

The Family History of Our Family
by
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I got the idea to describe the lives of the many branches of our family. On June 15, 1971 I reached the age of 81. I came to America on February 28, 1908. It is more than three quarters of a human's life. It has been a year since I have been toying with the idea to write this. I want to leave this for my children and friends of the family, and will make use of information which I hope to get from my younger sister and brothers, also from my children and their children. Since I am not a writer, I think it is a big job, but I believe that where there is a will there is a way. And like on Yom Kippur we pray to the Almighty to give us strength for the coming year, I, too, pray He should give me strength to achieve my goal. Like in the Yom Kippur prayer Hineni.... I will describe happenings in my life, some to be proud of and others not so. I, David Tzirlin, am the central figure in this undertaking. I think that I remember things that happened when I was three years old, but my sister says that I heard those things told by the older brothers.

We were six brothers and one sister, who is the oldest. She is 92 years old and has all her faculties. One may be proud of her. Of course, at her age, she quite often does not feel well physically, rheumatism, stomach trouble... Later I will write about her family. She gave me information about our parents. My father's name was Leibe Tzirlin. He came from a small town by the name of Fleschenitz, my mother and her parents lived in the town of Zebin(?), Minsk Province. My mother's name was Hanna Cfman. She was a girl up in age, whom her parents were anxious to marry off, so that she would not remain an old maid.

My father's father, i.e. my grandfather's name was Zalmen Leiter, and my father's mother's (my grandmother's) name was Shifre. My mother's

father and mother were Shepsel and Dvoyre Hofman. My mother had smallpox in her childhood. One used to tie a child's hands, in a case like this, so as not to let the child scratch his face, but it was very hard to control my mother, and she was left with pock marks all over her face. Her parents were very worried about marrying off a girl with such a defect.

My father's parents from the town of Pleshchenitz were anxious for their son to marry. Although he was of a younger age than the bride, he suffered from asthma, a sickness which causes a lot of coughing. When the match was in the process of being arranged, i.e. the match between my father from Pleshchenitz and my mother from Zebin, my mother's parents, who were worried about a girl with a defect, a pock-marked face, and not too young, agreed to the match, so did my father's parents, even though my father was younger, but was ill with asthma. With lots of Mazel, they were married.

My father's parents were Zalmen Leyzer and Hyene Sifre (Shifre)? Tzirlin. My mother's parents were Shepsel and Rive Mere. My mother Hanna had a brother, our uncle, whose name was Mote. He had three children; Rive Mere, Zalmen and Peshe Dore. They lived in Zerim(?). He was a tailor. So was my grandfather (my father's father), who lived in Pleshchenitz. He sewed for gentile and Jewish inhabitants of Pleshchenitz and surrounding towns and villages. My father Leibe and my uncle Mote opened a tailor-shop in Pleshchenitz, where my father's parents lived. It was the largest town in the vicinity, with a larger Jewish population and more Jewish institutions such as a synagogue, a bathhouse, a ritual bath (mikva) for women for the week days and for men - Thursdays and Fridays. Among the men there were some Hasidim. In Pleshchenitz there was also a rabbi and cantor for the High Holidays, there was also a cheder and a rebbe who tutored the children of Pleshchenitz and the adjacent towns. Boys and girls attended the cheder.

My sister Merke was one of those who attended the cheder in Fleschenitz and my grandparents from my father's side took care of her as my parents lived in Kuralne, a smaller town than Fleschenitz.

In those years they did not believe in educating girls. Girls were taught to believe in God, to do good deeds, to say the blessings in the morning and before bedtime, before and after the meals and the blessing for kindling the Sabbath candles. My sister Merke studied more than that; she wanted to know more than just the prayers.

For the children from smaller towns the parents used to engage rebbes who themselves were students of yeshives and used to teach half a year from the holiday of Sukos til Pesach. After that children used to study at home. Thus did my older brothers. They did not study too long, though; only the five books of Moses and the blessings, as at the age of 12 they had to learn a trade, such as to become a carpenter, tailor, painter, shoemaker.

Our parents were not rich. Father was a sick man and found it difficult to provide for the children. They were, therefore, taught trades; Mendl became a shoemaker, but the older brother did not want to be a craftsman so he became a coachman and worked for somebody else. Then a government order was put out forbidding Jews to live in villages and small towns. The excuse was they should not exploit the gentiles. My parents then left Zebin and settled in Klibane, Minsk Province. My brother Itchke and little me, Dovid, were born in Klibane, where there were few Jewish institutions and not much of Jewish life. My father could not continue his partnership with my Uncle Mote, as, because of his asthma he could not do inside work. He coughed a lot and the doctor advised him to do outside work. My mother helped him to earn a living by baking bread, challah, rolls, etc. and by selling it to muzhiks (peasants) from surrounding

villages. She also traded her baked goods for chickens, thus enabling her to prepare for Shabbas. My father acquired a horse and wagon, and used to deliver provisions to the nearby towns. The provisions consisted of herring, fish and other food articles which the shopkeepers, in turn, sold in their shops. That is to say that my father was a delivery man who traveled by horse and wagon and supplied the shops with goods that they needed for their trade. His earnings were very meager, scarcely enough to support his wife and five children. They did not stay long in Klibane, as Jews were forbidden to reside in towns and villages. It remained for them to start out for Minsk, but 21 viorst from Minsk there was a town called Horedok where there was a copper factory, and they decided to settle there. The factory used to manufacture all sorts of copper pots and pans. My father thought he could earn a living with his horse and wagon by going often to Minsk. My grandfather Reb Leizer moved from Pleshchenitz to Minsk and worked as tailor of men's clothes. He had an older brother in Minsk who had six fingers on his left hand. He was called in town Avrom Shishtiren (shisha in Hebrew means six- F.G.). He, too, was a tailor, but in the summertime he used to deal in fruits, such as apples, pears and plums, which were grown in Minsk orchards. He was wealthier than my grandfather (his brother). His sons were Shmuel, Yankl, Moshke and Mendl. My grandfather, his brother, had a daughter Some who was married to my uncle Shmuel. They were cousins.

Grandfather had another daughter, Dinke, who married Uncle Leibe, son of Avrom. My grandfather's brother had a daughter by the name Dinke. She married a man by the name of Azriel, who had a poultry market. He used to sell live and killed chickens, ducks, and before the Holy days geese and turkeys. They were the richest members of our family. Uncle Yankl Tsirlin had a teahouse in Minsk. It was called the Zionist Teahouse, because he belonged to the General Zionists. But members of all parties used to

frequent the place, such as Bund, Zionist, Socialist, Revolutionary, and Social Democrats. The place was always full, and various discussions were carried on. After the revolution, in 1917, Uncle Yankl became an important functionary in the Communist-Bolshevik party in the Kiev arena. He had the military rank of colonel or general. We did not hear from him, but he was not liquidated by the Communists when they seized power in the U.S.S.R.

I mention in my writings my father's father Zelman Leizer, also grandfather's brother who was known in Minsk as Avreml Shishtiren, who had six fingers on his left hand. I also mention his children, because they all played a big part in the lives of our families. My father also had a younger brother by the name Yankov. He emigrated to Australia; while working as a tailor he also started buying shares in gold mines. From his letters we learned that he earned considerably from the goldmine shares. He used to send grandfather nice presents for the holidays like Rosh Hashonah and Pessach and never forgot our family either, also his two sisters Sorre, Uncle Shmuel's wife and his sister Dinke and Uncle Leibe, who was a cap maker. As you can well understand, my father's family were not in a position to make a living. My father being sick, even with my mother's help, was not able to make ends meet (for themselves and family) and the help from the uncle from Australia came in very handy. We used to write him letters of thanks and appreciation. He was well known in Australia and from the pictures he used to send us of himself, his wife and children, the way they were dressed, they looked like they belonged to high society. Unfortunately this lasted only a few years. The gold mine shares lost their value and our uncle stopped sending us assistance. I think that he must have lost his wealth the same as did people in this country during the Wall Street crash. At first one makes a profit from shares, then there is a crisis and everything one has acquired in years is lost.

Much to our chagrin, our uncle, not having been able to help his poor family any longer, even stopped writing, and we don't know how he ended his life. And now back to my parents' lives. I remember that I was five years old when we moved to Horedok. We rented an apartment from a rich landowner whose name was Lipnitski. He had a large courtyard and orchard. Our apartment was at the front of the building, consisting of many rooms and a balcony. We had to ascend many stairs to reach our apartment. There was a spring flowing under our balcony, the water cold, clear and refreshing. There was a nice social life in Horedok. At age five, I established a business around the spring. In summertime, when girls and boys ages 13 and 14 used to go walking in the woods around our house, I used to sit on the stairs, a metal dipper in hand, and would sell them refreshing spring water, for which they would pay me a kopek (a penny in this country). Business was good, no investment, clear profit, which I would turn over to my mother. I will mention some of the boys and girls of Horedok. There was a feldsher (old time barber-surgeon) in Horedok by the name of Shoul Gorelik. When I was 18 and a half years old I came to Minsk for a visit. There was an Arbeter Ring branch there (No. 99). I was not eligible to join that branch, as I was under 20 years old. A man by the name of Morris Malat was a member of that branch. His wife Gosia recognized me, as she knew me from Horedok. She had a brother - Shmuel Gorelik-and they were the children of Shoul the feldsher (Toyfe - doctor in Hebrew). She, Gosi Malat, asked me if we lived at 3 Miliken, Horedok, and reminded me that I used to sell her spring water. Her brother, Shmuel Gorelik, married Rochel Kirtsan, who was learning to be a seamstress. At age 14, she introduced me, Dovid the tailor, to a group of tailors and seamstresses of Minsk, who belonged to the Bund. Her husband was Shmuel Gorelik, Sophy Malat's brother Shmuel was a sign painter. He was a very cheerful person and while hanging

the signs he used to sing sweet Jewish melodies. This, unfortunately, did not last long. I don't know how long they were married, but he died at a very young age in 1920, during the flu epidemic which broke out in Minsk and many young people lost their lives. Later Rochel married Yosef Tsukerman, who belonged to Arbeter Ring Branch 99 of Minsk. He was the father of Yankev (Jack) Tsukerman who was a municipal judge during Mayor LaGuardia's stay in office (in the Family Court). His father lost his wife at a very young age and his second marriage lasted 40 years. I was very well acquainted with Yosef Tsukerman. Originally he was a tailor, but he studied English and graduated high school. He had a job in City Hall during the Second World War, I don't know in which department. He died after being married to Rochel 40 years and Rochel died in the Arbeter Ring Home a few years ago, where they were both very active. Blessed be their memory!

