, then perhaps the same would be true at my place. Experience, however, proved that one could not rely on supposition in the Land of Israel.

## The Arabs Destroy My Orchard

The day after the outbreak of unrest between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, the events began to spread across the whole land, over all the colonies and settlements, over all the trains and roads. They began to systematically destroy Jewish orchards and Jewish property generally. The colonies defended themselves heroically and dear Jewish victims fell.

A few weeks after these bloody events began, the overseer of my orchard in Gederah, an Arab, came to me and reported that the Arab bands in that area had warned him that if he continued to guard a Jewish orchard he would be shot down like a dog. Therefore he came to tell me to hire another guard, [as] he can no longer stay on the job.

My manager, Kosowski, too, came with the unhappy news that the situation was critical, the danger of an Arab attack on the orchard was very great, yet he had decided that, the next day, he would go out to work with twenty workers because the orchard had not been watered and there was the danger that the entire orchard would die off if the ground were not immediately irrigated.

I categorically opposed his or any workers' daring to go to work in the orchard at such a critical time. I told him clearly that, even if the entire two-hundred *dunam* orchard were to be lost, it would still be a lesser loss for me than if, heaven forbid, a single worker were to be wounded due to me. And so it remained as I insisted. The entire orchard remained untended and unprotected.

I applied for protection of my property to the local police and to the *distrikt* officials, but it was as if I was speaking to a deaf wall. Seven days later Kosowski came, pale and in fright, to tell me that at night, Arab bandits attacked and destroyed the orchard. Most little trees were torn out by their roots, the others were chopped and crippled. Many of the trees had already ripened and were about to bear fruit: *orandzhen* and *greyp*-fruit.

My heart was torn, because one had to know how much effort and pain it took to raise an orchard, how one had to tend it as a small child and one suffered all the problems that a dad did with his child. And now, when the time had arrived to gather up the fruit of long years of heavy labor, you become aware that wild vandals, with a single blow of their bloody hands, had destroyed so much human work and so much human hope.

We stood there despondent, not knowing what to begin to do. Finally my manager was the first to break the silence and volunteered that, at dawn the next day, he would travel to Gederah, get some of my workers there, and perhaps a policeman, as well, and all of them together would go to take a look at what had happened to the orchard. I again, with complete determination, declared that I would in no way allow it. I do not want to bear the responsibility for these people's lives.

It remained between us that we would wait several days, perhaps the situation would calm down somewhat and then we could risk traveling to the orchard. My younger son protested and wanted to travel at once to the orchard with the manager. I could barely hold them back for four more days, and on the fifth day the manager, at five in the morning, came to my house in his automobile. He gave me his word that he would drive only to Gederah and that they would see there whether it possible to reach the

orchard, which is located two kilometers from the village. And when he assured me that they would return no later than five o'clock at evening, I then permitted my son to ride along.

I gave my permission with a heavy heart and as soon as they drove off I regretted having permitted it. A day began for me of painful waiting and anticipation for my son and manager to finally return. Five o'clock finally arrived, I ran out to the road but saw no one coming. I ran through the streets, asking people and, minute by minute, grew more agitated over not seeing their return.

The clock advanced to six and seven at evening. I felt as though my heart was leaping [from my chest] and could not find a place [to rest] out of unease and fear. I contacted telephonically the wife of my manager Kosowski in Petah Tikva but she, too, had not any word from her husband and was very worried.

The hours passed and I knew not what to think. I had specifically agreed with my manager that, in the event he might see that they could not return on time, he would at least telephone me [as to] where they were. It reached ten at night and still my son and manager had not been seen. My nerves were tense to the point of madness; my wife, as well, who had calmed me until now, no longer had words to quiet me. I did not cease calling on the telephone all my friends to help me determine what had happened to my son and manager.

The police, too, had no reports as to what had happened with the automobile on the road to Gedarah. Late at night, with my friend Engineer Fridman, I went to the main police commander; he was amazed to see me at midnight. He promised me that he would do all in his power to determine what had happened to them. He called all the police stations and all replied that they had not seen such an automobile with two passengers in the entire course of the day.

Only the police station in Gedarah itself reported that they had been seen at around three in the afternoon, when they driven off from there without saying where to. It was one o'clock at night when I returned, broken, to my home. My entire body trembled and would not permit the thought that the worst might have occurred to my child. So we lay there in great distress, waiting for any sort of report from the police.

