

TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE SHTETL IN FACT AND FICTION

A Mini-Course in Four Sessions

By

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PREFACE

Since the exile from the Land of Israel some two thousand years ago, we Jews have been an urban people, gravitating towards cities and towns in all the lands of our dispersion. Only in cities could we fulfill our religious and communal obligations and only there did we feel safe. In the six-hundred-year history of Polish Jewry, the shtetl or market town became the locus of organized Jewish life, a city-in-miniature which, in its heyday, enjoyed an almost autonomous existence. How the shtetl came into being, how it flourished, changed, was destroyed and was transplanted, is the subject of this course. By rescuing the shtetl from popular misconceptions we begin to explore its many facets: as a Holy Community united under God, as a viable social organism, as an arena of interaction between Jews and non-Jews, and as a model of tradition and change.

FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

- A. General Introduction: The kit you have in front of you contains everything you need for an adult education class, 4-5 sessions long, on The Shtetl in Fact and Fiction. The materials were prepared by Professor David G. Roskies in consultation with Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs.
- B. In this kit you will find:
1. An audio cassette with detailed lesson plans for each session;
 2. A Teacher's Guide with a written outline of the background material contained in the audio cassette;
 3. A video cassette to be shown in Lesson 1;
 4. Two sets of stories, one marked "For the Instructor," and the other for duplication and distribution to the students;
 5. A copy of The Shtetl Book, co-authored by David G. Roskies;
 6. A bibliography of published yizker-bikher (memorial books).
- C. How to Prepare
1. Watch and enjoy the video cassette (43 minutes);
 2. Listen to the audio cassette for a general overview (40 minutes);
 3. Replay Lesson #1 on the audio cassette as you follow along in the Teacher's Guide.

D. A Note on Fielding Questions

Fielding questions is the most difficult part of teaching. Remember, when someone asks you a question--

1. Don't panic;
2. Don't bluff.

When in doubt, defer the question for later. The better you know the outline of the course, the more precise you can be as to when this particular question will be dealt with. (You may wish to prepare a set of notecards with your own course outline.) If you already know that the question will not be covered later, you still have ample time to check the Index of The Shtetl Book for a possible lead.

There are two kinds of questions that people ask:

1. Vague;
2. Specific.

The former are much easier to answer than the latter. Since most people have not been staying up nights thinking about the shtetl, their questions are apt to be inchoate and possibly even silly. That is a boon for the group leader, because you can then reformulate the question in such a way as to provide the specific answer you already know. Before you know it, you will be considered an expert!

LESSON I

- I. Introduction: The instructor should explain the following:
- A. The structure of the course. It will run for 4-5 sessions and will deal with:
 - 1. What a shtetl was, and how it functioned;
 - 2. How it is similar to or different from the way Jews live today; and
 - 3. How and why it disappeared as an arena of Jewish life.
 - B. To discover what the shtetl was really like will require us to separate the static stereotype of the shtetl (as passed on through literature and popular culture) from its actual, historical development.
 - C. To this end, two of the most powerful and popular images of the shtetl will be studied in their original literary form. This will then help focus on the historical and sociological aspects of shtetl life.
 - D. The major shtetl institutions will be examined in terms of the following relationships:
 - 1. Between Jews and God (the religious life);
 - 2. Between Jews and other Jews (the social life);
 - 3. Between Jews and non-Jews (the economic life and the impact of historical upheavals).
- II. After explaining the purpose of the course, show the video cassette.

III. Following the film, allow at least half an hour for questions.

A. Here is a list of questions that are likely to come up:

1. What is the difference between the shtetl, the shtot and the village?
2. How many Jews lived in shtetlekh?
3. Why did most Jews live in cities and towns?
4. Would the shtetlekh have survived if not for Hitler?
5. What was the nature of the shtetl's transformation?
6. What was the status of women in the shtetl?
7. How can Peretz present such a bleak portrait of the shtetl when my image of it is so different?
8. Are Boro Park (Brooklyn) and Mea She'arim (Jerusalem) modern-day shtetlekh?
9. How accurate is Fiddler on the Roof?
10. Why do Litvaks consider themselves to be better than Galitsyaner?