When I was six years old I started to attend the cheder. There were two Hedorim in Horedok. The rebbe of one was Reb Hirsh the tall one, and the rebbe of the second cheder was Hirshel Kredatke, because he was short in stature.

When I was three years old, my brother Abbe was born. I did not attend cheder very long in Horedok. I knew the alphabet and a little of the Chumesh. I knew the alphabet when my father took me to cheder at the age of six. When I was learning the alphabet my father used to drop 20 kopeks from up above and would tell me that an angel from heaven dropped them for me and I should be a good boy and study hard. He made me believe that the angel wants me to be nice to my parents and God will see to it that I succeed in my studies. My parents always worried about their children, both the boys and the girl. They worried constantly about their Jewish studies, about their trades and which path in life to choose for

them in order to earn a livelihood. Still they never lost faith in God, hoping that the Almighty will help. When my sister Merke was 14 years old, my mother started to worry about her trousseau. It was not an easy task for poor people to acquire clothes, modern shoes, hats, comforters (perines) filled with goose down, as all these things were very expensive. My mother thought of an idea: The town of Horedok was on the banks of the river Svisle. Wild geese and ducks used to come ashore to look for food that people used to scatter on the banks of the river. As the wild ducks and geese would come out of the water, they would shake vigorously and loosen feathers and down. My mother used to send me and my brother Abbe to gather the feathers and for that task she would pay us one or two kopoks. That was the way our poor parents cared for and worried about the children.

In Horedok there were some well-to-do inhabitants, but proportionally there were more poor people. But thanks to the mill and the copper factory many of them were able to earn a livelihood, meager as it was. There were many Jewish craftsmen and artisans in Horedok who were not rich and worked hard to earn a living; on the other hand there were inhabitants who succeeded, owned their own homes and also had tenants. There were several charitable institutions in the town who helped the poor people with medicine, and they would send the doctor when needed. If a poor woman would give birth, the women (balebostes) would visit the woman in childbirth and bring along pastries and zwieback and all kinds of goodies. Boys from the hedolim used to come to say Krishme (Kriat Shma) and to hang the Song of Ascent (Shir Hamaalot) over the bed of the new mother, also praying for the health of mother and child.

My father used to go to Minsk very often; it was 21 viorst from Horedok. On the way he would pass through the suburb Kamerike. There was a bakery there that used to bake bread, rolls and other baked goods for nearby

stores. Once he inquired if they would employ a 14-year old girl, meaning my sister Merke. They asked him to bring her and upon his return to Horedok he gave the news to my mother who agreed to let my sister learn the trade. She would, at the same time, earn her keep and also be able to help her parents. My sister was very happy to accept the job and my father took her to Kamerike. She started to work right away, without inquiring under what conditions she would be working. They left it up to the conscience of the lady baker. Her earnings were very small, as she was being taught the art of baking. On my father's frequent trips to Minsk he would stop to see my sister, and later bring home regards from her, that she worked hard and was learning the trade. She would work from early in the morning till late at night. There were no regular hours; one had to work till the work was done, but she did learn to be a baker. It was getting more and more difficult for my father to travel from town to town to deliver the merchandise. At that time he learned that there was a brick factory in another suburb of Minsk, where they were manufacturing bricks for the construction of houses, for ovens, etc. The bricks had to be transported from one location to another, but still in the same town. It was a Jewish town, with Jewish institutions, a synagogue and other needed facilities. When my father returned home and suggested to my mother to move to that town, she readily agreed. My sister was very happy to hear that we wanted to move to Minsk, where she will be able to visit the family from time to time; so were my older brothers, as a large city provided a better opportunity to find employment. My older brother did not learn a trade; he worked for a coachman and made a living for himself. Eventually he bought a horse and cab and became a drayman (cabman), like a taxi in this country. He had a healthy physique and all other boys his age were afraid of him. Our brother Mendl, the second brother, became a shoemaker and earned his livelihood.

Our paternal grandfather also moved from Leshchenitz to Minsk. He was already up in age and did not have much work as a tailor. He got an apartment near the fish market. All the inhabitants of small towns tried to move to larger cities.

There comes to mind things that happened in Horedok which are worthy of mention. Horedok was considered Lithuanian, Minsk Province. It was one of the more civilized towns, through which flowed the river Svisle. A large part of the population was Jewish, but there were many Christians in the vast surrounding areas. There also lived a count and countess in the suburb of Horedok, to whom the river Svisle belonged. The countess had an adopted son. Nobody ever mentioned the name of the count, only the adopted son. He was a midget, about three and a half feet tall, and his head was as big as his whole body. When the countess used to go through the town, in a coach drawn by two horses, nobody ever saw the count with her, only the midget. He took care of all her finances, the land and the river. The town was sometimes also called Ashtresitski Horedok.

During the summer months people used to catch fish in the river Svisle. Fish like pike, and many other fish were plentiful. There was a regular fish industry and the process of catching the fish lasted several days. The countess, the midget and a staff of servants used to stand on the river bank; a net was spread over the river, and after the catch would be pulled out, it would be sold to Jewish fishmongers from Minsk. They were not allowed to sell any of the fish to Jews or Christians of Horedok. The Jews of Horedok had to go to Minsk to bring the fish back and sell it to the inhabitants, Jews and Christians. But one must not forget the kindness of the countess and the midget. (It was rumored that the countess was of royal lineage).

The river Svisle had three parts. Two parts were divided by dams, and when these were closed, the third part was left without water, only mud and fish. I will never forget the scene, people young and old, men, women and children would come, thanks to the kindness of the count, countess and midget, and gather all the fish they were able to, free of charge, and neither Jew nor Christian was barred from doing so. Those who had ice cellars took enough fish to freeze and to keep for a long time. Everybody was thankful to the count, the countess and the midget and nobody of the Horedok inhabitants will ever forget it. That was approximately in the year 1883. I was 7 years old when we moved from Horedok to Minsk, where my father got work at the brick factory. My younger brother was then 4 years old. He was not a well child and my mother had a difficult time with his upbringing. He used to get convulsions and spasms and every time he would get an attack he would pass out. My mother had her own methods how to bring him to: She would put him on the floor face down, put a wooden trough, the kind she used to knead bread in, on his back, then throw a clay pot on the trough and that would wake my brother Abbe up and the convulsions and spasms would stop. My mother knew many home (old wives') remedies which she practiced on young and old people. If somebody had a stomach ache, she would put that person on his back, heat up a glass with a burning candle, then put the hot glass upside down on the person's stomach and that would relieve the stomach ache. If somebody had boils or pimples, she had certain plants which she would apply to the sores and in a few days the person would be rid of them. These were the home remedies my mother would use and people would be very grateful to her.

I want to mention that in Horedok my parents rented a 4-room apartment in a two-family house. We lived on the first floor. Together with the apartment we got a 2-bed garden where we sowed cucumbers, carrots, lettuce,

turnips, radishes, and beets. We also had a goat. All this gave my parents the possibility to feed and bring up the family, five boys and one girl. The goat was kept in the vestibule, but in cold weather she was brought into the house. We also kept a big barrel of water in the vestibule; the water was brought into the vestibule using a device consisting of a wooden bar and two buckets hanging on the ends of it, and that was carried on the shoulders. The water was used for drinking and cooking. It was two years since we moved from Lipnitski's house where we had a spring nearby, but there we did not have a garden, nor were we allowed to keep a goat for the supply of milk. It was a poor life. My parents could not afford to pay the rebbe, so that the children got very little instruction and became laborers. When my father took the apartment in Minsk, it was in the basement, six or seven steps below street level. At the time the family moved from Horedok to Minsk, the older children were already there, working. Itchke, Dovid and Abbe were still in Horedok. It was in the fall, in the month of October. The fruits were already ripe to be picked. We had enough vegetables from our garden, but we sold the goat and used the money for our moving expenses. Father was already in Minsk and mother had to take care of everything herself. She engaged Mote the commissioner (?) to move us from Horedok to Minsk. He had a large wagon and a good horse. The trip had to last 10 hours. We were supposed to have started out early in the morning on a Monday or Tuesday. As a boy of 7, who could already read a little in the Chumesh (five books of Moses), I thought that it was terrible to start out on a 10-hour journey without a piece of fruit to munch on. I arose at 6 in the morning and ran to Nehame's courtyard, which was not far from the market place. Near the front of the street there were fruit trees with the best apples and pears, the sight of which gave one a gnawing feeling around the heart. I climbed

the fence and started to pick apples and pears. Suddenly I heard the voice of a man, and who would it be, but none other than Mote the commissioner, who was to move us to Minsk. He was on his way home from morning services. He told me to get off the fence. I had already picked a sizeable amount of fruit, which I kept putting inside my shirt. I was very frightened, but he told me not to be afraid as nothing bad will happen to me if I will return the fruit to the orchard. He scolded me mercilessly and told me that a Jewish boy is not to steal; only goyim are thieves. I started to cry and right then he recognized me and asked me if I am Chane's boy, whom he is supposed to move to Minsk. He chastised me, telling me at the same time that my parents are such fine people, and I, while still crying, started to throw the fruit back into the orchard. Then he complimented me that I was a good boy, I come from nice people, and because I listened to him and returned the fruit to the orchard, he will not tell my parents what I did. He also told me he would be at our house in an hour and would I tell my mother to be ready. When I returned home my mother asked me where I had been, but I would not tell her. Had she known the truth, she would not have been able to bear the disgrace. At eight o'clock Mote came and I was very happy that he did not mention a thing to my mother. He considered it having done a good deed not to allow a Jewish boy to steal some fruit, but the real good deed was that he did not tell it to my mother, thereby saving her from being disgraced. I will never forget the incident.

Mote put all our belongings on the wagon and tied it with ropes so it would not shake. We three boys, Itchke, myself and Abbe climbed on top of the wagon which was laden with featherbeds and pillows; we all started out on our trip from Horedok to Minsk. Mother prayed silently for a safe journey and a peaceful arrival in Minsk. We had to pass through Kamerike

where my sister worked in the bakery. The wagon and the people were shaking, as the roads were not paved. It was getting chilly, but at about 2 in the afternoon we arrived in Kamerike. Our sister came out of the bakery and treated us to rolls and bagel which we accepted readily, as we were very hungry. Reb Mote rushed us on, as we still had a considerable distance to cover before reaching the brickworks, where my father was waiting for us. We were hoping to arrive there before sunset. We passed a railroad line and saw a locomotive attached to a number of passenger and freight cars on the way to Vilna and smaller towns on the way. For us children it was a tremendous novelty, as we had never seen a steam locomotive that was fed coal by a fireman. My mother had had the experience of traveling by train and promised us that God willing, when we grow older she will take us traveling on a train to the surrounding towns. The brick factory was on the other side of the tracks and we had to wait for the train to pass before the barrier was lifted and we could be on our way again. At about 5 o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at Itchke's house, about five blocks from the railroad station, and our basement apartment, its windows being even with the ground. The apartment consisted of five rooms. There was one brick oven in the apartment and it served for cooking and baking. Under the oven there was a space for chickens to be raised for the family's consumption.