Finally, at four in the morning, I was called by the cited Engineer Fridman with the joyful news that finally they had learned that the missing ones are at *Kvutsot Brener* [Brener settlement], five miles from my orchard. What my wife and I had endured in that terrible night — is entirely impossible to describe. But our joy was endless upon hearing that they are alive and whole.

Only at ten the next morning did the disappeared ones show up and reported that the Arabs had cut all telephone connections and that was why they couldn't keep the promise to contact us. As to the orchard — they confirmed the destruction of which I had earlier known.

At that there arrived in the Land of Israel a delegation of three American Senators who were to investigate the reasons for the Arab actions against Jews and also to report on the extent of the destructions and slaughters that the Arabs had caused. The Commission consisted of the following three Senators: Warren Austin, the present American representative at the United Nations; Royal Copeland, Senator from New York who had, years earlier in Washington, helped me to bring my wife to America, and Daniel Hartinger [? Not found in U.S. Senate history].

This Senatorial Commission traveled across the entire Land, saw the terrible destruction that the Arabs had caused in the Jewish areas, and among others they also visited my orchard, and what they saw there they accurately described in the report to the American government. Approximately four thousand fruit trees had been torn up there by the roots. Hard work and toil in the course of four years had been lost.

A delegation of American citizens whose properties had been destroyed by the Arabs was received by the Senators at the “King David Hotel” in Jerusalem. Three rabbis also took part in the delegation. The Senators requested that I, the most damaged American citizen, provide the Commission with a written memorandum. The next day I provided the memorandum and it was included in full in the report of the Senatorial Commission that was later published in Washington.

I had another opportunity to meet with the Senators at a reception given in their honor in Tel Aviv. At the reception I performed some of my compositions and later, in a friendly conversation, was able to more accurately describe the tragedy that had befallen the Land through the Arab depredations and the unconcern shown to this tragedy by the English Mandate-power.

But Senators come and Commissions go — none of it could remove and minimize the catastrophe that had struck the Yishuv. I personally sorely suffered not only the loss of twenty thousand dollars that the orchard had cost, but the hopes and the work and the effort that had been put into the orchard in the course of four years. The momentum of my construction activity in the Land of Israel, which I had undertaken not to get rich but because I was filled with joy by every minor achievement, every newly-added cottage, every newly reclaimed *dunam* of land, had been interrupted.

The unrest in the Land did not cease, engulfing ever more victims and creating still-greater destruction in the Jewish areas. The Jews did not long maintain the “self-restraint” policy and began repaying the Arabs with often quite bloody attacks on such places where thick masses of Arabs were concentrated. They, too, had victims fall, and often quite innocent women and children. But that is the way of war: the bullet is blind and does not always strike the guilty.

At that time we received news from Europe that my wife’s mother had fallen very ill and that her only wish was to see us. I applied to the American consul in Jerusalem for a passport. They replied that, since it had been five years since I had been in America, I could not as an American citizen [*i.e.*, naturalized] obtain a pass for travel to any country whatsoever, but with my old passport I could return to America, live there for at least a year and then obtain a new document for travel to wherever I want.

Since there didn’t seem to be an end to the disturbances, we therefore decided — together with my wife and the little one — to return to America and there to wait [Heb. phrase:] until the evil recedes. In July, 1937, we left the Land that we had chosen as our permanent home. We had to make the return journey on a freight ship that took all of 24 days, stopping at tens of ports.

This was my last view of Europe before Hitler ignited it in flames — flames in which our people were destroyed in Europe. It was actually two years before the outbreak of the Second World War, but in Italy, where we stopped for several days, we could already hear the people awakening in its anger against the dictator Mussolini, who had dragged his country into a bloody adventure in Ethiopia.

The chauffeur of the automobile in which we drove around on the Italian Riviera had no fear in pouring out his quite bitter heart against the Fascist regime that had brought the greatest tragedies to his

country. For a certain moment I feared that he might be wanting to provoke me that I, the foreigner, should agree with him and then he would catch me in speaking ill of Il Duce, whose appearance and power exceeded that of the king.

When, a few days later, we disembarked in the French port of Marseille, it was as if we had left the darkness for the sudden light of day. France was living the same worry-free and cheerful life as always; it did not seem that the people understood the mortal danger rapping at its door. Its neighbor, the German, was already sharpening its sword toward France, as toward all of Europe, but France was cheerful and prepared, in Munich, to bribe the murderer with a piece of Czechoslovakia, believing that thereby it would drive off the Hitlerite evil spirit.

