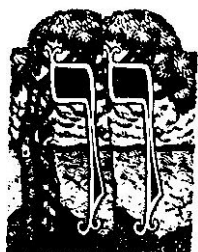


### 3



[In 1902,] when Josef was about ten years old, his childish soul was shocked to its core. A bloody pogrom broke out, in the town, against the Jews. Dozens of Jews were severely injured and whole streets, with Jewish property and goods, were robbed. To this day, that fearsome image still hovers before his eyes - one evening, all the Jewish shops were smashed. The neighbours gathered in their house. The landlady of the building, who was friends with Josef's parents, calmed everybody down.

Suddenly, a large stone hit the window of the house and shattered the glass into little pieces. Everyone began to huddle against the walls. The landlady lit candles in the windows and put out crucifixes. The landlady's husband, Bentkowski, every time, ran out onto the street and brought back the latest news. But Josef had a suspicion, that the landlord, himself, was aiding the pogrom and was coming home every couple of hours to reassure them, as it were.

Late in the evening, on the other corner, in front of Josef's house, a band of *shkutzim*<sup>1</sup> broke into the coffee roasters' shop in Reb Mojsze Hasenfeld's building. They looted the shop and set it on fire. A red glow could be seen in Josef's house through the window, and everyone's wails intensified.

In the middle of the night, gunfire was heard. The landlord Bentkowski came up running breathlessly, and told them to be at ease. The "*Moskale*"<sup>2</sup> were shooting, the attacks had ceased, there were wounded in the street.

Several days later, once again, there was talk of a pogrom in town. Josef's fear was so great, that he pleaded with his parents to be sent away somewhere. He took his youngest sister Cirla and travelled to Piotrków [Trybunalski], to his aunt Hinda [Staszewska], his mother's sister. In Piotrków, his little sister ran a high temperature and contracted scarlet fever. Josef felt guilty for having taken Cirla away from home. His father and mother rushed to Piotrków and wished to send Josef home, so that he should not become infected, Heaven forbid. But Josef refused to leave his sick little sister's bedside under any circumstance. He only journeyed home once his little sister had recovered and could already get out of bed.

\* \* \*

As a child, the giant fire in Landau's celluloid factory [in the summer of 1905] made a huge impression on Josef. Six Jewish girls were burned to death there<sup>3</sup> - some of whom were from ul. Garncarska, where Josef lived. It was actually on that street that the large funeral procession for the victims took place, in which thousands of people took part. Speakers stood

---

<sup>1</sup> [TN: Heb., lit. "loathsome creatures"; the term "*sheiget*" (pl. "*shkutzim*"), which is used biblically in ref. to insects prohibited by the dietary laws, is a derogatory appellation for a particularly depraved individual, usually (though not exclusively) a Gentile.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Muscovites, viz. the Russian soldiers.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: According to the article "The General Jewish Labour Bund" in the "Czenstochover Yidn" (p.124), five female workers and two male workers were burned to death in this fire.]

on the shoulders of those who came to mourn the great tragedy. Without his parents' knowledge, Josef went along with the thousands-strong multitude to the cemetery, and was present during the burial.

To this day, the fiery, the yellow-haired young man with the elongated face, who eulogised the six young victims, still stands living before Josef. His words, in a Lithuanian Yiddish, are still ringing in Josef's ears. This was Aron *Częstochower* or "*Der Gejler Aron*<sup>4</sup>", as the town's socialist speaker and agitator was called. Aron's words became etched in Josef's mind.

Josef did not go back to *cheder* anymore. From his brother Zalman, who attended the *progimnazjum*, he gobbled up a bit of Russian and arithmetic, and he tried to get back into the "народная училище" [Rus., public school]. He eventually entered Year Two. His teachers were Juda, Awner and Morris Lehrer.

At school, Josef got along very well with his peers. They all lived not far from Herc's barracks. The best diversion at school was playing soldiers. All the school's children took part in this game. They waged wars and bestowed awards upon the participants. Each one was given a book costing between one and five kopeks. Inside these books was an inscription to the effect that it had been awarded to so-and-so for his fine exploits in "battle", signed by Fajwel the "General" and Josef the "Colonel".