B. Here are the answers:

1. Question: What is the difference between the shtetl, shtot and the village?

Answer: It is both a matter of size and structure. The distinction is primarily a numerical one.

- a. A village (dorf in Yiddish) was rural and agrarian, inhabited mostly by peasants. The few Jews who lived in a village were the tavernkeeper, the miller and, possibly, the milkman (like Tevye).

Both the shtot and shtetl were organized, urban, communities where Jews lived concentrated in the center of town and supported their own educational, social and religious institutions.

- b. Shtetl is the diminutive form of shtot.
- c. The shtetl was a market town with the market as its main source of livelihood.
- d. A community with more than 10,000 Jews should be considered a shtot.
- e. To qualify as a shtetl, the community had to have at least a house of prayer, a ritual bath and cemetery--and a periodic fair or market.

2. Question: How many Jews lived in shtetlekh?

Answer: By 1897, more than 50% of the Jewish population lived in three cities: Warsaw, Odessa and Lodz, which contained over 500,000 Jews, or 1/10th of the 5 million Jews in the Tsarist Empire.

3. Question: Why did most Jews live in cities and towns?

Answer:

- a. Because they felt there was safety in numbers;
- b. Because only an urban structure could support the basic institutions needed for Jewish life--the synagogue, bath, butcher, schools--all of which were located within walking distance;
- c. Because Jews were prohibited from owning land.

Comment: private towns were established by kings and squires in Poland, from 1550-1800. However, from 1850 to the First World War, the number of shtetlekh declined, due to increased urbanization, industrialization and immigration to the U.S.

4. Question: Would the shtetlekh have survived if not for Hitler?

Answer: Yes, but not in the form shown in the movie.

Comment: The cut-off point in the life of the shtetl was World War I, after which the map of Europe was totally redrawn. The film portrays the shtetl as it existed prior to World War I. After the war, Galicia was annexed to Poland and reunited with its culture after having been separated for over a century.

Comment: The new Soviet border cut through the heartland of Jewish Eastern Europe. It was an economic death warrant for everyone east of that border. The Soviets viewed Jewish economic activities as parasitism. The forced collectivization of the peasantry also wiped out the economic base of the shtetl.

Comment: Only in Poland, the Baltic countries, Romania and Hungary did the shtetl survive and become transformed between the wars.

5. Question: What was the nature of the shtetl's transformation?

Answer: The nature of this transformation is the subject of Lesson 2.

6. Question: What was the status of women in the shtetl?

Answer: There were three things in the Jewish community which constituted status:

- (1) Talmudic learning
- (2) Wealth
- (3) Yikhes (family connections)

While women could not become talmudic scholars, they could acquire status from the other two elements.

(For a more detailed discussion, wait until Lesson 4.)

7. Question: How can Peretz present such a bleak portrait of the shtetl when my image of it is so different?

Answer: God willing, the answer will come in Lesson 3!

8. Question: Are Boro Park (Brooklyn) and Mea She'arim (Jerusalem) modern-day shtetlekh?

Answer: No! Definitely not. These places are too isolated from society to be considered shtetlekh.

Shtetlekh were an integrated part of the society at large. Furthermore, Boro Park and Mea She'arim are too belligerent, living with a siege mentality vis-a-vis the Jewish and non-Jewish world.

9. Question: How accurate is Fiddler on the Roof?

Answer: About as accurate as Star Wars. Anyway, Tevye lived in a village, not in a shtetl.

10. Question: Why do Litvaks consider themselves to be better than Galitsyaner?

Answer:

- (a) Because they are.
- (b) Because regional rivalries are the stuff of every traditional (and not-so-traditional) culture.
- (c) Defer to Lesson #2.