I felt fortunate to be on the ship en route to America, which again appeared in my eyes to be the fortress of freedom in the world and the only hope for all peoples threatened by the danger of destruction by the brown Hitlerite beast. And when my foot, after an interruption of six years, again trod the free American soil, I breathed deeply. America then appeared to be the world's heaven by comparison with the chaos that could be seen in all other parts of the world.

I was delighted to be back in America, but it seems that many people, especially those in my *khazonish* profession, did not regard my return with great joy...and here I must pause a bit on the relationships between me and the other *khazonim* in America.

It is a fact that no one can deny that, with my arrival in America in 1920 I did not, heaven forbid, create any dishonor for the *khazonim* family. When I accepted my first cantor's job at the Brooklyn Temple Emanuel at the greatest salary that a *khazn* had ever obtained from Jews, that actually began the golden epoch of *khazones* in America. The prestige of the *khazn* rose higher and his general situation began to improve significantly.

*Khazonim* became more powerful in their own eyes and began to obtain for their chanting twice and three times as much as they had received earlier. Respect for the *khazn* also increased. And I will not be modest at all in pointing out that in great measure they had me to thank for this. They knew that I spoke in proud terms to all the *gabays* and presidents of the *kongregayshons*, that I do not bow, that I do not beg, but I demand. They also knew that as demanding I was with the bosses, so demanding I was of myself.

I held that the *khazn* must dedicate himself entirely to his holy work, not making concessions, serving with his whole heart no individual bosses, but the congregation as a whole, and then he would be appreciated and honored and his situation would be as high as is appropriate for a leading voice among the Jews. It was not only my opinion, but also the opinion of all the honest and most prominent among the *khazonim*, and many of them confessed openly to me that with my coming to America there began a new golden epoch for *khazonim* among Jews.

But to my great regret I must clearly state that this idyll in the *khazonish* world did not last for long. They were supposedly joyful with Kwartin and his success, but this was not sincere joy, it was more of a joy that pierced and pained. All the greater and lesser *khazonim* felt that *khazones* was heading in an excellent direction so they forgot their lowly past and began concentrating too much on the fat "today."

The *khazonim* began to sin, every individual *khazn* beginning to believe that he was the greatest "star;" especially was this said about the *khazonim* that arrived in America after me. For them the name

Kwartin was an empty sound. They gave themselves no reckoning about the deep change that my arriving in America had brought to the *khazonim* status.

There began a non-begrudging and a deprecation that was not to the honor of *khazones* as we knew it in the old country and I lost my charm among my *khazonim* colleagues and, among some, even became a thorn in their eye, as I stood in their way with my high job, with my great earnings, with my prestige among American Jews.

But finally these non-begrudgers lived to see a day of great joy. That was when they became aware that I had decided to leave America and to travel for permanent residence in the Land of Israel. They simply rubbed their hands in glee: finally they're free of so strong a competitor.

Simple logic dictated that when Kwartin is no longer in America and the world stands open for every "star" to assume his place, now, at least, they might say good words about me. No way. Then they let their tongues wag freely and began to unload from their hearts all that had collected there during all my successful years in New York. They even allowed themselves to say that Kwartin had had to [Heb. phrase:] "run off" from America because he could not deal with the competition of all the other great *khazonim* that had arisen in the interim.

And when I was in the Land of Israel and, may I not sin, succeeded in both my *khazonish* activity and in my work in helping develop the Land, even then they would not let me be. In the Land of Israel I received from America all the evil-minded rumors that my dear colleagues were spreading about me.

And at the same time there began a flood from all corners of the world to the Land of Israel by *khazonim* envious of the great success that I had there. They came from Warsaw and from Moscow, from Czechoslovakia and England and most of all — from New York. I, personally, could only be heartily joyful over the fact that the little Land of Israel became, in those years, a center of *khazones* among Jews. Actually, I believed in [Heb. phrase:] "not forgiving *khazonim*," that this could only help to purify and cleanse the field of *khazones*, so that the worthy and creative ones might remain, and the rubbish might be gone.

But those among the *khazonim* who failed the exam of the Land of Israel's Jewry left there with hearts still more embittered against me, as though I were solely responsible for their failure. And upon returning home to America they took to avenging themselves, spreading those senseless rumors about me, such as, for example, that I had lost my voice, that I had become infirm and lame, that I've gone blind and other such old wife's tales.