Reb Mote and my father unloaded our belongings, then they went to the synogogue to attend the Minhe-Maariv service. He stayed at our house overnight, as he did not want to travel at night. My father was hoping that in Minsk he will not have to work too hard, and not to travel around so much. Still the work in the brick factory was too much for his poor health.

My brother Itchke and I were sent to the rebbe, who was the shames (sexton) of the shul, to study Yiddish. It was a nice size congregation,

and there were several rich people among its members. Our landlord Yudke was a businessman; he also sold lottery tickets and people often won. One Sabbath eve, when we were returning from shul after welcoming the Sabbath, a heavy rain started coming down. We expected the apartment to be flooded. At three in the morning the water was getting higher and higher and flooded our rooms. The children were told to climb up on top of the oven which almost reached the ceiling. The chickens, too, were rescued. The flood lasted from 2 to 4 am. Then the wind and rain stopped, but we stayed on top of the oven till daybreak. Later on we helped our father to lay boards on the floors of all the rooms and to dip the water with buckets and pour it outside, where the ground was sloping downwards. We were all exhausted from all this. In the morning our father informed the owner of the house as to what happened, and then went to shul to "bench Goynl" - the blessing said by Jews after escaping a great danger.

After Shabbas the landlord repaired the wall that had collapsed, but we were afraid to stay in that apartment and started to look around for another one.

Not far from us a German company built a large brick factory which took up several blocks. It had a tall brick chimney which could be seen from miles away. Many people came from far away only to look at the wonder. It was equipped with a large steel boiler and several engineers and firemen, who fed the coal into the boiler, were in attendance. But one fine morning the firemen put the coal into the boiler and did not pour enough water into it and the boiler exploded and went through the roof. The steam was shooting out for several viorst (miles?). Many of the workers were injured and some were even killed. People from Minsk and neighboring towns came to look at the devastated factory. Luckily the debris fell on a vacant field and did not damage the nearby houses. Still people got frightened and started to look for new living quarters, away from the brick factory. The

firm repaired the damaged factory and it was told that they received a large amount of money from the insurance company.

Our sister Merke worked in Kamerike; Julius the older brother was not home either, he worked in Minsk; and Mendl, the second brother was a shoemaker and worked for Reb Kive. There was a lot of work in Minsk, a large city with many government departments and the Jewish craftsmen had plenty of work. But the government clerks did not pay cash for the repairs. They used to give coupons and on the 20th of the month they would exchange these for money. The work day was very long, from 8 am till 9 pm and the craftsmen received a meager pay, still my brother Mendl used to do private work after hours and earn enough to buy his clothes and shoes.

Our older brothers and sister used to visit the family for Shabbas, also on holidays. Thus was the life of our family. My brother Mendl used to sell his worn clothes and shoes and buy himself new ones. They already started to go on dates and there was no danger of intermarriage. Our parents were also afraid to live close to the brick factory and found an apartment quite a distance away, closer to the center of the city, not far from a shul, a bath house and mikve (ritual bath). The owner of the apartment was Avrohom Elie the cabinet maker (carpenter). The building contained two apartments and the carpentry shop. He had several young men working for him; also boys of thirteen or thereabouts, who were learning the trade.

Our apartment consisted of an entrance hall and four rooms. The entrance hall had no flooring, which made it cool in the summertime. But when winter set in, along with strong winds and freezing weather, the house was very drafty. It stood a distance away from other houses and the wind and frost would whistle and rattle the windows and doors. No matter how much wood and peat was used in the oven, it was still cold in the rooms.

We used to sleep fully clothed in order to keep warm. The water in the vestibule used to freeze and had to be thawed out before it could be used for cooking and drinking. We subsisted on potatoes and millet. My mother would bake her own bread and rolls, also challah for Shabbas. Herring, as far as we were concerned, was a holiday treat.

Father could not work every day, so he used to spend a lot of time in shul and read the psalms before and after the services. He could not work in cold weather, and our life was a very poor one. We were five boys and one girl, and when we moved to Minsk my brother Yoysel was born.

My mother had an easy time in childbirth; before the midwife would come, the baby was already born. (The following was told to me by my older brothers).

I was born in the town of Klibane. We had a cow, also chickens and hens. My mother was, at the time, pregnant with the fourth boy and was already in the ninth month of pregnancy. Still she carried on with her chores and that morning she went to the shed to milk the cow and feed the chickens. Since I was in a hurry to see the light of day, I decided to appear right there and then. My mother did not get alarmed, since it was not her first baby. She called my brother Mendl and my sister Merke and asked them to bring a cloth. My sister did not understand and brought a small cloth, but mother could not wait any longer and carried me into the house in her apron. Then the midwife came and performed whatever was necessary.

The children were very happy with the new baby. Not so my mother. She was thinking to herself that paupers multiply. The relatives were notified and on the 8th day the "Bris" was performed. The women of Klibane did not forsake my mother and sent gifts of cake and rolls. The boys from the cheder came to say the prayers and they were treated to cake and candy. The celebration lasted a whole week. I was given the name of Dovid and my parents were hoping that the addition to the family will bring good luck.

After wishing us all the best the relatives left. I was not born a Messiah. I was born in a poor home, but my parents tried their best for the children. I was told all this when I was three years old.

When we lived in the second apartment our youngest brother was about a year old. It was bitter cold and I took sick. The doctor diagnosed it as pneumonia and advised my parents to take me to the charity hospital in Minsk. I ran a high fever and it was dangerous to keep me at home. The sickness was contagious and they were worried about the health of the other children. There were four boys at home, beginning with 10-year old Itchke, myself about seven years old and the youngest, Yoysel, about a year old. I was taken to the hospital, but the rest of the children also came down with fever and they, too, were taken to the hospital. The nurses took care of the older children but the youngest was very sick and my mother was asked to come and take care of him, as he had to be watched constantly. She had to give him his medicine, also sponge him with alcohol. We were all in separate rooms. The youngest was seriously ill. He lingered on for eight or ten days and passed away. Our sister Merke used to visit us in the hospital, but did not tell us about our loss. My mother went home to take care of my father. My older brothers and sister came to the funeral and my father said Kadish. May the memory of my youngest brother be blessed. That happened a long time ago, about 1898. I was about eight years old. Still my heart cries after my lost brother. Such was our fate! We were in the city hospital for several weeks and our older sister and brothers came to visit us frequently. My two brothers left the hospital before I did. When my sister came to see me she would bring oranges for my enjoyment. I often inquired about my brothers, but she never told me anything. A few weeks later I was taken home and from the looks on everybody's faces I realized our loss.

We, the three remaining brothers, attended school where we were taught reading and arithmetic. The weather was getting better and the holidays of Purim and Pessach were approaching. For Pessach the whole family got together (for the first two days). We conducted the seder and the youngest brother asked the four questions (he had not attended cheder, but I taught him). When the term in cheder was finished and my father did not earn enough to pay the rebbe for my brother and me, our friends advised our parents to send us to the Minsk Talmud Torah (a tuition-free school). Those who could afford it paid, but children of poor homes were taught free. There we were taught not only Yiddish, but also Russian. The children who came from small neighboring towns were also given lodging there, as well as meals. There were dormitories, with beds and straw mattresses. The children who had room and board there were called Talmudists and they were proud. All the students were taught alike, the ones whose parents could afford to pay as well as the others. Russian was taught by Christian teachers, and one could acquire a good knowledge of both languages. The hot meals were prepared by the supervisors, and the students had their three meals a day there.

There were a number of wealthy Jewish philanthropists in Minsk who supported the free kitchen and the Talmud Torah. Poor people were also served in the free kitchen. For twenty-five kopeks they could have a hot meal during the week, as well as on Shabbas, but they had to pay on Friday for the Shabbas meal. The food was plentiful. On Friday nights, there was meat, fish, soup, challah, and during the week one could also buy tea for an additional five kopeks (a pot of three glasses, with sugar). I like to mention the city of Minsk, of which the majority of the inhabitants were Jewish, but the Christians were accommodated equally in the free kitchen. The students in the Talmud Torah, though, were all Jewish.

As I mentioned before, there were a number of rich Jewish businessmen in Minsk. One of them was Chaim Lurie, who had the monopoly on Petersburg rubbers and boots. He used to sell the merchandise wholesale to the shops of Minsk and Province. He was a good looking man with a white beard and everybody who knew him had a great deal of respect for him. He would contribute equally and generously to Jewish and Christian institutions.

The second wealthy philanthropist was Mr. Kovarsky. He had a number of business ventures and one of them was that of stock broker, like on Wall Street. He had a very good reputation and contributed generously to Jewish and Christian institutions. May his memory be blessed for all his good deeds for humanity!

A third person whose name is worthy of mention was Sheyndele Broide. She had a courtyard (of houses) and an office where people would save money and she would pay them interest. Everybody trusted her. In her courtyard there was a shul, where three services were conducted every day.

Also worthy of mention was Hienele Hatavitser, who also lived on Frantsikanor Street, like Sheyndele Broide, and who also engaged in the same business and who also was very charitable and generous in helping the less fortunate. All these that I mentioned were down to earth people.

There were others like them, who I did not mention, who supported the various institutions like the Talmud Torah, the kitchen and hospital, the Free Loan Society, etc. The government gave a subsidy to the Talmud Torah, because of Russian Language instruction. The name of the Russian teacher was Zipovich. He was an outspoken anti-Semite and used to ridicule the children's pronunciation of the Russian words. Nothing could be done about it, as he was appointed by the government. The second Russian teacher was Volodovsky. I suspect that he was a Tatar. He taught law (basic), was more liberal and did not make fun of the children. The third teacher, who

taught us arithmetic was a Jew, but did not present himself as one. He was a good teacher and did not ridicule the pupils. There was one other Jewish teacher - Mote Exgir. He taught penmanship. He was older than the other teachers, but his handwriting was something to be admired. Everybody who had to write to the king or to government institutions used to come to Mote Exgir. I will never forget his handwriting. Russian was taught three times a week, Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, from 9 am till 2 pm, with an hour's break for lunch, 12 noon till 1 pm.