Josef talked it through with all the pupils in the second division, [and they decided] that the black caps with the shiny visors, which they wore, were too plain in comparison with the caps worn by the *gimnazjum* students. The latter sported multi-coloured ribbons and stars on the front of their caps. Josef and his friends submitted a petition to the School Inspector, requesting that the pupils of the primary school be given better-looking uniforms and also nicer caps.

Following lengthy investigations, and after a personal visit from the School Inspector to the school, the pupils' request was agreed to and, a few weeks later, the pupils of the public school were already parading on a "*tabelny dien*<sup>5</sup>" or a "*galówka*<sup>6</sup>" in dark-blue tricot caps with green trimmings. These same caps were also later worn by schoolchildren in other cities.

Josef completed Year Two with a distinction. In Year Three, the pupils already demanded greater things - and Josef was always the organiser. The new demand was that the Polish and German languages be taught at the school. Josef organised the pupils in the following manner: as the "*dyżurny*" [class monitor], he registered all the pupils as having come late. When the teacher entered the classroom and saw, on the board, the report regarding the transgressions of the pupils, he punished them by making all of them stay in class after the lesson. Josef also stayed with them.

The pupils were very pleased with this punishment. They now had the opportunity to present a new demand. This time, the pupils demanded to be taught Polish - the language of the land,

---

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Yid., "Aron the Yellow", viz. blond; ref. to Aron Singalowsky, later to become General Secretary of ORT.]

<sup>5</sup> [TN: Rus., lit. "table day" (табельный день), meaning an official holiday which appears in a state-issued table.]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: Pol., "celebration", from the word "gala". According to "Sefer Zgierz", p.275, "galówka" is what the Russian Tsar's birthday was called at the time. In Polish sources, this word also appears in ref. to the anniversary of the Tsar's coronation.]

which the Russians suppressed. The pupils [also] requested German because, living not far from the German border, they needed to know the language of the neighbouring country.

The schoolmaster understood that this was an organised “rebellion” on the part of the pupils, and that there was a political lining to this demand. This was during the period when students’ strikes were taking place in the universities. The teacher spoke to the pupils and admonished them over the course of two days. He reminded them that they were receiving their education completely for free and that they were the children of poor people - and that should they not calm down and relinquish their demands, the school would be shut down and they would also be punished once more.

He also sent for the parents of the children and informed them of this. The meeting was a dismal one. Several pupils broke out in tears and the entire class renounced their demands.

After the failed “strike”, Josef did not show himself at school again. But he did come for the examinations and, to everyone’s great surprise, he completed the school with an award. This award consisted of a little red book in Russian with many signatures. Josef justified his not coming to school for several months by saying that his father had fallen ill at the time, and that he had needed to be home to help with the livelihood.

Josef had told the truth. His father was ill and Josef had been helping more to earn a living, working at the soda water factory, which his father was running at the time.

Opening a soda factory necessitated a special permit from the Governor in Piotrków. Josef’s father needed to present a certificate of integrity. Reb Duwid had to contend with all sorts of denunciations that the other Jewish soda manufacturers continually brought to the police. It was necessary to grease [the palms of] the police officials - or to “poison” them, [as the Jews called it] - for all these accusations to be waived. The police [also] kept [Josef’s father] informed as to how the matter stood with the higher authorities. Reb Duwid spent a fortune to be granted the permit for this enterprise, upon which he had built his whole future. He was rejected several times, which caused him great grief, and it was precisely because of this that he had fallen ill.

The last hope to be granted the permit was bound up with Josef. He was sent off to Piotrków to his aunt Hinda, and he and his aunt went to the Governor and requested an audience. With a “*prosheniye*” [прошение] (petition) in his hand, Josef stood before the Governor and pleaded with him to acquiesce to grant the licence for the soda water factory. Josef told him, in Russian, that the reason he had come was because his father was ill. When his aunt whispered to him that he should kiss the Governor’s hand, Josef burst out weeping. The Governor gave him a pat on the head and said, “Within three days you will receive an answer – all will be well!”