LESSON II

- I. Overall Purpose of Lesson 2
- A. To make a dimly-remembered place on a foreign map into the center of past and present Jewish identity.
 - B. To help locate that place as closely as possible.
 - C. To flesh it out through cultural geography and history.
 - D. To offer direction for future discovery.
- II. Suggested Method of Instruction
- A. Start with the Map
 1. The first assignment should be to locate the site of your ancestral shtetl(ekh) on the map of Eastern Europe in The Shtetl Book.
 2. Try different spellings of the same name. Sometimes you can go by the name of the province or gubernia, as it was called (Kiever, Lomzer, etc.).
 3. Sometimes family names can offer a clue: Polack, Litvak-- from Poland or Lithuania; Zhitomir, Warshawsky, Lemberger, for names of cities.
 4. If you know the name of the nearest city, chances are that there will be a yizker-bukh for that city, with a map of the surrounding towns.
 5. Be aware of the changing political boundaries. Galicia, for example, was reabsorbed into Poland in 1919, at the very same time that Lithuanian Jewry was divided into three parts: Poland, Lithuania and the Belorussian Soviet Republic.

6. Look for the nearest waterway and think about how your ancestors might have traveled or how the East/West trade routes might have affected their lives.
 7. How far was the town from the nearest train station? Is there any family folklore on the subject?
 8. Border towns were especially vulnerable to political change, but also benefited greatly from smuggling.
- B. Jewish Geography, or: What's in a Name?
1. Jewish memory in Eastern Europe defied geographical change.
 - a. What Jews called "Lita," was known as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1569-1772).
 - b. Place names were pronounced differently by Jews (see list at the back of Toldot).
 - (1) By the difference between the Yiddish name and the Polish one, the Yiddish has often preserved the older name of the town.
 - (2) Or, for example, Jews decatholicized names.
 - c. More important, one name gave a town prominence vis-a-vis other towns. For example, Chelm was a real place in the province of Lublin, but it was a town of fools only to Jews.
 - d. Many of the towns had special significance to Jews only and were unimportant to the non-Jewish population.
 - e. Many towns had nicknames for each other (see Shtetl Book for examples, pp. 45-49).

C. Cultural Geography: The Evidence of Dialects and Food

1. If you cannot locate your town on a map, dialect and food recipes can offer important clues.
2. Ask the group how they would say "buying meat." (See map in The Shtetl Book, p. 44). There are three possibilities:

- a. Central area-- e"שׂו / ו'ר (Koyfn Flaysh);
the Polish dialect, where Peretz came from.
- b. Southeastern or Ukrainian dialect-- e"שׂו / ו'ר
(Koyfn Fleysh); where Sholem Aleichem came from.
- c. In the northeast-- e"שׂו / ו'ר"ר (Keyfn Fleysh);
Litvaks, where Chagall was born.

Note: Galicia has no linguistic status; there is no such thing as Galitsyaner dialect. Galician Yiddish is the same as the Polish dialect.

3. Another clue is gefilte fish.

Question: (To class): How many people have a tradition of gefilte fish made with sugar or pepper (see The Shtetl Book, pp. 36-41).

Note: Both dialect and food recipes reflect real cultural differences!

- a. The northeast of Eastern Europe was the center of rationalism and learning (old-style Orthodoxy), and was where Mitnagdim were found.
- b. While the west and southeast, with their lust for life, and mystical fervor, were where the Hasidic religious revival occurred.

- c. The north was spotted with "college towns," each boasting its own famous yeshiva.
- d. The south was the site of Hasidic "courts," to which the loyal (male) followers made regular pilgrimages.

Note: The cultural differences were significant, encompassing three dialects, two recipes for gefilte fish and three for farfel--along with different approaches to religious life.

D. The Impact of History

1. The shtetl preserved in memory will depend a great deal on when that shtetl was left behind.
2. There were three main periods of change in Jewish Eastern Europe:
 - a. The period of Westernization, 1800-1880;
 - b. The period of mass migration and political turmoil, 1880-1914;
 - c. The period of physical destruction and internal renewal, 1914-1939.
3. The period of Westernization
 - a. Western influences traveled along the trade routes, via Königsberg, Berlin and Vienna (see the map).
 - b. In addition, the positive values of Western culture were imported through the Enlightenment movement known as the Haskala.
 - c. This movement began in Germany in the 1780s, with Moses Mendelssohn and then moved east and north through his disciples.

