

With My Heart

(for the benefit of [future] generations)

[by] Abram-Josef Sztybel

(Dedicated to my sister, Hadasa Lejzerowicz¹)

My sister Hadasa is my elder by one or two years. My father, of blessed memory, was extremely proud of her. She did very well in her studies and, besides her Rebbe [viz. *melamed*] Josel *Glotzer* [Wide-eyed²], who lived with his half-wit son and whose *cheder* was on the hill in the Old Cemetery, she had a modern teacher also and also attended the municipal school next to the Christian Cemetery.

With great pride, my father always showed my sister Hadasa's beautiful handwriting to our neighbours and the members of our family who came to visit us. She mastered the German gothic hand and also knew how to write in Russian characters, [which she did] for those of the townsmen who worked for the Russian military.

My sister Hadasa was always industrious, intelligent and full of energy. She would scold me, but even if she was fond of shouting at me, she loved me dearly and was proud of me.

In those days, I was one of the only two young men in town who, for a payment, had the privilege of studying with the Rabbi [Reb Symcha-Eliasz Szwarcberg], alongside the Rabbi's cousin Awreme'le Szwarcberg, rabbi of the town Terespol. The second young man was Lipman Klajner, the son of a glassware merchant and he had [already] been qualified to dispense Halachic rulings.

Once I had already read all the storybooks in Hebrew which Reb Aba, the book merchant from Szczekociny, presented for sale in our study-hall, I began reading those written in Yiddish.

There was also one fellow in the Study-hall, Icek-Majer Ferder - my father's relative - who began supplying me with books in the Yiddish language which were, at the time, banned by the government.

My sister Hadasa had a sharp eye and an anxious heart. I had no lack of subterfuges for my father and mother, but it was extremely difficult to fool my sister Hadasa. She considered it demeaning for me to engage in reading these "*ma'ase-bichlech*"³. Her healthy instincts and bright intellect told her that something of no small importance was beginning to take shape around me and she was wary. She was concerned about how my parents would take it and also for the peace in our home. She realised the worth of the sacrifices Father had given upon the altar of my education and how many efforts and suffering this dream had cost him. She watched me closely. She threw all my "*ma'ase-bichlech*" into the cooker, completely incinerating them. She assiduously lay in wait for [any] books that slipped out from under the fringes of my [clothes]. She fought a war with me against Yiddish and for Hebrew.



¹ [TN: Appears in the official records as Chudesa, b. In Żarki on 7th March 1880, daughter of Lejbus Sztybel and Rajzla Szwarc. She was married in 1900 to Icyk Janas Lejzerowicz and they went on to have 4 children. The entire family was murdered in the Holocaust.]

² [TN: See above on p.40 regarding this schoolteacher.]

³ [TN: Lit. "little storybooks"; light literature was considered frivolous and flippant.]

A Summer *Shabbes* at Twilight.

In the middle of the street and on the benches by the entrances to the houses, there is no longer a trace of the setting sun and, only on the upper part of the windows and on the roof of Icze-Chaskiel the egg merchant's house, are the faint flickers of its last rays still straying and wandering - their parting blessing: "Goodbye! Fear not – we shall see each other again tomorrow!"

The Third Meal banquet has come to its end - fermented milk and butter cakes. Father takes a *kazais*⁴ of the *challah* [festive bread] on which he says the blessing and goes to the prayer house to join the *minyán* [prayer quorum] and to enjoy Reb Ruben Dancyger's witticisms. My mother and my sister Hadasa sit on the bench in front of our kitchen window - the one facing the street. The little ones are rough-housing - they tumble about in the street's rubbish, laughing and shouting, disturbing the repose of Reb Icze-Duwid the Baker's ducks, which are loafing by the well.