As Josef was leaving the Governor with his aunt, she said to him, “My impression is that you’ve succeeded. As for the rest - may God grant His aid.” And, indeed, three days later — it was on a Saturday morning - the *prystav*<sup>7</sup> [of their street] called Reb Duwid through the window and

---

<sup>7</sup> [TN: Rus., “bailiff/marshal” (ПРИСТАВ).]

told him the happy news - that the permit for his soda water factory had arrived. Reb Duwid went off to the Chassidic *shtiebel* for the prayer service with a face beaming with joy, thinking that his salvation had only been on account of Josef's good luck.

Reb Duwid set up the soda factory in the same courtyard where he had run the beer tavern - in Bentkowski's building. With a handcart, Josef and his father would distribute the syphons of soda amongst the shops in the nearby streets. Instead of going to school to study, Josef helped his father. With great interest, he learned how to make the gas and fill the syphons with soda water. One needed to be extremely careful in the work - if the gas was not made just right, a misfortune could happen - the vats could explode, as also could the syphons while they were being filled with water.

Josef became trained in this trade and could already be relied upon. From time to time, he also helped push the cart with the syphons of water. He would also collect the money from the shopkeepers.

Sometime later, a law was passed to the effect that soda factories could not be situated within any inhabited building. Reb Duwid's factory was relocated to a neighbouring building, to that of Jankiel Dawidowicz. Jankiel, the owner of the building, had a small house with several rooms built especially for the factory, in accordance with the stipulated requirements. In the same building was also Jakow-Ber Silver's "*chaynaya*" [чайная] (tea-room), where the city's Bundists would gather.

\* \* \*

In his free time, after work, Josef read a great many books and brochures in Russian, Polish and Yiddish. When the Russo-Japanese War started, Josef devoured the papers with the news. Now and then, Josef brought home the thin booklets printed on blotting paper<sup>8</sup>, which he received from his friend Lajzer.

I started frequenting the "bourse" [labour exchange], which was on ul. Ogrodowa, from the end of the New Market [Nowy Rynek] to the *Kapeluszarnia* [hat factory].

The bourse was the meeting place, where the organised workers brought with them the yet unorganised workers and campaigned to them, and conveyed the instructions and decisions of the organisation to the workers that were already organised. Walking about, they discussed various political issues, party programmes, and organising the different trades, in order to be able, as a collective force, put demands before the employers, as regards wages and workhours.

The bourse had its separate groups in town, which were headed by the more intellectual labourers. This was the bourse of the SDKPiL Party (later the Communists). There was also a Jewish SDKPiL group in this bourse, which was called "*Grupa Żargonowa*" [Jargon Group]. Due to his capabilities, Josef became one of the leaders of this Jewish group.

---

<sup>8</sup> [TN: Viz. cheap, low-quality paper; the term used in the original Yiddish is the same as the German "Fließpapier".]

In those days, a conference of the various existing SDKPiL groups took place at one of the large factories in Warta. The conference included delegates from small Polish and Jewish circles (“*dzielnice*”<sup>9</sup>) and from the Central Committee in Warsaw. This conference was attended by the later sorrowfully renowned leader of the Bolshevik “Czeka”<sup>10</sup> in Soviet Russia - Feliks Dzierżyński.

At this conference, there was a heated discussion regarding the so-called “Jargon groups”, meaning the small circles that conducted their illegal socialist activity in the Yiddish language. Josef then staunchly defended the Jewish groups. He spoke in good Polish and, in his speech, raised awareness as to the importance of the Yiddish language. He reproached those assimilated Jewish intellectuals, who were ashamed of Yiddish, and asked the conference to allow the continuation of the Yiddish groups. He [also] requested it be decided to issue socialist informational literature in Yiddish.