The purpose of all these malevolent desires to depict me before the American Jews as being at death's door was to make it impossible for me to resume my *khazonish* activity when I returned from the Land of Israel. All these "good friends" of mine had already heard that, due to my papers, I was forced to return for a bit of time — so they prepared such a dear welcome for me. How far this animosity was from that solidarity and comradeship that once ruled among *khazonim*! What had happened to the former community prayer leaders who were to have defended their kind?

## Some Comments About the Future of *Khazones* Among Jews

The evil-minded rumors that my colleague *khazonim* in New York spread about me went so far that one time in the Land of Israel I receive a telegram from my children in New York [asking] that I at once advise them the truth about my health condition. I rubbed my eyes and asked: what sort of truth are they demanding and about whose health-condition do they speak? I had never before felt so completely healthy in all my body parts as in those years in the Land of Israel.

A few days later a letter arrived that explained the entire mysterious story. The children wrote to me that they had been visited by a known *menedzher* who had more than once engaged me for various appearances and concerts, and who told them that he would very much like to engage me for the coming Days of Awe, but since he heard in the *Khazonim* Association from two *khazonim* who had just returned from the Land of Israel that *Khazn* Kwartin is deathly ill, therefore, as an old friend of mine, he had come to my children to learn whether this was really true.

When I read the letter it became fully clear to me what truth it was that the children had asked of me. I now knew quite well who it was in New York that was subverting his own comrade. I immediately, understandably, denied all the evil-minded rumors. Then there was another letter, this time from the *menedzher* himself. And let me call him by name: this was my old friend Zeldov.

He wrote concretely that he is engaging me for the Days of Awe at such-and-such a sum, but nevertheless he asks me personally to write to him as to my health, that my word will suffice to calm him that he might not, may we be spared, suffer a failure with me. That was how the slanderous machine worked against me and sought to make it impossible for me to renew my *khazonish* activity in America.

When I arrived in America on the ship from the Land of Israel I was awaited by that cited *menedzher*, Zeldov, and the well-known conductor, Machtenberg, with whom I had had the pleasure of appearing many times. They were both amazed upon seeing me. “You have grown twenty years younger!” — they exclaimed. And this was while some “good friends” had recited the memorial prayer for the learned dead on my behalf.

I must tell the truth, that I was somewhat resentful and hurt that there was not to be found a single *khazn* in the entire *Khazonim* Association of America who might have come to the dock to extend a hand of greeting to a colleague who had his accomplishments for the development and improvement of the *khazonim* profession in this country and who had now returned after an absence of six years.

I want to be properly understood. I did not desire any honors or receptions or banquets; I had had my fill of those in the course of my life. The only thing that I did desire and had the right to expect was — comradeship, collegial relations, warmth of people of the same occupation who certainly knew the modest place that I occupy in that occupation.

After I chanted the Days of Awe with great success at the Slonim Synagogue, I received an invitation from the *Khazonim* Association in New York to attend a general meeting of theirs. I felt bitterness at heart toward these colleagues of mine and was not able to accept that invitation. Somewhat later I was approached by the newly-elected president of the *Khazonim* Association, *Khazn* Kapov-Kogan, whom I



did not yet know. He personally asked me to attend the meeting that was especially called to celebrate his *instaleyshon* as president.

I accepted his personal invitation especially when he assured me that it would be a great honor for him if I were to participate in his celebration. When I entered the meeting hall all the *khazonim* arose and applauded and they called out [Heb. phrase:] “Welcome to Him Who Comes!”

When things quieted down I told them everything that had gathered in my heart, that their hands clap so strongly but in their hearts the majority of them think that it would’ve been better if *Khazn* Kwartin had remained in the Land of Israel rather than coming to America. I also told them that I would not have come to the *miting* were it not for the personal invitation by *Khazn* Kapov-Kogan. “And I came to tell the new president that I regret for him very much that he has taken on the presidency, and I wish him with all my heart that he may emerge from your hands safely, in one piece...”

I especially greeted *Khazn* Kapov-Kogan and wished him great success in America, but as a *khazn*, not as the president of the *Khazonim* Association and, saying this, I arose and left the meeting. And a year later, or somewhat later, I met with *Khazn* Kapov-Kogan who reminded me of my words at that cited meeting and that he is truly pleased that he escaped in time, in one piece...

Upon arriving in America I lost no time and quickly contacted the government in Washington about my passport. Usually one must actually remain for a year in the country before one can obtain permission to leave again. I, however, obtained this much more quickly and I was truly overjoyed because my desire, as soon as it was accomplished, was to return to the Land of Israel which I already considered to be my permanent home.