The Jewish lessons would start at 2 pm. The personnel for Jewish studies consisted of three regular rebbes and one supervisor. He was well versed in Jewish studies as well as Russian, and it was up to him to map out the program of studies. His name was Kalmen Rozovsky. He was a very kind person and was good to the pupils as well as to the teachers. I have an idea that he came from Poland. He had an apartment in the school yard. (He was in his 60's). The three rebbes were: Yankev Shif, for the beginners' grade Alef, who taught the Alef Beth and Ivre (Hebrew reading), then there was Reb Shuel, a handsome man with a long yellow beard, who taught the prayers, the psalms and the beginning of the five books of Moses, which we translated into Yiddish. We had to learn to read and chant the services, including the portion of the week. The seven and eight year old boys grasped the studies very quickly. Sometimes Reb Shuel would assign a certain portion to learn by heart, and he himself would lean on the lectern and doze off. There were a few wild boys in the grade and they thought of a trick to put glue on the lectern and when he would fall asleep leaning on it, his beard would stick. Then all the boys would burst out laughing and he would wake up and his beard would be stuck. Dead silence would prevail in the room. Everybody kept quiet when he would ask who did it, as nobody wanted to be an informer. Then Reb Shuel would call the assistant, Reb Itohe Kasivaker,

who was cross-eyed and had a yellow beard, and he would make an investigation. Still nobody would point to the guilty ones. He then would proceed to single out two boys whom he suspected and told them that if they would not come forward with the truth, they would be punished. After not getting any results he would tell the two to remove their pants and with a leather whip he would whip them five times, till it hurt. They cried, but still kept quiet. This sort of punishment was a way of enforcing a certain discipline in the Talmud Torah. After the punishment the boys did not play any more tricks on Reb Shuel.

It was believed that the children in the Talmud Torah received a better education than the ones in the private chedorim. Not all the boys got a tuition-free education. The ones whose parents could afford it paid their way. Still it was less than in the private chedorim. Children of better homes, who lived in Minsk, used to go home every day, but those who came from small towns around Minsk only went home on Fridays. The rest of the time they slept in the Talmud Torah dormitories and also had their meals there. In our Talmud Torah there were about 200 children, about half of them were from out of town. Some of them were even given clothes and shoes. Every two weeks the children were taken to the steam baths. There they would wash themselves clean and even steamed their clothes. Steam was produced by pouring water on hot stones.

The children were well taken care of in the Talmud Torah. They had periodic eye examinations by Dr. Kaminsky, and Dr. Hurgin took care of their teeth. They had to bring a certificate that they were from the Talmud Torah, and the doctors took care of them free of charge. The dentist, Dr. Hurgin had a very good reputation, that he does not pull teeth unless it is absolutely necessary. There were cases when a dentist would pull a child's tooth with the excuse that it would grow back, but very often it never

happened and the child was left without some teeth. When a child would get sick, he would be sent to Dr. Dreyfus. His remedy would be either castor oil or an enema for constipation. If a child was seriously sick the doctor would send him to the hospital where he would be kept a week or ten days as the case was, till the child was well again.

The Talmud Torah had various sources of income: If a rich man would fall sick, the family would send a contribution to the Talmud Torah and the children would come and read psalms for his return to good health. This would be done after school hours and it was not the rebbe that used to go with the children, but his assistant, Itche the cross-eyed. He used to give the children several kopeks, but often he would take for himself some of the money that was meant for the children, aside from the money that was meant for him. The children also had a little income when they would be sent to a home where there was a new baby born, and they would be saying the evening prayers. Very often a rich man would put the Talmud Torah in his will. That would sometimes amount to hundreds or thousands of ruble. In a case like that the Talmud Torah would send the children to the funeral and they would follow the hearse and chant the appropriate prayers befitting a saintly man. The children who were sent on that kind of mission had to have clear soprano and alto voices, and naturally the older boys would be chosen for that. One fine morning I was asked to come to the office of the cheder, when I was studying with Hirsh Leyzer the rebbe. He introduced me to the superintendent Rozovsky and his assistants Yosef Shif and Itche Kosets. There were about twenty-five boys there. We were all auditioned. They listened to our voices and also our diction. I had the nicest alto voice of all of them, then nineteen more were selected, altos and sopranos. I was to sing the solo part at the funeral of one of the most prominent people of Minsk who died at a rather early age. I sang my part in

a most moving way and all the other boys repeated after me. The leader was Itche, whom you already know. Reb Yosef Shif coached us, as he himself was a reader in shul during the High Holy Days. The funeral was attended by a large crowd, both Jews and Christians, as the deceased had been loved and respected by everybody. It was customary in a case such as this that the casket was carried for about ten blocks. Then the procession would stop in front of the shul, a cantor and choir would chant the "El Mole Rahamin". Then the casket would be put on a hearse, drawn by two horses. The horses were covered with black cloth so only the eyes would show. The coachman, too, was dressed in black; and the twenty boys from the Talmud Torah, with their leader Reb Itche, would follow. At the indication of Reb Itche I would start chanting solo, in a very melodramatic tone, which made the appropriate impression. The other boys would repeat after me till the procession reached the cemetery, which was quite a distance from the city. There, the remains would be cleansed by the Hevre Kadishe, so that the deceased arrive cleansed in the world thereafter.

The family of the deceased used to give Reb Itche 25 rubles; five for him and a ruble for each boy. But he used to give only half a ruble to each boy, but with me he made an exception, he would give the whole ruble. That's how it went--even from death one tried to make a profit!

Since the leaders of the Talmud Torah realized that I had a good voice, they tried to take advantage of it. On the eve of the Sabbath they would put me on the pulpit to do the welcoming prayer. Then, one of the Jews who was visiting from out of town would recite the evening prayer. The children would then go to the free kitchen for their Sabbath meal, where wealthy Jews from other synagogues would wait on them. On Fridays and Saturdays, after the meals, I would chant the Sabbath songs and the rich Jews would give Mendl the supervisor a ruble for me, which the other boys envied. On Saturday mornings the children did not get breakfast.

My paternal grandfather Reb Zalmen Loizer lost his wife, my grandmother, and moved from Fleshchenitz to Minsk. He found an apartment not far from the Talmud Torah. My brother Abbe was also a pupil at the same Talmud Torah. It was very difficult for us to do without breakfast on Saturdays. My sister arranged to leave rolls and little challahs for us at our grandfather's place.

My grandfather had remarried; his second wife's name was Chaye Roche. She had a daughter of ten whose name was Gitl. She was not too bright and whenever she would see us eat the rolls our sister had left for us, she would make fun of us. My brother could not take it, and stuck out his tongue at her. She then ran to her mother to complain, and her mother, in turn, told us that if we wanted to come for breakfast on Saturdays we are not to make fun of her daughter. We excused ourselves saying that it was the other way around, that her daughter was making fun of the way we eat, with such an appetite.

Grandfather was up in age and could not work as a tailor, but his second wife was a dealer and used to sell various articles of food on the fish market. Grandfather was seventy years old and his wife in her sixties. Two years after their marriage she got pregnant and could not go to the market. His children could not help him out, but I believe that his brother Avreml (the one who had six fingers on his left hand) often gave him a few dollars (?). So did his daughter Hase and her husband Shmuel who was a cousin. They lived in Fleshchenitz and whenever they would come to Minsk they would help us out too, by giving us a few dollars (?). I remember Uncle Shmuel very well. He was of medium height, with a long black beard. He had a tailor shop in Fleshchenitz and would come to Minsk to buy merchandise for his shop. Grandfather's other son-in-law Reb Leyb was a cap maker and could not give my grandfather any financial assistance.

As I mentioned before, two years after my grandfather married his second wife she gave birth to twins, who only lived several days, as they were sickly. Because of poor health my father could not continue to work in the brick factory. After talking it over with the older children, it was decided my father should sell the horse and wagon and move closer into town, where he would be able to see a doctor more frequently. They did not treat chronically sick people in the charity hospital. The older brothers thought of the idea my mother should bake rolls and bread and my father should carry it in a basket and sell it, and maybe make a living. They rented an apartment from Fayve the glazer. He had married for the second time. He had a son by his first wife who was already a glazer in his own right. He worked for a boss and also lived and ate there. He was a young man of sixteen and could take care of his needs and not depend on his father and stepmother. Fayve's wife Kushe gave birth to a son who was named Loybetske. She was a healthy woman and her husband earned well at his trade. He replaced broken window panes.

The glazer and his wife agreed to let my parents use the oven Mondays through Thursdays, supplying our own wood, so that mother could do her baking. We moved to this apartment in the month of October. My brother Itchke and I were at the Talmud Torah, where we slept and had our meals. We only came home Shabbas after dinner. Itchke was then twelve years old, I was ten and Abbe seven. My parents were already thinking of letting Itchke learn a trade. There was an institute in Minsk where children of poor families could learn trades, the boys to be carpenters, cabinet makers, etc. and the girls milliners, or corset makers. They were also taught arithmetic and Russian. But one had to have an elementary education in order to be admitted to the institute. The superintendents were Mr. Neyfah, himself an educated person, who took care of the boys, and a lady Maria Yakovlev-Lifshits, for the girls.

Her father was a well-known person in Minsk; he was a lumber merchant. He belonged to the old Romanover Shul and was the best Torah reader there. He was also well versed in Russian and Yiddish. His older daughter Maria became one of the leaders of the Social Revolutionary Party, the Jewish Bund. After the Revolution of 1917 she became a Communist, but did not agree with Lenin and Stalin. She played a big part in the Revolution, till she was liquidated in St. Petersburg. She was a very noble person and the girls in the school respected her. One must cherish her memory. The school was a branch of Ort, which taught Jewish children trades, in order to enable them to earn a livelihood.

There was a committee of philanthropists who cared for boys and girls who had no elementary education and could not be admitted to the institute. They would find artisans, who, for the sum of twenty-five rubles, would take apprentices. A contract would be drawn up and signed, the artisan was obligated to teach the boy or girl the trade, also give him or her room and board. There was a lot of cheating going on, as some of the artisans were irresponsible, sometimes they would take advantage of the apprentice and make him or her help with the housework or the shopping, something which was not in the contract. Sometimes the artisan would demand additional money from the parents of the apprentice. Since it was not always easy to find an artisan to take in apprentices, the parents were willing to add to the committee's pay, as long as the child will learn the trade. The artisan was also supposed to pay the apprentice a certain amount, according to the contract, but that was not always fulfilled. It was real slavery! The parents were glad to find a place for their children, no matter under what conditions.

Not far from where we lived there was a carpentry shop run by Simche the carpenter. He agreed to take on my brother Itchke as an apprentice.

