

## From the Editors of *Zayn*

In 1953-55, Rafał Federman wrote a book, which was published in 1957 under the title *From the Warta River to the East River*. In his preface to the book the author says, among other things, that his sole intention was to record a chronicle of the times and environs in which he had lived for more than sixty years. The horrific destruction of Poland, the destruction of his home and the annihilation of his nearest and dearest sought an expression in him.

He thought, "Let at least some of my experiences and those of my friends be recorded somewhere". It was a life filled with joy, as well as hardships and also stumbles. With this book, he had no intention of writing some artistic novel. This he leaves for the true artist, who will, hopefully, sometime be able to make use of it.

Rafał Federman's book also features a motto by H.D. Nomberg, which says:

*Man's life is [just] a shadow –  
Oh yes, this is so.  
He chases joy but finds its neighbour;  
He chases and falls - oh, woe!*

We shall also quote several lines from a larger piece<sup>1</sup> on the abovementioned book by the famous author Icchok Warszawski<sup>2</sup>. This will give those readers, who have not read the book, an idea of its contents:

*Rafał Federman is, by his whole bearing, a man of the people, with a rare sincerity and straightforwardness.*

*The story of his life is rather sad. His father toiled away all the years to make a living. He died young. Federman's hero, Josef, attended gimnazjum for a while. Early on, he started reading books, became an activist and went about with girls.*

*In the memoirs of the majority of Socialists, they avoid recounting personal affairs. The writer of these lines read a great many books of this sort as a boy. All they ever wrote about were the conspiratorial activities, arrests, experiences in prison, fights with the police, provocateurs and so on. The author seldom mentioned a romance, or even the fact that he had a wife. These matters were deemed unimportant.*

*For Federman, however, this was already of great importance - and this lends more familiarity to his book. Federman does not attempt to give the impression that his communal work was more important to him than his personal life. He also admits the truth - that his romances and relationships with women played a very crucial role for him, if not the most important one.*

*He was wed, but relations between him and his wife were cold, even if they were both members of the same party. Following the death of their child, the atmosphere became even worse. While his wife was living in Paris, our hero was having a hot romance with a girl, and when he,*

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: The original article appears in the *Forverts* of 25<sup>th</sup> August 1957, p. 15.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Pen name of Isaac Bashevis Singer.]

*Josef, was already in New York, saved from the Nazis, his wife was having an affair with a French railway employee. In the end, after being for a time with Josef in New York, his wife returned to France, where she died.*

*Josef was so lonely here [in America], that he tried to find a wife through ads in newspapers. But a young woman stole into his life - Gołda, the daughter of his old friend. This same Gołda and her brother Mordche had survived Hitler's massacres, and Gołda was now Josef's wife.*

*These are just a few facts. The book is full of facts, which may be of importance both for the historian and the man of letters. In this book, Josef emerges as a whole man and a man who is honest, goodhearted, romantic, with a strong faith in good, without any hatred or bitterness towards others, always ready to help people and to take part in their suffering and joy. He writes in this book that East Broadway is his second home.*

*For Federman, his loyalty to Jews and Judaism are self-evident, as it was for many men of the people in the home of old - had he not suffered from childhood as a Jew? Everything he did and does is connected to Jews and Yiddish. The protagonist very frequently asks the old question, "Where does the evil in people come from? Why? Why cannot man, the paragon of creation, be truly and actually good?"*

*Federman ends his book with the apparent death of his hero, Josef, and he presents there the will which this Josef was to have written. He says there:*

*"Yes, my dears! I leave this earth with great grievances against the Master of all Worlds – and even more grievances against mankind! This discontent is not mine alone. I feel I may speak on behalf of thousands of others like me, who wish to see this world changed, with more honesty and justice, and with less hatred and envy between one another, as opposed to the way He, the Master of the World, created this little world of His, where people kill each other, and where we, the Jews, are to suffer more than all other nations, suffer without an end!"*

*Among other things, the protagonist says in his will:*

*"Look after my books, my spiritual possessions. Peer into them, learn and find comfort in the wonderful words of our writers and thinkers."*

*Federman is not religious, but there is a religious feeling to his memoirs.*

The hero Josef, however, has not died. He is alive, continues being active in communal life, and he continues writing about his experiences and wrangles in the same style and form.

Here, a completing chapter is presented, a continuation, which has hitherto not been printed.