But sadly events developed in another direction and I could no longer bring my plans to fruition. My relatives in the Land of Israel reported that the waves of unrest had not only not ended, but with the increase in Jewish acts of vengeance the atmosphere in the Land had become sharper, a true economic chaos is in force, and their advice was for me to delay my return.

In this way I kept postponing my journey until — traveling was no longer possible. The Second World War broke out with all its horrors and tragedies for our people. One’s nerves had to have been made of steel to accept the Job-like reports being carried from across the sea about the horrible destruction of millions of our brothers and sisters, about the extinction of hundreds of Jewish communities, about the extermination of a large part of our people.

I found consolation and liberation in my free time when I became engrossed in the ancient Jewish prayers. And thus I came to completing the third volume of my *khazonish* work, “Prayers of Zebulun,” that includes the complete weekday afternoon-evening [ritual], of the Sabbath welcome and of the Sabbath morning prayers and complement. In writing this work I had in mind mainly the young generation of *khazonim* and even beginning *khazonim* who are taking their first steps in this field, and I wrote it simply and understandably in order to give each one of them the opportunity to become acquainted with the old, genuine, traditional mode of prayer.

I consider my musical works to be a modest contribution to the old treasury of Jewish melody and prayer. As to the extent that I was able to create something original, or to enrich the cited treasury — this will be judged by the generations that follow me. They will, as I believe with all my heart, continue

building and creating this structure that upheld Jewish life in the course of long generations and nurtured that life with the succulence of the Jewish sigh and of the Jewish yearning for total redemption.

And as I am speaking of *khazonim* and *khazones*, I will here attempt, after a *khazonish* career of over fifty years, to make some remarks which may be capable of affecting and influencing the further course of this unique and so-important art among Jews.

The *khazonish* past is spread before me clearly and brightly, I see the *khazonish* reality now before my eyes, and what the future may bring — no one is able to guess. But yet it is our duty on the base of the bright past and that not-so good present to attempt to come up with some sort of diagnosis for the future.

I have already mentioned in the first chapters of this life-story that right at my childish age of seven-eight years my only dream was that God might help me and I might at some time have the joy of hearing a real *khazn* and choir. And when I did hear the first *khazn*, Getsel Balter, it seemed to me that the highest joy that could be granted me in life would be becoming a choirboy.

A year later I had the opportunity to hear the Talna *khazn* Avrom Shoykhet with his choir of fifty boys. These first two choirs that I heard in my early youth penetrated deeply into my heart. Especially the soloists, the altos and sopranos, captured my child's soul and it was they who determined my fate to become a *khazn*.

This was because they spoke to the Jewish heart and expressed the thousand-year Jewish pain. Understandably, then, as a child, I could not have known what had so captured me. This became clear to me in the course of years. The solos of those children contained the naïve honesty of the pitiful Jewish life whose only consolation was — hope and faith that at some time the messianic redemption would arise and Jews would be delivered from all their suffering.

The solos of those children's choirs became so deeply inscribed in my child's mind that I could sing along with almost all of them. The *khazn* and his choirboys had long left the *shtetl* but I still wandered about as though in a netherworld, singing along and humming all their melodies. And I carried them with me thus in the course of all my life as the bright beginning of a singing world that arose in me.

I often asked myself the question: Where is the root of *khazones* to be found? Where lies the secret of this art that so deeply influenced Jewish life? It cannot be said that *khazones* is transmitted as an inheritance. My father was never a *khazn* and neither one of my grandfathers were *khazonim*. And my children, too, though it must be admitted that I am not-too-bad of a *khazn*, did not take after me in the slightest.

The same can be said of other artistic talents: virtuosos, or painters, or famous actors. The parents' art doesn't extend to their children. So it must follow that when an artist is fated by his art to influence the generation in which he lives as well as later generations, that such an artist must, all alone, from his earliest childhood, absorb into himself from the surrounding atmosphere all the succulents that will later serve to feed his creativity.

It is understood that the further development and fulfillment of his native talent depends on his expansion and the power of his influences. To be a *khazn* among Jews one must be born with the blessed characteristic of *khazones*. Later that inborn characteristic must be developed, enriched and established within predetermined norms. But in addition to that, there is demanded of a *khazn* something that other artistic talents do not need.