Simche had several workers who already knew the work. My parents agreed to Simche's conditions, as long as Itchke will learn the carpentry trade and will be able to earn enough for himself. One of Simche the carpenter's workers was a man by the name Malat. He was a very nice person and took care of my brother Itchke and taught him the work.

As I mentioned before, we moved to Faive the glazer's apartment in October. Time passed by and the holiday Purim was approaching. A group of Jews got together and organized a Purim Shpieler circle. I was getting to be known as having a good voice and was taken into the group. There were five adults. They were: Alter the sheet metal worker, Sholem the shoemaker, Avrohom the tailor, Philip the carpenter and Boruch Zalmen the blacksmith. I, a boy of ten, was the only singer. The Purim play had no name. Anyone of the group who had a joke to tell or a criticism to make about one of the inhabitants of the neighborhood was free to do so, for the sake of making merry and in order to make people laugh. All the people in the group lived in proximity to one another and were friends. They prayed in the same shul and visited each other for Kidush on Shabbas. Therefore they wanted to make merry, have a drink together and enjoy the yontev Purim. They dressed up in funny costumes. One was Haman the mean one, another, Mordechai the Tsadik (saintly man). Then there was Goliath the Philistine, King Solomon, King David. Even Zeresh, Haman's wife, was not left out. Right after the service and the reading of the Megila the Purim Shpiel would begin. The group of players would go to the homes of the rich Jews and the important officers of the shul, while a group of children would follow them, and without asking whether they would like to hear it, they would start telling the story of Purim. They would finish with the thought that Purim is the jolliest of all holidays, and one must not forget the miracle that happened then. Jews must be proud of the fact that Haman and his ten sons were hanged, Mordechai

was elevated to the rank of minister and Esther became queen, the wife of King Achashverus. All this raised hope in the hearts of the Jews and that was a miracle in itself. I don't know where they got the stories that were told then, or the songs I was taught to sing, which I did in a beautiful voice and with much feeling. I believe the poems were composed by the jesters such as the well-known Elickum Tsenzer and others that were not so well known. There was a jester (badkhan) in Minsk by the name of Mates. He used to make a living by entertaining at weddings and brisn (circumcision ceremonies). He and other entertainers used Jewish folklore for material, also some songs by Goldfaden. Some of those stories and novels were very popular in those days. The young people used to borrow books from the libraries (for 5 kopeks a week), and read them and learned to sing the songs which the entertainers made popular. The song I sang with the Purim Shpieler group was about Haman - he had gallows built on which to hang Mordechai. Instead he was the "kapore" (sacrifice). I sang it solo, then the whole group would repeat it, and the whole "shpiel" made a very nice impression. The play would end with the words "A good Purim to all Jews, we should all be happy and content, and hope for another year".

We were never allowed to leave the homes of the rich without gifts of food and drink, as well as cash, anywhere from five to ten rubles. We used to earn quite a bit of money, but Purim was only once a year! I used to turn my earnings over to my parents who needed it badly, and my mother would give me change for pocket money.

As a boy of ten I already had enough sense how to make money. I had the idea to start dealing with a product that was essential in cheder and in the Russian class. The pupils used to get, free of charge, one pencil and one steel pen point. It was difficult to get another pencil or pen from the office, if these were lost or got broken. I bought several dozen

pencils and pen points wholesale and let it be known among the pupils that I am dealing with these products. I did not charge them too much, but I did not lose any money either. The supervisor and the teachers used to send the pupils to me when they needed a pen or pencil. They would even allow me to sell my merchandise during the lesson. If a pupil from another grade would knock on the door and ask for David Tsirlin, the rebbe or teacher already knew what it was about and would allow me to go out in the hall, as long as it did not take too much time and I would not miss much of what was being taught. I had my merchandise ready in boxes and the transaction was very brief. Not much time was wasted so that I would be allowed to continue my business. The children who had no money with them would get credit and they would pay me a few days later. Business was good and the leadership of the school complimented me on my ingenuity. I turned my earnings over to my parents, who were very much in need of it.

I remember one incident which caused me a lot of aggravation, but it ended well. Our landlord and his wife had a little boy, Leibele was his name. One warm day after Purim the landlord decided to whitewash the house - it was cheaper than to use paint - and he did the work himself. I did not feel well that day and asked the rebbe to allow me to go home. My mother was at that time working in a bakery where people would bake their Matzos for Passover, in order to earn some money for the holiday. My father used to spend the whole day in the little Chasidic synagogue, where he would read the psalms and attend daily services. I came home at about ten o'clock in the morning. The landlord and his wife had to do the marketing for the holiday and did not want to take their little boy with them. They asked me if I would take care of him for a couple of hours. All I had to do was watch him, as they had fed him already, and they promised to compensate me for it. They also asked Leibele if he would stay with me and promised to

bring him nice toys when they returned. Everything was agreed and they left. I had a headache, but Leibele left me alone for about an hour. One could still smell the chalk which the landlord used to whitewash the house. Due to my headache I fell asleep. Suddenly Leibele came up to me crying and I could not make him stop. I asked him what he wanted and since he did not speak well as yet, he said he wanted 'mol'. I thought he meant milk, and since I had none, I was at a loss. I could not pacify him. Then I noticed pieces of chalk used for the whitewashing on the stove. I took a piece of it, mixed it with water and it looked like milk. I gave it to the little boy and he drank it gladly. After that he played a while longer and fell asleep. As I looked at him I imagined that his face was turning red. I thought to myself G. forbid, maybe the drink did him harm and I waited anxiously for his parents to come home. They returned at about 5 pm and asked me if the child was quiet while they were away. I told them that he cried because he was thirsty and I gave him some water and after that he fell asleep. At that moment he woke up and told his mother he had a stomach ache. She gave him some castor oil, then he had a bowel movement and he felt better. So did I. Years later I met him in the street, a tall healthy young man, who was also a glazer, helping his father to replace broken window panes. I was very happy that it ended well. I never told it to anybody and it remained a secret to this day.

My mother did all kinds of work in order to feed the family. My father, as long as I can remember, was sickly. He was a very kind and honest person, and would do anything for people he knew. I want to describe one incident in order to give an idea about my father's kindness. Every Friday night he would go to shul to welcome the Sabbath. Sometimes there were out-of-town guests in shul, too, on the eve of the Sabbath. If they were poor they would sleep in shul, on the front benches. Quite often one of the rich

people would take a guest to his house for the night, but that guest had to be well dressed. But if there were Jews who were not well dressed, the shamos (sexton) knew that Reb Leib, the poor one, will not deny his request and will take a poor Jew to his house for the Sabbath.

We lived in an apartment that could sleep three people and mother used to work very hard all week in order to prepare for the Sabbath. Sometimes we ourselves did not have enough to eat, but my father, may he rest in peace, would not let a poor Jew go hungry.

My father used to like the chasidic synagogue and became an ardent participant in their services. He used to pass by several synagogues and go a long way to reach the chasidic one. He would take my brother and me to services there. When they would chant the blessings of the High Priests (Kohanim), I used to sing along with them the oi, oi, oi, while my head was covered with my father's tallis, because one was not supposed to look at the Kohanim. I will never forget that scene. But this did not last long. We were still living in Fayve the glazer's house. After Passover my mother again started to bake bread and rolls. My father would then buy salami, hot dogs, cheese, butter, and would sell all these at construction sites, in factories and wherever possible. He already had his steady customers, and even gave it to them on credit. My mother would sometimes buy the ingredients she needed for her baking on credit and pay at the end of the week. Very often the people who would buy from my father on credit could not be found the next day, so that my father had losses instead of profit, and my mother could not pay Yoshe Bine the groceryman for her purchases. They could not stay in business under such conditions for very long. We could not continue living in Fayve the glazer's house any longer. His wife Mishe was very mean and always quarreled with my mother. That summer we moved to another room. The house belonged to Itzik the merchant. He used

to deal in fowl, calves and sheep. For the Sabbath a shoichet used to come in the middle of the night and slaughter an animal and Itzik would sell it quietly without paying taxes. He used to bribe the local officials and continued his business undisturbed. My mother continued her baking, but would sell her baked goods herself for cash. She could not bake much, because we lived in one room. We had a bed, a sofa, a table and three chairs, and a closet above the bed to hang the clothes. When my brother Abbe, may he rest in peace, and I came home for the Sabbath, we would sleep on top of the closet tied up with a rope, so we would not fall down. If we did, we fell on top of the bed and did not get hurt. We used to come home Saturday afternoons, spend the night and go back to the Talmud Torah Sunday morning. We did very well in our studies, better than if we had studied with a rebbe.

As I wrote before, I did well in my business of selling pens and pencils to the boys in the Talmud Torah. There were no girls there. My younger brother, who was about eight years old, became envious and also wanted to engage in selling. One day, during recess I walked out into the courtyard. I saw my brother Abbe carrying a bag of apples and pears which he bought in the marketplace, and selling them to the boys. Of course, it was too heavy a product for him to deal with. I persuaded him to give up his business and offered to share my profits with him.

And so time passed. I was about ten and a half years old and Abbe was seven and a half. Itchke, thirteen, worked for Simche the carpenter; Mendl worked for Kive the shoemaker, one was a coachman and Merke, our sister, worked in a bakery. My brother and I were in the Talmud Torah the whole week, and only came to see the family Saturday afternoons. The older brothers had room and board at their employers' houses and also came home Saturdays and holidays. I continued with my singing at funerals and Reb Itche would give

me the right to choose the boys that accompanied me. We used to sing at funerals of rich people. The ones who paid well would have twenty boys follow the casket, the ones who paid less would only have six, but never less, and never more than twenty.