- d. The first great encounter between the Westernizing forces of the Haskala and the "Easternizing" forces of Hasidism, which originated in the Ukraine, took place in Galicia.
 - e. Refer to the song, "The Philosopher," for a humorous example (on the cassette).
 - f. The 1860s, in particular, were a period of reform in tsarist Russia, when it really looked like Jews would finally make it into the Great Society.
4. The period of mass migration and political turmoil
- a. The honeymoon ended with the first wave of large-scale pogroms in tsarist Russia, in 1881-1882.
 - b. This precipitated (but did not cause) the mass migration to America and elsewhere.
 - c. From the 1880s onward, Zionism and socialism began to compete for the allegiance of the shtetl population.
 - d. Revolutionary hopes peaked in 1905, when civil liberties were granted to all citizens of the Russian Empire, but the next day counterrevolutionary pogroms broke out all over.
5. The period of destruction and renewal
- a. World War I was the great watershed.
 - b. The Pale of Settlement was abolished in 1915.
 - c. Large areas of Jewish Eastern Europe were destroyed.
 - d. Then came the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which was

- e. Followed by the Civil War in the Ukraine in 1918-19, during which an estimated 60,000 Jews were murdered.
- 6. The Interwar period
 - a. In Poland, and the Baltic countries, shtetl life was transformed from the inside.
 - b. Jews increasingly organized into political groups
 - c. These groups supported youth movements, libraries, schools, theaters, soccer teams, newspapers, lectures, etc.
 - d. Young people especially were caught up in the new political lifestyle, complete with uniforms, songs and celebrations.
 - e. None of these youth groups was satisfied with Jewish life as it was; the Zionists prepared for hakhshara, the pioneering settlement of Palestine; the Bund fought to enter the specialized trades; the Communists dreamt of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

III. The Major Sources for Self-Discovery

A. Yizker-bikher

- 1. What are they?
 - a. The collective projects of landmanshaftn.
 - b. These are organizations of Jews hailing from the same city or town, who met in the New World--be it in North America, Latin America or Israel
 - c. They were originally established to help the immigrants help themselves.

- d. The high point of the landsmanshaftn was during the mass immigrations, from the 1800s to 1924.
- e. Between the two World Wars, landsmanshaftn raised money for their brethren back home. (Kolbushov even made a fund-raising film in 1929).
- f. After the war, the landsmanshaftn were preoccupied with two main projects: raising money for Israel and memorializing the life that had been destroyed. The dream of each landsmanshaft was to publish its own memorial book.

2. Question: How are the yizker-bikher (memorial books) organized?

Answer: Of the over 700 books published to date, most follow the same format:

- a. They are written in Yiddish and Hebrew;
- b. They run about 500 pages, on glossy paper;
- c. They begin with the earliest history of the town--from about the 1500s--to the beginning of the 20th century;
- d. All of this is usually condensed into about 20 pages, because the shtetl lacked an historical consciousness.
 - (1) It did not preserve its own records.
 - (2) When Jews left, people had no idea where they came from or where/when they settled.
 - (3) Often, a professional historian (not from that town) would be hired to write this introductory chapter.

3. Question: What then is the major focus of the memorial book?

Answer: The life of the town just before World War I, and between the world wars. This, as we have just seen, was the time of dramatic change in the life of the shtetl. The third section of the memorial volume deals in detail with the Holocaust (i.e., names, places), and usually includes a list of the martyrs of the town.

Question: The yizker-bikher favor the description of the shtetl between the two world wars. Why?

Answer: Because most people who contributed to yizker-bikher left the shtetl in their early teens, i.e., sometime after World War I. There are very few who remember the shtetl as it was before World War I.

B. Family History and Folklore

1. If it is not too late, interview someone from the family about life in the Old Country.
2. Now that you know about cultural and historical factors, be sure to ask about fish recipes, religious practices, songs, stories, etc.
3. Find out why they left. You may be surprised.

C. Works of Fiction

1. Having studied the life as it was and checked this data against family history, you are ready to go on to the reading of Yiddish literature on life in the shtetl.
2. Next week's assignment: Read the two short stories.