That is the particular atmosphere of the upraising which the future Jewish congregational leader obtains in his youth. That is his parents' house which places a deep stamp on the future *khazn*. If this is a house of honest, pious and God-fearing people, then the child receives from his very first steps the opportunity to absorb the good Jewish traits and they influence his entire later career as a spokesperson of the Jewish masses.

I recall that at the age of five the *rebe* managed to plant in me the feeling of the all-powerful God who sees all that occurs in the world, but Whom none of us can see with our eye, so therefore we feel Him in our heart. And this God required that we children be good and pious, honest and careful, and to obey our parents and what the *rebe* says.

In this manner there began to develop in ancient Jewish children the need for the Holy Scripts, a respect for something higher that bore the name God, esteem for father and mother and elders in general. In this way one was bound to the entire tribe of Jews — to Jewishness. The fate of any Jew in the world became one's own fate. And when we later heard of and ourselves began to experience pogroms against Jews, oppressions of our brothers and sisters because they are Jews — our young little Jewish hearts were pained and bloodied over these Jewish troubles.

This hard Jewish fate that we absorbed starting in childhood deeply penetrated our entire being. I recall that when I would pray and come to the verses "See our misfortune," "Promise from the heavens," "Rock of Israel," and the like, something inside me began to tremble and I would, with my young being, ask God with all my heart that Jews might no longer suffer and might finally have no need to lament.

That was the beginning when there began to arise in me prayers with melodies — my first improvisations. Every prayer that I sobbed out in the ritual fit into a separate mode, in a separate melody. The heartfelt Jewish prayer flowed out by itself, laying the foundation for that high *khazonish* function.

From that it must be concluded that a *khazn* who did not absorb during his childhood all the good traits of piety and *khsides* [adherence], who did not observe and did not listen as the small town pious prayer leader pours out, during the Days of Awe at the altar, his bitter heart in a sea of tears and profound outpouring of his soul — such a *khazn* can truly not feel his high calling, he simply does not know "before Whom one stands."

Sadly, sadly, among us has increased the number of *khazonim* who do not understand the sacredness of their profession, who see *khazones* only as a means to earn a living.

I do not want now to speak of the ancient *khazn*, the truly pious Jew all of whose limbs trembled for a good time before the Days of Awe, fearing that he was not fit to be the spokesman for his community of Jews. So he would run, before each prayer session, to immerse himself in the *mikve* [ritual bath] to cleanse himself physically and to prepare spiritually for Holy Labor. He felt tremendous responsibility on himself. His hands and feet trembled when he stood to chant the prayer "I, lacking good deeds."

Such a *khazn* really did stand before the altar "shaking and in awe" because he felt that starting to argue with the Ruler of the Universe in the name of the community — is no small thing. When he began to chant the prayer "Please let the road I will take, and intend to seek mercy for me and those who sent me, be successful" — it was not tears but blood that ran from his eyes!

We have all gone far away from those times. But yet it must be said that a good voice by itself does not make a good *khazn* for Jews. Of course one must have a voice and really a well-cultivated voice, and

the *khazn* must be well musically trained, but this alone does not suffice. Without a deeply-Jewish background there is a lack of the roots from which *khazonish* stems.

In fact, the present-day *khazn*, after all, is a direct descendant of the pre-historic Levites who performed the Holy Rites at the Holy Temple. And none of us is qualified to follow in their footsteps. But even if we were not to look so far back and be satisfied only by the epoch of three or four generations ago — things grow very lonely at heart, when we see what has happened with our high calling.

Recall only the generation of great Jews, our wonderful predecessors like: Betsalel, Yerukhem HaKoten, Nisi Belzer, Nisi Blumental, Vayntroyb [Weintraub], Zalman Umaner, Borekh Shor [Baruch Shore], Borekh Kinstler, Velvele Shestopoler, and somewhat later the *khazonim* and community leaders: Gurevitsh, Birnbaum, Bakhman, Pinye Minkovski, Razumni, et al. All of these were original *khazonim* because they were rooted in Jewishness, in good Jewish mores which gave them power and ecstasy to sing out and present before the All Powerful all of Jewish pain and the hidden Jewish hopes for redemption of the whole world and of the Jewish people.

Such a *khazn* did not think so much about his earnings, which were quite poor, but mainly about inner peace and completeness; he regarded his function as a sacred service to the community and he always sought to enrich his Jewish knowledge. Days and nights he would sit, immersed in old books, improvising and seeking to invent something new. He did not spare the effort to enhance the prayers so as to please more the Master of the Universe as well as his congregants.