One day the well-known cantor Zeydl Rovner from Vienna, Austria (which we called Galicia) came to Minsk. He came to the Talmud Torah to select two boys, an alto and a soprano, whom he wanted to take to Vienna for training. A number of boys were called to come to the office to audition. The whole staff of the Talmud Torah was present. After listening to all the boys, Leybele Elokh, soprano, and I, tenor, were selected. The head of the Talmud Torah, Mr. Rozovsky was very anxious for both of us to accept the offer. It would have been a credit to the Talmud Torah that two of its boys would be going to Vienna with the well-known cantor Zeydl Rovner, and they tried to persuade us to accept the offer, because they thought that a great future was opening up to us. Cantor Rovner told us that in addition to learning to read music and voice training he would also see to it that we learned Yiddish and maybe other languages. Leybele Elokh and I told him that we could not decide ourselves; we had to ask our parents. They gave us two week-days to go home and propose it to our parents. When I got home my mother thought I was ill, because I came home in the middle of the week. I assured her I was all right and told her the reason for my coming home. My father was in shul, as usual, and only returned in the evening. I told both of them about the splendid future that was opening up to me and that I was willing to accept Cantor Rovner's offer. My mother told me right away that even though she was not educated, she would never agree to allow me to leave home. She also thought it was an excellent opportunity, but she wanted the family to be together, even though it was such a struggle to make ends meet. If it was meant to be, she said, it would happen right here in Minsk. My father agreed with my mother, saying that I was still

so young, and I should forget about it. He told me to rely on God and He will provide a happy future for me. I assured them that I will never do anything against their wishes and stay home. I myself was frightened despite the promises of such a wonderful chance, and was very happy to remain close to home. I did not wait two days, but on the morrow I went back to the Talmud Torah and told them about my parents' decision. Leybele Elokh's parents, on the other hand, did allow him to go to Vienna with the famous Cantor Rovner. There was a difference between his parents and mine. His father was an entertainer (badkin) at weddings and other joyous occasions and it was an honor for them that their son had the distinction to be chosen by such a famous chazn (cantor) to go abroad for a number of years. It turned out that the cantor fulfilled all his promises. Leybele Elokh attended the cheder where he studied Yiddish. He also studied German and voice, as well as score. He had a good soprano voice; at the age of thirteen the voice changes into bass and an alto voice changes into tenor. One has to wait several years till the voice changes into an adult voice. In the meantime one has to become an artisan to earn a living. I envied Leybele Elokh that which I could not achieve with my voice. In the meantime I continued to attend the Talmud Torah and earned a little from my singing at funerals. The boys envied me; when there was a funeral Reb Itche gave me the privilege to select the other boys. I also instructed them in reading the prayers, to welcome the Sabbath and in chanting the Sabbath songs. We used to celebrate the holidays of Chanukah and Purim in the Talmud Torah, but would go home for Pessach and Sukos, when the Talmud Torah would be closed. After that the new school term would start.

My father was not very well a few weeks before Pessach and did not come home. He stayed in shul and ate in the 'kitchen' where he would get a hot meal. He did not feel right that he could not work and support the family. He used to see me and Abbe in the 'kitchen'. I suspect that he

used to go to his father's for assistance. Grandfather and his wife Roche used to deal in the marketplace. They would sell fruit, berries, mushrooms and other such foods, whereby they earned a meager living. Grandfather Avrom Leyzer could no longer work at tailoring, so he helped his wife either in the fish market, which was close to their home, or in the old market, which was a couple of streets away. They did not go out on Fridays, as they were getting ready for the Sabbath. My grandfather would always ask my father why he became so pious. Still my father continued to go to the chasidic shul during the week as well as on the holidays.

It was the year 1900. My mother worked in a matzos bakery where she would roll the matzos and also bake matzos for us. There was a committee that would help needy families to prepare for yom tov, so they, too, would have a happy holiday. They would provide them with wine, beets for "rossl" (a fermented beet juice). My mother would give rossl to other people in order to perform a good deed (mitzvah). My father as well as the older children would come for the sederim and we would celebrate together, but the older children would not stay for the night, as there was no place for them to sleep.

After Pessach, around the holiday of Shvuous, we had to look for another place to live. My mother did not get along with the landlady. My mother, due to her troubled life, was not in very good humor, and it was difficult for two women to be in one house. We got a room in a street that did not have a good reputation. It was Novokrasne Street, and was the red light district. But the people of the "Houses" did not bother the poor inhabitants of that region, as they were afraid of God. They were false believers. They had a false piety in them.

I failed to describe the time when our own matzos would be baked. My mother asked me to stay home that day and help in the bakery. The procedure

was thus: there was one person to put in the flour, one to pour the water, one to roll the matzos, one to perforate it, and one to put it in the oven. I was the flour pourer as well as the one to see that the person doing the perforating did the rows close to one another. The matzos had to stay in the oven a certain time, so that it wouldn't get burned or overdone, and one had to watch the clock constantly. On certain days, rabbis used to come to the matzos bakery to bake the "Shmure Matzos" (matzos that was baked with special strictness). My father also ate "Shmure Matzos" on Pessach, and people would pay more for baking it than for regular matzos.

And so the years passed by and one was getting older. We lived across the street from a carpentry shop; the owner of which was nicknamed Leybe Kichele. He had several boys who already knew the work, as well as several apprentices. There was a shul in that street, where there were three services daily. Among the people who came to pray, especially on the Sabbath, were also the owners of the "Houses", as well as some of the women. Prostitution was legal in Minsk, but only in certain localities, and the women had to have periodic check-ups by city physicians, so they would not spread venereal diseases. Only poor people lived in that neighborhood, as rents were much lower. My mother started another business. It was summer time; she would get up early in the morning, walk to the woods on the shores of the river Svisle, pick blackberries and raspberries, then sell them to the inhabitants of the summer homes, the rich women who would spend their summer there. Later she would also buy eggs from the neighboring farmers and sell those, too. Toward evening she would come home with a little more profit than if she had sold her merchandise in the city. She also avoided carrying all those heavy baskets to the city. She used to come home tired, but happy having earned some money. One had to have a permit from the city to pick berries; my mother did not

have it, as it had to cost a couple of rubles. If the guard of the forest would ask her for a permit, she would give him forty or fifty kopeks and he would not bother her any more. Some days I used to go with her to help, but she did not always go in the same direction. Often she would go in the forest near the railroad station, but there were no customers there. In that case she had to walk several viorst (miles) till she got home and the next day she would sell the merchandise in the city. My mother worked very hard to make enough to pay the rent.

Very often, on the way home from the forest, we would meet Jewish farmers bringing their milk products to sell in the city and they would give my mother and me a ride, for which we would be very grateful. They would let us off a couple of streets from where we lived. She earned a little more from her latest venture than she did when she was baking bread and rolls at home. Her work days were from Monday through Thursday. Friday she would prepare the Sabbath. That's how things were in the summertime. The winter months were worrison and difficult. The children were getting older and her only hope was that she will somehow push through the difficult times. It was already the Jewish month of Ov and during the nine days one could get along on dairy products, which were much cheaper than meat. For the holidays of Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur my mother would buy lung, liver, calf's legs, tongue, marrow bones, meat from the head of the calf -- and we had a feast! On the morrow after the nine days in the Jewish month of Ov Arie, the reader of the synagogue came to the Talmud Torah. His son was also a pupil in the Talmud Torah. The son told his father that there was a boy who could assist with the Rosh Hashonah service, for pay, of course. The son was older than I was, but his voice was not very good. Arie used to "davn" in Khienele Khaytovich's shul. During the year he did not need any help, but for the holidays Khienele told him to get several boys to help with the service, to make it more in the holiday spirit, more "Yontevdik".

She gave him additional money for his assistants. The Jews who came to pray in her shul did not pay anything, she paid for everything as a good deed (Mitsvah). That year she wanted the reader to be accompanied by singers. Arie had heard me sing at a Friday night service and my alto voice pleased him very much. His son did not have a good voice, but he could read the prayers better than I did, especially the holiday prayers, Rosh Hashonah, Yom Kippur, including the Kol Nidre and the prayers of the whole day of Yom Kippur. When Arie made me the offer I told him I would have to ask my parents. The officers of the Talmud Torah were very anxious for me to accept it, as Khienesle Khatayvitser was very wealthy and used to contribute generously to the Talmud Torah. They could not refuse her request. I asked Arie how much I would be getting. He told me that he would guarantee twenty-five rubles. For Rosh Hashonah he would give me ten rubles and the rest, they would put a copper plate for the reader and his assistants. This plate would be in addition to the other plates that will be put there for various charities. If I will please the congregation he guarantees that I will have fifteen rubles from the plate money, which will make twenty-five rubles all together. He was also sure that Khienesle and her family, who will attend the services in her shul, will give me a nice present, since they will know that I am a pupil in the Talmud Torah. He wanted me to go home and ask my parents and give him an answer that same evening. I could not believe my ears that I would earn so much money. After I got home and told my parents about Arie's offer, my mother agreed instantly. The only thing she was worried about was my meals and having to come home by myself such a long distance. My father, on the other hand, was not very pleased. He was anxious that I go with him to the chasidic shul and help the chasidim with their chanting. But my mother had more to say in matters like these and had the last word. I promised to talk to Arie about my meals and

lodging. When I told Arie later that I would accept his offer under my conditions, he promised to find a place for me where I would get room and board on the holidays. He was sure that somebody from the congregation would take me in. Otherwise I would be able to stay in his house. He also told me to assure my parents that everything would be taken care of. He right away showed me the prayers I would have to do with him and his son, as well as the ones which I would have to chant solo. I was pleasantly surprised over the whole event. Reb Arie was told by the officers of the Talmud Torah about the offer I had a year ago from the famous cantor Zeydl Rovner and they assured him that I will succeed beautifully in his shul. Reb Arie was a good reader of the Torah. Had he had a good voice, he would have made a good chazn. He told me that he was sure I will not put him to shame. I only have to pronounce the words distinctly. He said he would start with the prayer "B'rosh Hashono yikoseyvu, u'vyom tsem Kippur yekhoseymn (On Rosh Hashonah we will be inscribed in the book of life and on Yom Kippur it will be signed)". He will indicate to me when to take a high note. But I told him that an alto cannot take high notes, but will sing with enough feeling to please the congregation. After several rehearsals Arie was pleased with my singing and diction; when his son helped along Arie thought he was interfering with my singing, but I told him it would be all right. As a matter of fact, it would make it easier for me and he could take lower notes if he could not carry the high ones. I assured him that if we will all cooperate we will make a good impression. Since it was a few weeks before Rosh Hashonah he asked me to come to his house every day after school, at about 4 pm to rehearse the service and if it will last till late in the evening I will have the evening meal with them and stay overnight. I agreed to it and he was very happy that I was so understanding. Rosh Hashonah came and we started with the Maariv service. The cantor began with "Borkhu es Adonoi Hamvorokh" (Blessed be the Lord our

God) and the congregation responded. My first solo was "Ahavas Olom Eys Yisroel Amkho Ohovto Toro Umitsvos Khukim Umishpotim Ousonu Limadeto" etc. The chazn continued with "Ki Heym Chayeynu V'Orech Yomeynu Uvohem Nehege Yomom Voloylo..." and thus the first Maariv. It was a big success. There were many words of praise from the Gabai, and especially from Khyenole Khateyvitser. The chazn was also very pleased and invited me to his house for the evening meal and for the night. The next day, again, I did very well, to the satisfaction of everybody present. Many recognized me and knew that I was a pupil in the Talmud Torah and also heard me at funerals and in the "Kitchen" where I sang Zmires (Sabbath Songs). All this success did not spoil me. It gave me confidence and self respect.