LESSON IIIINTRODUCTION TO THE SHTETL IN FICTION

I. Background For Instructor

- A. The purpose of this session is to gain a greater understanding of the following:
1. How to read Yiddish literature;
 2. How Yiddish literature developed;
 3. How the authors viewed the shtetl.
- B. This will be achieved through:
1. An introduction to shtetl fiction; and
 2. An analysis of two short stories.

II. Introduction

- A. Explain to the class the purpose of this session.
- B. Review the two rules of shtetl fiction referred to in Lesson 1:
1. We are dealing with an "image of the shtetl," that is, a literary construct--fiction as opposed to fact.
Comment: The shtetl enters into fiction, that is, it began to become fictionalized, just as it was beginning to fall apart.
 2. The writers about the shtetl were themselves rebels who rejected shtetl society, left it and chose never to return.

C. The "Image of the Shtetl" was transmitted through literature in 4 stages:

1. Stage I--1860 to early 20th century

- a. This was a time when writers were extremely critical of the shtetl. People who wrote during this period saw the shtetl as a symbol of everything rigid and backward, old-fashioned and narrow in Jewish life.
- b. They attacked, through their fiction, the religious and ideological foundations of the shtetl.
- c. In order to portray the shtetl as a fortress in isolation, they deliberately kept non-Jews out of the shtetl world they described (this was completely untrue).
- d. At the very end of this phase, Peretz wrote "The Dead Town," which is an all-out attack on all aspects of shtetl life. (See pp. 271-280 of The Shtetl Book for another example of Peretz' writing about the shtetl during this period.)

2. Stage II--The Romantic Period--1900 to World War I

- a. This was a reaction to Phase I. The writers in question were I.L. Peretz, S. Aleichem, S. Asch and S. Ansky.
- b. At this time, these writers were in search of a myth of a collective past. Nationalism was in the air,

and the image of the shtetl was revamped to reflect a positive view of tradition, faith and community.

3. Stage III--Between the two world wars
 - a. During this period, the writers were extremely critical of the shtetl. They themselves witnessed its physical and spiritual destruction.
 4. Stage IV--After the Holocaust
 - a. Fiction writers during this period portrayed the shtetl in a completely mythological way.
 - b. The people who lived in the shtetlekh were no longer flesh and blood, but martyrs and saints. For example, a book written in 1954 about the inside life of the shtetl, spoke of how Jews went to the bathroom. Though the description was meant to be humorous, two major Jewish writers of the day protested that it desecrated the memory of the shtetl martyrs.
- D. Method of teaching the stories
1. Having asked the class to read these stories in advance of the session, you could begin by asking for comments and then proceeding with questions. OR:
 2. The stories can be read in class, with the instructor commenting throughout the readings, and then asking the following questions:
 - a. Is there a structure common to both of these stories?

Answer: Yes. For example, the three-part structure of The Dead Town should be noted.

(1) First, Peretz presents a panorama of shtetl institutions (Phase 1).

(a) Question: What results does this panorama achieve?

Answer: It describes the total decay of religious and cultural institutions.

(b) The panorama ends when he looks at the moon (romantic and mystical). This is Peretz' way of alerting us to the fact that the emphasis has shifted to Phase 2.

(2) Phase 2 is a parable: he presents the historical and political background, which is important to understanding the completely illogical and untenable situation of the Jews. The discussion of the moon brings Peretz to Phase 3.

(3) Phase 3: the Prognosis

(a) Question: What is Peretz' assessment of the shtetl?

Answer: The shtetl has become a place of the living dead. Reality has become a nightmare, and people have lost the will to live.

(b) Question: What is the function of the narrator?

Answer: To draw us (the skeptical reader/s) into the nightmare.

Comment: A year or two after writing the story, Peretz did a complete about-face, and came to write about the shtetl in the more mythological/romantic/folk vein with which we identify him.

(4) Question: Why is that?

Answer: Perhaps because once Peretz realized that contemporary Jewish life was a nightmare, the only way to go on writing was to create an idealized, make-believe world of long ago. This world would then serve as a source of faith and solidarity for modern Jews.

(5) Dreyfus in Kasrilevke

Question: How is the story structured?