In the last two generations as well, and, may we be preserved, between the living and dead, also among some of the living and influential *khazonim* we find devoted followers of that great *khazonish* tradition. I will call out just a few names: Karniol, Shteynberg [Steinberg], Rutman [Rothman], Yosele Rosenblat, Roytman, et al. All of them were raised “In the laps of Judaism” and you could recognize that in the inner fire of their chanting at the altar.

But with pain in our heart we must say “We mourn those we lost.” In most cases we see that the light of *khazones*, which illuminated Jewish life over the course of generations, is fading away before our eyes. There is no longer that modesty and those feelings of great responsibility to the community that had characterized the above-named generations of *khazonim* among Jews.

Therefore there has arisen before us a sort of burlesque-*khazones*, a *khazones* in spangles that tries to use outer effects to hide the inner emptiness and isolation from any Jewish source whatsoever. Lost are the dear traditional prayers, the wonderful rituals that the people itself created and from generation to generation assigned to its spokesmen, its congregational leaders, to carry further into eternity.

I would say still more: today’s *khazn* has allowed himself to be robbed of all the nobility and dignity of the *khazonish* profession, as it had been revealed to us in the course of past generations. He has become lowly in his estimation and made himself entirely dependent on the *kongregeyshon*. Over the course of hundreds of years the *khazn* set the tone in the synagogue. Today it is the executives who pay “veydzhes,” or the *rabay*, whose preaching is in English.

And when one begins to fall — one doesn’t know where to stop. If one has once departed from the traditional road — one sinks further and presents the audience with the cheapest little songs, the tasteless couplets, to the shame of the Holy Place that recalls such honorable times and such wonderful functions of the *khazn* among Jews.

## I Lived to See the State of Israel Come Into Being

Before I close the story of my life upon attaining the age of seventy-five, I will recall my great joy in that I was destined to live to see the State of Israel come into being. From the year of 1926, when I first came into the Land, my heart was captured by this corner of the world that had witnessed our former greatness, our falling so low, and the heroic efforts of our generation to return the crown to its place, to revive our people in its former homeland.

I had great moral successes in the Land of Israel, I also suffered material losses in the Land, but this had nothing to do with the inner union that was created between me and this wondrous Land at first sight.

Even before my leaving the Land in 1937 I was fated to live through a great personal joy there: I gave my youngest daughter, Shulamis, in marriage in Tel Aviv to the engineer Rudolf Ashner, a son of the former president of the famous Fasanen Temple in Berlin. I was especially overjoyed by this event because it was symbolic for me: let at least one child of mine settle in the Land of our future and lend a hand to its development and blooming.

This was a fine Jewish celebration, observed in the highest traditional Jewish spirit. All of three wedding officiants participated, and all of the most prominent and honorable representatives of the Yishuv: the Sephardic Rabbi, Oziyel; Rabbi Gold, one of the most honored leaders of the [religious Zionist party] “*Mizrachi*,” and Rabbi Dr. Liberman, from Berlin, who occupied a professorial chair in Jerusalem. This celebration has especially remained in my memory because right after the wedding-canopy service I had to leave all my honored guests and ride to Jerusalem where, that same evening, I had to give a concert on behalf of the yeshiva of Rabbi Kook, of blessed memory. When I returned from Jerusalem late that night, I still found all the guests and we all celebrated until well into daylight. This was truly one of my happiest days in the Land of Israel.

I also want to dedicate a few words to a colleague, a famous and beloved *khazn* who left this world in the most blooming years of his life. I mean Yosele Rozenblat, who was in the Land of Israel at the same time as I. Three days before his tragic death both of us appeared together at a concert in honor of the jubilee [50-year anniversary] of the Jerusalem *Khazn* Riblin. I noticed that Yosele, of blessed memory, was straining greatly while singing, he was panting and breathing heavily.

This was on a Thursday and two days later, the Sabbath, he was to perform his farewell chanting at the Ruined structure of Rabbi Yehuda the *Khosid*. So I pleaded with him to save his voice, to hold back and not sing so many encores because he needs his strength for the Sabbath chanting. But as with a true artist, it was not his habit to think about what might come later. So he sang again and again, and coming down off the platform he was entirely soaked in sweat.

This did not truly hold him back from his Sabbath chanting in the Ruin, which was one of his stormiest successes. The synagogue [congregants] virtually carried him on their shoulders, as though the Jews had the bad premonition that this was not only Yosele's last appearance in the Land of Israel, but generally on this sinful earth.