Right after Rosh Hashonah Reb Arie gave me ten rubles, as agreed. I ran quickly home and gave it to my mother. I was happy to see my father at home. They were both very happy and pleased and my mother gave me one ruble to spend on goodies. Reb Arie asked me shortly afterwards to come and rehearse the Yom Kippur prayers. Many of them were the same as the Rosh Hashonah prayers, but some were new and quite difficult. On the eve of Yom Kippur we had to be in shul before "Minche". Many of the religious Jews went to the Mikve (ritual bath) to cast off the sins of the year before. Then they would have the shammos (sexton) whip them ten times, whereafter they would give charity in the various plates that were placed by various institutions. One of the plates was for the chazn and his assistants, namely his son and me. Every Jew made a contribution to the plates and did not overlook our plate. They were all pious Jews and hoped that we will plead for them, for a year of health, sustenance and a year of peace for all mankind. Minche time approached and all the plates were removed, because the holiday was about to begin. There were about twenty-five rubles in our plate, but I had fifteen more rubles coming to me according to the agreement. The chazn took the money with him and we went to his house.

His wife had prepared a delicious meal of soup and kreplach, chicken, kompot and tea. After we finished eating, she wished us to have an easy fast and a Good Year and we all responded with "omeyn".

When we arrived in shul some people were already there, saying the silent prayer before Kol Nidre. After we finished the Kol Nidre, which is done three times, the congregation stood in tense silence. The chazn said the blessing Shehcheyonu, V'kiymonu V'higiomu Lazman Haze (Who kept us alive, sustained us and let us arrive to this day) and then continued with the Maariv service. Yom Kippur did not fall on a Saturday, so that I did not have too many solo parts. Still I did the "Al Chet (for the sin), Yaale... Ovinu Malkeynu, until Kadish - the prayer for the mourners and then the whole congregation joined the chazn and his assistants in singing Adom Olam. The following day one of the congregation did the Shakris (morning service) and the reader-cantor, Reb Arie and his assistant, his son and I, did not go on till the Memorial service. We did all our parts as we rehearsed, and after an hour's break we continued with the afternoon service. Toward the end we rushed a little, as we were all very hungry. The cantor told me I could go home to break the fast, and although it was quite a distance, I was very happy to see my whole family. When I arrived, they had already eaten, but my mother had enough left over for me. We only had one room and there was no place for everybody to sleep, so my older brothers went back to their employers' places. Only my sister and I stayed.

I want to mention here that my brother Itchke could not study because he had trouble with his eyes and was sent by the committee to Dr. Kaminsky, who treated him free of charge. It was the same committee that arranged for him to learn the carpentry trade in Simche the carpenter's shop. He went to work at the age of 13.

Abbe and I stayed home till after Sukkas, as the Talmud Torah was closed all that time. The following day I went to Reb Arie and he gave me fifteen dollars (rubles), according to the agreement. He also surprised me by giving me five rubles from Chyenele Chateyvitser as a gift from her for my pleasant singing. All together I had thirty rubles. I asked the chazn how I could thank her, and he told me he would do it for me as it was hard to get to her. I thanked him and full of joy I came home and gave my mother twenty rubles, which came in very handy. And so, time marched on!

My father's health got worse. He coughed a great deal. Still he went to the chassidic synagogue, even though it was far from us. He went to the free hospital frequently for periodic examinations and was given free medicine. His sickness was incurable and it got worse in the wintertime. Since it was still Sukkos, my brother Abbe and I had vacation from the Talmud Torah. My grandfather's brother, Avrom Sistiren had an orchard on Romanover Street, so my brother Abbe and I used to walk over there and he used to give us apples, pears, plums, fruits that were ripe at that time, then I also used to buy a watermelon, which was much cheaper after Rosh Hashonah, and take it all home. It was a big treat for the whole family.

After Sukkos we returned to the Talmud Torah. We were promoted to a higher grade and the new season started. The boys from the provincial towns would also return after the holiday vacation and we all felt that we were getting older. I was eleven years old then. And the old schedule in the Talmud Torah began all over again. There were more boys that year, and more teachers were engaged. The boys were told that if they would make good strides in their studies, they would be given new clothes for the winter. They meant the poor children who slept and ate at the Talmud Torah.

My sister Merke was close to twenty years old. She suggested that since my father was so sick we should have a picture taken of the whole family. She did not realize that anybody would object to it. But she was

wrong. Our father, as I already mentioned several times, was very pious and told her it was a sin to have a picture taken of one's own image, as man was created in the image of God, and refused to go along with the idea. We all felt very bad about it, but we could not force him.

It was then the year 1901. We all used to get together at our parents' on Saturday afternoons and went back, by brother Abbe and I to the Talmud Torah and my older brothers and sister to their places of work. That year my older brothers decided to gather a group of older children over 16 and put together a play for Purim. They agreed on a play about Joseph in Egypt. They obtained the text, the melodies some of them I knew, and they started to rehearse. They knew that I had a good voice and asked me to take the part of young Joseph. I accepted it gladly, as I preferred my brothers' friends than older people. We studied our parts and learned the names of the tribes. We did not get permission from the police to put on the play. Very often theater groups used to come and put on plays in large homes or stables, without permits, and if police would come they would bribe them with a couple of rubles and they kept quiet. We also obtained a large place, learned our parts, and the whole story, beginning with Jacob sending his sons to Egypt to obtain grain, as there was famine in the land of Canaan; the way the brothers sell Joseph and he reaches the palace of the king of Egypt and becomes his adviser; the seven years of plenty and the seven lean years -- all this we learned and we were ready with the opening of the play. Suddenly a policeman saw there were a lot of people coming to the house. He came in and asked if we had a permit. He refused to take a bribe and gave us half an hour to clear out. One of our group knew the owner of a large factory, so we hired two wagons, loaded our equipment and started out before the policeman came back with more of his buddies. When we reached the stable, we unloaded our equipment, put up a stage and people started to come. Some

brought stools with them, but most of them stood. Admission was from twenty-five kopeks to one ruble. We did not have a set price. We were a group of eighteen people and were very happy to be able to present the play to the satisfaction and enjoyment of our listeners. I played young Joseph and a young man of twenty played Joseph as an adult. He had a pleasant tenor voice and his diction was very clear. Some of the people in the audience were so moved that they shed tears during the whole performance. After it was all over they put more money in the cash box to demonstrate their satisfaction with the performance. Our take was eighty-five rubles, but none of the participants received any pay as yet. Still they asked me if I wanted some money and I told them I had to give my parents some money for yontev. They then gave me ten rubles, which pleased me very much. I was the youngest of the group, about eleven years old. They had in mind to hold the group together and present other plays in the future. I was disappointed that my sister, my brother Abbe and my parents could not come to the play. It was too far for them. Nevertheless, it became known in Minsk that there is a group of young men who sing well and perform well.

As I mentioned before, my father was very sick and his condition was getting worse from day to day. By then it was already a couple of weeks before Pessach. My mother was working in a matzos bakery and hardly earned enough for the holiday. On that Friday, she was already home from work, the feldsher (half doctor) was called, but he advised us to call the doctor from the hospital and when he came my father was spitting blood, his heart was beating fast and the doctor said it was the end. He did not give my father any medicine. All the children were present, and that Friday, at 6:00 in the evening my father's condition became worse and he stopped breathing. My mother and all the children started to cry and my father woke up and uttered a few words. He held on till about 9:00 pm. Some

women said that our crying woke him up. He dies at the age of forty-two. He lived a tortuous life, but since he died on Shabbas Hagodl (the Sabbath before Passover), the men said that he dies as a Tsadik (a righteous man). The funeral was held on Sunday, fourteen days in the month of Nisan, at noon, because it was the eve of Pessach. The whole of my father's family came to the funeral, but because of yontev we did not have to sit shive the first two days, only the days of chol hamoed (intermediary week days). He was buried on the new cemetery.

This is the story of my father's life and death. He was a very kind person, always willing to do good deeds for people, but lived a tortuous life, a troublesome life, and died at a young age. That was in the year 1901.

My mother became a young widow with a family of one daughter and five sons. Three sons already worked and the two smaller ones were still at the Talmud Torah. One had to worry about their upbringing, and to see to it that they grow up to be decent human beings. She asked us to observe our father's memory and recite the Kadish (prayer for the dead) and go to shul three times a day. The older boys could not live up to that, since they were working. They only went to shul on Shabbas but we, the two smaller ones, used to go to the shul courtyard where there were several shuls, and we recited the Kadish many times a day. We were sure that our father's soul would go straight to the Garden of Eden. We assured our mother that she had nothing to worry about and should try to prolong her own life to the extent of our father's life, which he was not able to carry on, and live to a ripe old age.

Our mother and all the children began to plan about giving up the room in which our mother and late father lived and find an apartment big enough for the whole family, so we would all be together and try to make mother's

lot a little easier so she would not have to work so hard. It did not take long and we found an apartment for ourselves on the other side of the red light district, avoiding the houses of ill repute. It was near a Tatar school and we shared the entrance hall with the landlady who was Tatar. Her family consisted of her husband and two grown sons. The older son and his mother were managing the school that was attended by Tatar children ages 7-12, who were also taught Russian. The second son and his father went to work. Our apartment was on the side of an orchard where various fruits were growing. We had a room and an alcove behind the oven where our mother slept --- also my sister whenever she came home. Abbe and I slept on one sofa, Julius and Mendl on another sofa. Itchke, who still worked for Simche the carpenter, stayed at his employer's, three streets from our apartment. The entrance hall was shared by the landlady and by us. They were nice people; they used to invite us for tea every evening. Friday was a Tatar holiday and the school was closed then. Early in the morning they would say their prayers; their language sounded similar to Turkish. We got along very well with our landlords and respected them a lot. On the side of the house they had an ice cellar. In the wintertime they used to fill it up with ice and in the summertime they used to keep their food there in order to preserve its freshness. They gave us permission to use the ice cellar, and my mother took advantage of it. She used to prepare a barrel of pickles and a barrel of sour cabbage and we had enough to eat summer and winter. Nine days in the Jewish month of Ov I became Bar Mitsvah, because an orphan celebrates it at the age of twelve.