This time too, like always, my father took me with him to the prayer-house and, only thanks to my cunning, was I able to return home to my hiding-place between my father's bed and the settee by the window. But my sister Hadasa had followed my movements on this occasion as well. I had almost taken out the "*bichl*", when she sprang out of her ambush and fell upon me with her fists, slights and upbraiding. "No longer a *yeshiva* student – once more a boy! No longer an *illui*⁵ – once more a boy!"*)



My sister Hadasa has remained there, in the *shtetl*. She [continues to] live her former natural life – the life of our fathers and forefathers. She goes on spinning the ancient thread, and her descendants will continue to fight for our national values and to protect them.

Szlojme Halperin

His father, who in my days was a prominent follower of the *Aleksander Rebbe*, was never called by his surname, but was named for his mother-in-law Nuchem *Rojzla's*; only his son - the one who was my study-hall mate - was referred to by his name and surname - Szlojme Halperin.

Szlojme Halperin was older than me. His spot at the Study-hall was to the right of the [Holy] Ark, the second or third of those sitting at the table which stood on the eastern side of the room. My place was to the left, at the head of the table which stood along the length of the room.

On *Shabbes* mornings, I would study the [Talmud] tractate of *Menuchos*⁶ with Reb Chaim-Wolf Rajzman, the owner of a sawmill for cutting planks and, at these times I, also sat at the table to the right, facing Szlojme Halperin - and this is how I became acquainted with him.

He was taller than average, dark-skinned and also dark-haired, with huge green eyes and red, sensual lips. A permanent smile graced his kind and gentle features. His well-fitting attire was always

⁴ [TN: Lit. "like an olive," viz. the minimal amount of bread required in Halacha to constitute an official meal, over which one needs to say a special blessing before and after eating it.]

⁵ [TN: A young Talmudic prodigy.]

*) Allusion to the popular [Yiddish] saying: "No longer a bride – once more a maiden!"

⁶ [TN: Pronounced "Menachot" in Israeli Hebrew, meaning "Meal Offerings"; tractate dealing with the rules of the preparation and presentation of grain-meal and drink offerings at the Jerusalem Temple.]

clean and was usually dark in colour. He changed his garments frequently - more so than the other study-hall lads - because his father owned the largest woollen fabric warehouse in the entire vicinity.

Those were the days of the Anglo-Boer War in Africa⁷. Szlojme Halperin once remarked that there also existed gazettes in the Holy Tongue [viz. Hebrew]. When I voiced my doubts, he sprang up and swore that there were bundles and bundles of newspapers in the Holy Tongue in the attic of their house.

This revelation robbed me of my repose, until I managed to persuade him to bring me a few pages of these gazettes. They were issues of the [St] Petersburg *Ha'Yom*⁸, and the literary wealth of its contents could well have delighted even a young modern-day Hebrew heart. He brought me one issue each day, for which I paid him with the sole coin I used to receive every single day from my mother, peace be upon her. Once I had finished one bundle, he brought me from the second, the third and the fourth. There were also issues of *Ha'Melitz*, *Ha'Tzfira*, *Ha'Carmel*, *Ha'Levanon*⁹ and others there. I was intoxicated. Entire worlds had all of a sudden been revealed before me - infinite expanses. The merit of the [Hebrew] language stood me in good stead in that, in my parents' house, I was not discouraged. They had no inkling of what was gradually taking shape. On the contrary - they were happy and delighted when I read the "news" to them in the evenings or at the close of *Shabbes* and my father would repeat them to his friends between the afternoon and evening prayer services, as if the events had only happened the previous day such as the [Russo-]Turkish War [of 1877-78], the assassination of Tsar Alexander II [in 1881], and the like...

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⁷ [TN: *The Second Boer War of 1899-1902.*]

⁸ [TN: *"Today"; the first Hebrew daily newspaper ever printed. As the paper was only printed from 1886 to 1888, the "news" they contained would have been well over a decade old by the time the author read them.*]

⁹ [TN: *The Intercessor, The Siren (sometimes also rendered "The Epoch"), The Carmel, and The Lebanon; all early Hebrew periodicals.*]



From R. to L.: 1) Abram-Josef Szybel; 2) his father-in-law, Reb Isser Gurdus; 3) the writer David Frischmann, editor of Ha'Tkufa [The Epoch], Moscow 1917