The next day, Sunday, Yosele rode off with a large company to the Dead Sea on a filming shoot. The day was hot and the choking air in the flatlands was unbearable. The shoot required him to bathe in the

waters of the Dead Sea. This had a greater effect on his weak heart and that night, returning to Jerusalem, he suffered an attack and died.

In the middle of the night a special messenger from Jerusalem was sent to me by my friend Amdurski, to relate the tragic news. I bemoaned a highly-talented colleague, a learned Jew, God-fearing, pious, who was truly an honorable inheritor of those generations of traditional Jewish *khazonim* about whom I spoke in a previous chapter.

When the war ended I was fated to visit the Jewish settlement in Mexico. I say fated, because that visit, or actually three-time visit in the course of fifteen months, provided me with boundless joy and happiness. In the seventy-fourth year of my life I could see how my prayers, my “chanting” still enthuse so many Jews, may no evil eye befall.

In general, the young Jewish settlement in Mexico was a tremendous surprise to me. Small in number, only twenty-some thousand Jews, but what youthfulness and freshness, what adherence to the best and most beautiful that Jewish life possessed in our old homes. Both the pious and the secular, both the Orthodox and Zionists, even Bundists [Yiddishist revolutionary Socialists] — all are permeated by the desire to continue our traditions of a characteristic Jewish-cultural life.

I do not speak of the broad-heartedness of the Jews there when charity is involved, when the most varied Jewish causes in the world are involved, and especially for the Land of Israel. Joyfully I record in my memoirs the Mexican Jews and the countless friends I made there during the time of my brief presence among them.

How great is my happiness and joy at having lived to the historic moment when the peoples of the world adopt the epoch-making decision to re-establish the State of Israel on a portion of our historic land. I saw the Land of Israel wrangling with the foreign power that showed no great enthusiasm for the purpose with which it had been entrusted. I saw the scandalous behavior of England toward the Yishuv in the Land of Israel when the Arabs mutinied and sought to drown in a sea of blood the heroic feats and achievements of the Yishuv.

Therefore I burned with an inner lust to see the Land and the people there now, after the chains of foreign rule have been thrown off, and after our heroic youth of the Land, with hard sacrifices, drove off the numerous enemies and began to fortify the national independence of Israel.

At Passover time in 1949, on the first anniversary of the proclamation of Jewish national independence, I was able to fulfill this desire and after an interruption of twelve years’ time to again tread the holy soil of our homeland.

I walked over the sun-drenched, so well-known to me streets and plazas and yet it was no longer the Land that I had left at times of inner bewilderment. I did not recognize the people anymore: somehow another spirit, a spirit of freedom and exaltation rested upon them. I met proud Jews there who gave themselves a full reckoning of the tremendous responsibility that Providence had laid upon them to realize the thousand-year dream of an ancient people to live on its own land as equal to all people.

I did not get a room in the Tel Aviv hotels because of the tremendous influx of tourists for Passover, so I stayed with a brother-in-law of mine in Bnei Brak. Some of the well-to-do householders there came to me to remind me that in 1926, right after my first arrival in the Land, they had built the yeshiva in Bnei

Brak and lacked the means to complete the building, so they then asked me to give them a chanting that would enable them to raise the needed means.

Now I went to see the yeshiva to whose construction I had laid a hand and drew prideful joy over the fact that the Voice of the Torah echoes so broadly across our eternal Land. Of course I saw the difficult problems of hundreds of thousands of our brothers, the remnants of a people that pressed thirstily to the only shore of security, to the land called Israel.

Along with all the residents of Israel I felt that this tremendous purpose of “ingathering the exiled” is far beyond the modest possibilities of the Yishuv, and that to its aid must come the entire people which lives widespread [in diaspora], but whose heart’s rhythm beats in time with the great messianic happenings in Israel. I felt further that it was not enough to celebrate and to be proud that it is to our generation that has fallen the witnessing of the great event, but that we must day-in, day-out remember those burdens and responsibilities that have fallen on the not-quite million Jews in Israel and contribute our share to relieve those burdens.

Intoxicated by sweet feelings, I went, this time, along the streets and plazas of Israel. I thanked the Creator that I have lived to see these great days of our history. I did not doubt for a moment that the people, wherever it might be, would rebuild Zion and Israel, and that the name of Israel would again light up in the world as a symbol of peace and magnification of the concept of Man, as we have received it from our Prophets.