With the approach of Rosh Hashonah, the cantor of the Katsovisher (butcher) synagogue asked me to join the choir. It consisted of three men and four boys aged 10-12. The cantor's name was Ekman. He engaged me for Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur, and if I would do well, he would extend it to Sukkos. It was a wealthy congregation and for the two High Holidays they

were going to pay me thirty rubles. Also I would be staying with one of the congregants and get my meals there. The butcher Grunam wanted to have one of the choir boys as his guest for yontev. He asked me to dress well, and his boys, one my age and the other 14 years old, would treat me like a brother. He also told me that on Yom Kippur eve there would be a plate for the choir, in shul. Usually there are about fifty or sixty rubles in the plate, and every member of the choir gets an equal share. I accepted the job and we were ready to start rehearsing the chanting of the prayers, my solos and the part of the other boy who was with the choir the second year. The cantor-reader Arie also wanted me to sing with him and his son again but they were a little too late as I had already accepted the job in the Katsovitcher shul. I was really glad it turned out this way, as I preferred singing with Cantor Ekman who had a regular choir. We did the service on the eve of Rosh Hashonah and everything went very well. The butcher took me along to his house, where I got acquainted with his sons and his wife. They were very happy to have a guest for yontev. After the meal we said the blessings in which I introduced a holiday melody and they were very pleased with my presence. Now about the meal: I had never had a meal like that in my whole life. The wine for Kidush was one of the best. The fish, meat dishes and kompot were out of this world. I was well dressed for the holiday, a new suit, beautiful cap, and my behavior and way of speaking pleased them very much, and I made a good impression on all of them. They asked me about my family. With tears in my eyes I told them about my father's early death, about my brothers, mother and sister. They suggested that I spend the night in their house, but I told them I did not want my mother to worry, and there was no way I could let her know that I was not coming home to sleep. I bid them all good night and ran home. I relayed to my family all that happened, about the nice people I met, the wonderful

meal I had, and then I went to sleep early so I could get to shul in good time the following day. When I got up the next morning, the first day of Rosh Hashonah, my mother had breakfast ready for me and I started out on my way to the Katsovicher shul.

My mother was going to the shul nearest to our house. She told the other children not to forget to say Kadish in our father's memory and to be sure to attend the Yizkor (Memorial) service the following day. She was sure that I would do all that without being reminded.

I arrived in shul the following morning at about 9 o'clock. Many men were already there, also women, in their section of the shul. The cantor and his assistants were ready to start the service and he was glad to see me there on time. He later asked me how I was treated at the butcher's the night before and I told him I wished the same for all the Jews. He invited me to spend Yom Kippur in his house.

We did the customary Yom Kippur morning service. The shammos (sexton) was the reader; the cantor, assisted by the choir, did everything as we rehearsed; and the Jews were very pleased. At 2:00 in the afternoon we had a break and after the rest of the service was completed and the Shofar was sounded we left the synagogue and wished everybody we met a Happy and Prosperous New Year. When we came to Reb Grunam's house the tables were set by the maids and there was an abundance of food and drink. The meal and the blessings afterwards lasted several hours. Their younger son, after getting permission from his parents, went home with me. After having prepared him that my home is not like his, we arrived there and I introduced him to my mother, sister and brothers. Then I took him to the orchard with its trees laden with ripe fruits and also took him to the Tatar school, after getting permission from the teacher. My mother offered him some refreshments, but he was too shy to accept it. We left afterwards, as his parents asked him not to stay away too long. Upon arriving there he told

his family all he saw and heard (in the Tatar school he observed the pupils learning the Tatar language). His father had already left for shul, as he had to decide who of the congregants was to receive the honor of going up to the Torah (Aliyah), who should open the arc, etc. His mother gave us something to eat, as we were going to stay in shul till after Maariv (the evening prayer). She also repeated the invitation to me to stay for meals till after the holiday. I thanked her and told her I was very happy to do so. I wished her a Good Year and that things should not be any worse the year to come. My new friend and I left for shul to attend the evening service. The cantor and choir participated in the service and it lasted till about 8 o'clock.

We went to the house of Reb Grunam for dinner, which lasted till 10:00 o'clock in the evening. His son told him about the nice visit he had in my place. Like the evening before, I went home to sleep. I was overjoyed with all that happened that day and I told my family what nice people I associate with.

The second day of Rosh Hashonah the service was shorter than the first day, as we went to Tashlich, when we went to the river to cast away the sins of the year gone by and to pray for a good year to come. Then everybody rushed to attend the evening service and that ended the holiday of Rosh Hashonah. Reb Grunam told me that I will be welcome to come to their house for dinner on the eve of Yom Kippur and also to break the fast. The cantor complimented the choir for their singing and asked us to come the evening to rehearse the Yom Kippur service. We agreed and that's what we did. We started the rehearsal with Kol Nidre and continued with the whole service for Yom Kippur eve. The cantor asked me if I needed money, and as always, I told him that I was always in need of money. He gave me ten rubles and told me to expect the rest after the holiday. In this shul, too, they had plates for various charities and one plate for the choir. The

cantor had a separate plate for himself and he told us that he was sure there will be between fifty and sixty rubles, like every other year, for the choir. He was pleasantly surprised that in the choir plate there were seventy-two rubles. That amounted to ten rubles and thirty kopeks for each one of us. We asked the cantor to keep the money for us till after Yom Kippur. We had to hurry with the meal before the fast. As I already wrote, I was invited to Reb Grunam's house again, so his two sons and I arrived there in time. The table was already set, and again we had a delicious meal of soup, kreplach, wine, etc. I told Mrs. Grunam that I would not eat much as it is easier to fast, also it is much better to sing, when the stomach is not too full. We finished the meal with tea and raspberry jelly, and the younger son, my newly acquired friend, and I hurried to the synagoguo. We wished each other an easy fast and a Good Year to come. There were more people in the synagoguo on the eve of Yom Kippur than of Rosh Hashonah because people who don't attend services frequently still come to the Kol Nidre service. The choir did everything very well. The congregation joined in frequently, and after the service I rushed home.

I woke up early Yom Kippur morning. My mother was already gone. Some people stayed in shul overnight. My brothers, who were not very observant, told me not to fast a whole day, so before going to shul I drank a glass of milk and ate a piece of challah. During the break in the service I came home very hungry. Nobody was home, so I took a piece of chicken (the chicken was the one that was used for the kapore (sacrifice) on Yom Kippur eve) that my mother had prepared to break the fast with, and a piece of bread, and my hunger was satisfied. I was roady to leave for shul again, but my mother came in then and asked me if I wanted something to eat. She gave me a glass of milk and a piece of challah. I was at a loss; I did not want to tell her that I ate chicken and I am 'flayshik'. So as not to

upset her I drank the milk and ate the challah. I thought to myself that God will forgive me for the first sin which I have committed.

The day after Yom Kippur I came to Cantor Ekman and he gave me the twenty rubles that were coming to me and the ten rubles and thirty kopeks, my share of the plate money. I was very happy. It was the most money I ever had -- all together it came to forty rubles and thirty kopeks. The cantor told me that they could not afford the choir for Sukkos, for which I was glad. That meant I will have the whole week free. My brothers and sister came home for the first days of Sukkos. My sister suggested that we all have a picture taken; she only regretted that our father will not be on the picture. She arranged with the photographer Applebaum to come and take our picture. That was in 1901, and that is the picture you will see on the other side of the book which I am writing about the family.

I was preparing for my Bar Mitzvah; as an orphan one goes through the ceremony at the age of 12. My mother started to think about teaching me a trade, and which trade would be best. I thought that tailoring would be best, as I will be able to make my own clothes and will only have to buy the material. That year, after the ninth day of the month of Ov, my mother and I went to the committee that assists poor children to learn a trade. I wanted to attend the trade school, but the person of the committee told me that there was no more room there and I should find a tailor willing to take an apprentice. I started to look, but could not find such a tailor in the center of the city. There were only big tailor shops there and they did not take apprentices. It was already winter and I decided to look for a tailor on the outskirts of the city. I found one who was called the Viennese Tailor because he used to sew uniforms for the military and government officials. His name was Sholem Sendrovitch. He had two apprentices who had been with him a year and a year and a half, and already knew how to work on pants and vests. He told me to come after the holidays, as

he did not want to start with a new apprentice between the holidays. I agreed to it; in the meantime, I was still attending the Talmud Torah, but they waited for me to finish or stop attending, as I was already Bar Mitzvah. They could have sent me to a Yeshiva, if I wanted to go, but here one had to pay. There they find homes where the boys get their meals and the boys are taught to be "melamudim" (teachers). And if one knows Russian and Yiddish well, the boys can be tutors to well-to-do children who attend private schools, and need help in preparing their homework. For that the boys would get paid, thus enabling them to pay the tuition in the Yeshiva. I realized that I could not achieve this, taking in consideration my circumstances. Boys from small towns around Minsk could afford to do that; their parents wanted them to be 'Melamudim' (teachers), and while doing that they themselves were studying in order to acquire a higher education. They were called "externists". Many who could not acquire a higher education in Minsk used to go abroad. In such cases the parents supported them. For me that was an impossibility.

I became known in Minsk among the singers who used to entertain at weddings and other joyous occasions and used to earn a few rubles that way, but one could not hope to make a living by doing that. That year there was a Zionist congress -- I think it was the Tenth Zionist Congress -- and I was in the choir at that congress. I still remember some of the speakers: Dr. Sirkin, General Zionist; Rubentchik, Labor Zionist; Dr. Sokolov, who came from abroad. The congress lasted a whole week. It was under the supervision of the Russian government, who gave the permission with the understanding that they will not advocate against the Russian independence. The conference made a tremendous impression and people from surrounding towns came to attend this extraordinary event.

As you see, even though I was only a boy of 12, I was interested in movements which I later developed among the poor --the General Bund.

After Sukkos I came to the tailor on the Tretsker Hill. I came with my mother and he told her that the committee is not paying him enough for the time and effort he is about to put in in teaching me. He was wondering if she could add something to the money the committee would give him, and also feed me the first year. My mother started to cry, so it was agreed that he will take me on for the money the committee will pay him, give me room and board during the week. On the eve of the Sabbath I will go home, and early Sunday morning I will come back to the shop. And that's the way it will be for three years. The workday will start at 8 am and end at 8 pm, except on Sunday I can come at 9, since I have a long way to walk from home. He wanted us to inform the committee that he agreed to all their conditions, and they would send a representative to confirm it.

The tailor had a workroom in which there was a large table. I was to bring a straw mattress, a feather pillow, one or two sheets and a blanket. The large table was to serve as my bed. There was a room behind the tailor shop that was used by the tailor and his wife, and a kitchen where the food was prepared for everybody. Behind the oven there was a small room that was occupied by the tailor's sister. She was a sick woman. She had epilepsy, but we had to make believe that we knew nothing about it.