Answer: The original is divided into 6 chapters which easily fall into 3 parts:

Stage I--the news arrives;

Stage II--rise and fall pattern, as the people became totally involved with Dreyfus and his fate;

Stage III--the climax: the great disappointment; yet in the end, the Jews in Kasrilevke still place faith over fact, the Word over the World.

Question: What does this conclusion illustrate?

Question: What stage in the development of shtetl literature does the story characterize?

Answer: Stage 2, the Romantic Period

Comment: S. Aleichem wrote this story after becoming dissatisfied with the Enlightenment and with radical solutions to the Jewish and Russian problems. He saw the enemy as being too strong. All the shtetl could do was to react by talking, shouting and upholding the Ultimate Truth.

Note: Paragraph 2 of the story, i.e., how they obtained their tea illustrates the shtetl's relationship to the outside world, as compared to that of a technological society. Whereas modern societies are joined to each other by the law of supply and demand, Kasrilevke's bond to the outside world is purely emotional and moral, based on the law of good and evil.

Question: What does this tell us of S. Aleichem's view of the shtetl?

- E. Conclusion: the aim of this lesson was to analyze the two stories presented, and to learn the following:
1. How each image exaggerated a different aspect of shtetl life;
 2. How such an image was calculated to affect its readers; and
 3. Where the stories fit in the changing temper of modern Jewish times.

LESSON IV

I. Introduction

- A. Purpose: To acquaint the class with the life cycle of a man and woman in the shtetl
- B. Sources for further preparation
 - 1. The Shtetl Book, Chapters 5, 7 and 8
 - a. Chapter 5: Growing Up in the shtetl
 - b. Chapter 7: Entertainment
 - c. Chapter 8: Living with the dead
 - 2. The recorded songs on the cassette

II. Suggested Method of Instruction

- A. By comparing and contrasting the characteristic lifestyle of the shtetl society with the more open lifestyle of the modern American Jew, the strengths and weaknesses of both should become more apparent.

Question: Would the life cycle of a shtetl society not be similar to that practiced by the traditional American Jew?

Answer: Yes, in the sense that the rites of passage, i.e., brit mila (circumcision), bar/bat mitzva, marriage and death are still significant events in Jewish life.

Question: What purpose do these events have for us?

Answer: (a) They mark off times of significance in our lives. They bring friends and families together, which is especially important in a society as diverse and as rapidly changing as ours.

(b) But in the shtetl, which was a much more closed society, there were many more ritual occasions to celebrate, a variety of "initiation rites" in one's life.

Comment: In a modern society, one's religious life is more private and compartmentalized. It is something you do outside of normal work and play. What, then, can we learn through shtetl practices to lessen the distance between one's religion and one's life?

III. The Life Cycle

A. Birth

1. Question: How did Jews prepare for a birth in the shtetl?

Answer: (See page 145, in The Shtetl Book). As soon as a child was born in Eastern Europe, precautionary measures were taken.

The brit (circumcision) was the first of many initiation rites prior to entering adulthood. The Jewish infant was also initiated into his culture. The earliest and least painful of these initiations were lullabies.

2. Question: What purpose did the lullabye serve?

Answer: It presented the child with shtetl values through the hopes and dreams of his parents.

Comment: (See p. 147, The Shtetl Book). Read the lullabye to the class in English. POINT OUT how, with each verse,

the contrast grows between the mother's elaborate hopes for the future and the child's present condition. THEN--play the lullabye (Side 2 of the cassette) to the class.

3. Question: When do you think school began for the child?

Answer: At approximately the age of 3, when the child was old enough to begin school (heder). Recall the humorous dialogue between teacher and student in the film. For a fuller description, see pp. 154-57 of The Shtetl Book.

4. Games also played a very important role in socializing children in the shtetl, and provided a painless form of initiation. Children had their own folklore, which parodied adult behavior. (See The Shtetl Book, p. 160).

Comment: The Yiddish parody on the teacher and his assistant is on the tape. Time permitting, you may wish to play it. Regardless of whether the games involved were for girls or boys, many of them parodied shtetl life.

5. Question: What happened after the child mastered the alphabet and learned how to pray?

Answer: (1) The student would enter translation heder, learning to translate the Hebrew of the Bible into an archaic form of Yiddish, and following this at some point, the child would graduate (another initiation rite) to study at night.