At this conference, Josef was also appointed to be the contact person between the Jewish and Polish groups in the city. He would receive the literature for the Jewish group - the newspapers *Czerwony Sztandar* [Red Banner], *Przegląd Społeczny* [Social Review] and the different proclamations for the Jewish group. Josef had occasion to frequently be in Warsaw, from where he brought the literature for the entire region, and especially for the city and Zagłębie Dąbrowskie [the Dąbrowa Basin]. Josef remembers his first trip to Warsaw very well:

Josef donned the clothes of his mate Lajzer [Berkowicz], who already wore short clothes and a hat, like a German [Jew<sup>11</sup>]. Josef took Lajzer’s passport and set off on his journey. When he arrived in Warsaw, he went to the address which he had been given. From there, he was taken to a confectionery store, where a student was already waiting for him. His name, needless to say, was unknown to Josef. The student had a brief conversation with him and, having become convinced that everything was “kosher”, he gave Josef a second address, where he was to receive the “literature”. A Polish worker was living at the house this address indicated. It was somewhere in Wola (a Polish workers’ neighbourhood in Warsaw). The fellow members - Poles and Jews - were drinking quite a bit there. Needless to say, they offered Josef a small glass of schnapps and snacks. Josef ate something, but did not taste the liquor. He was afraid that he would get drunk and jeopardise his entire journey, which was also fraught with peril.

An unconventional thought stole itself into his young mind at the time - How could they be drinking during such important and responsibility-laden illegal work? But he said nothing. Josef collected his “goods”, which were packed in an elegant valise, took a seat on a *dorożka*<sup>12</sup> and travelled to the Warsaw-Vienna railway terminal. Along the way, they had just stopped a young man with a package. From his seat in the *dorożka*, Josef saw how a policeman tore open the young man’s parcel with his sword. A whole pack of “literature” cascaded out. A large crowd of passers-by, and just curious people, immediately gathered around them and

---

<sup>9</sup> [TN: Pol., districts/neighbourhoods.]

<sup>10</sup> [TN: The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (Всероссийская чрезвычайная комиссия); the first of a succession of Soviet secret-police organisations.]

<sup>11</sup> [TN: The custom in those days among ultraorthodox Jews in Poland was that only rabbis wore hats, whereas the common people wore black, kepi-like “Jewish caps”, which were considered part of the “uniform”, along with the long caftan, whereas the more modernised German Jews wore Western European attire.]

<sup>12</sup> [TN: Russian-type cart for transporting passengers, commonly used in 19th and early 20th century Poland as urban public transport.]

were observing the incident. By virtue of that young man being detained, Josef was saved with his [own] pack of “goods”.

Yet, with that, the danger had still not passed. At the entrance to the terminal, as usual, constables and gendarmes were standing and inspecting the packages of anyone who seemed a little suspicious. Upon arriving at the terminal, Josef did as a wealthy man would do, and called vociferously for a “*nosilszczyk*” [носильщик] (porter) to unload his package from the *dorożka*, and loudly ordered him to purchase a second-class passage on the “*kurier*<sup>13</sup>”. First of all, Josef was freed from the valise. If the porter was stopped, he would obviously make himself scarce! In the carriage, Josef distanced himself from the valise. He sat on another bench and put it away on a shelf further off. This precaution was necessary, for they also frequently carried out inspections in the carriages.

Thus, he arrived in the city. There, too, the same procedure took place - Josef obtained a porter and told him to take the valise over to a *dorożka*, with which he travelled off in the direction of Stradom (a workers’ neighbourhood in town). Upon alighting from the *dorożka*, Josef set out, on foot, towards a nearby field (which had already been designated in advance) and, there, he put the valise amongst the wheat. At an appointed hour, comrades came, took the valise and carried it away to the house of a Polish worker. Along the way, they also had to avoid the border guards who, due to the city of Warta’s proximity to the German border, frequently searched for contraband. The hidden revolutionaries organised their own watch, which went ahead. As soon as the revolutionary watch noticed a patrol of border guards approaching, they gave a signal and the comrades hid in a courtyard and waited there until the patrol passed by.

After so many hardships and risks, the valise with the revolutionary literature finally made it to the appointed address.



---

<sup>13</sup> [TN: From the Ger. “*Kurierzug*”, or “*courier train*”, meaning a passenger train.]