(2) Following translation heder was Gemara (Talmud) heder, where only Talmud was studied and where, if the student was successful, he would graduate to independent study and, depending on finances, would either study locally or out of

town at a place of learning. If this was not possible, then the boy became an apprentice to a craftsman.

6. Conclusion

a. The coming of age in the shtetl was marked by either becoming a graduate student in Talmud or becoming a breadwinner.

7. Question: But what about bar mitzvah?

Answer: Bar mitzvah was not as important in Eastern Europe as it is today.

Question: Why do you think this is so?

Answer: Because of the following:

- (1) The bar mitzvah was only one of many initiation rites in Jewish shtetl life, between birth and reaching the age of 13.
- (2) Young men in the shtetl assumed full religious obligations long before their 13th birthdays.

Question: This system of study seems to be all-inclusive: did shtetl life leave room for any adolescent rebellion?

Answer: Yes. Like today, each generation had its causes and outlets for rebellion.

(a) During the early 19th century, youth rebelled against the system by becoming Hassidim.

(b) During the middle of the 19th century, they became "free thinkers," or "Maskilim."

(c) From the 1890s onward, they became either Zionists or Bundists. Zionists saw a return to the Jewish homeland

as the only solution to anti-Semitism, while the Bundists and other Socialist-Internationalists saw the struggle of the working class as the only way to improve the lot of the Jews.

(d) At any time in the 19th century, one could rebel by running off to a yeshiva against the wishes of one's parents.

Comment: Those who rebelled against shtetl life were not necessarily rebelling against Jewish life. Jewish alternatives to the shtetl existed, because of shtetl society and in spite of it.

8. Question: Did the life cycle substantively differ for women?

Answer: Yes.

Comment: First of all, shtetl society and traditional European societies in general viewed women as secondary to men. Women were trained:

(a) To be home keepers;

(b) Their education differed--it consisted of learning to pray, read and write in Yiddish;

(c) They also learned kashrut, and the laws of ritual purity. In the shtetl, they only achieved full acceptance after marriage and motherhood. There were few ceremonial occasions in a girl's life, although marriage itself was the most elaborate ceremony in shtetl life.

9. Question: Did marriage and the circumstances leading up to it differ substantially from today?

Answer: Yes. First of all:

- (a) Marriages were prearranged;
- (b) Young people had to wait for their parents to find mates of similar social status;
- (c) The dowry was the regulating agency;
- (d) What a parent could pay determined the groom's status.

Comment: The community provided a dowry for destitute women.

Comment: There were several ceremonies surrounding the wedding, many of which are still observed today.

- (a) For example, the badekns (veiling of the bride, which was accompanied by a stern warning about how to behave if she wanted to live the "good life").

Comment: At this point, you may wish to listen to the song on the cassette.

10. Question: Was there not more to life in the shtetl for women besides marriage?

Answer: Yes. The second most important initiation rite for a woman was giving birth.

Comment:

- (a) Shtetl life consisted of very fixed, self-perpetuating roles and expectations. The role of women was an extremely fixed one.
- (b) Superstitions played an important role in shtetl society, which tended to view death and misfortune as independent forces which obeyed their own set of rules.

The belief in demons, Lilith and the Angel of Death was fairly widespread. So amulets were employed to vouchsafe the health of a newborn child (see The Shtetl Book, p. 145, for a good luck charm for male children.)

11. Comment: Having completed these two initiation rites, the woman assumed her position as an essential participant in the economic, social and religious life of the community. Men and women had separate, yet parallel, roles:

(a) Women studied the weekly Torah portion from a Yiddish homiletic version of the Bible called Tsenerene; they read moralistic tracts in Yiddish and prayed from special Yiddish prayerbooks called tkhines.

(b) They also enjoyed reading dime novels and romances in Yiddish.

12. Question: Up to now we have observed the shtetl as a feudal, unchanging society, which was socially stratified and which had clearly demarcated rites of passage, but we have also seen the upheaval, especially after World War I, and the vast changes that began to take place. But in such a closed society, could people release their emotions--their joy and anger--without destroying the society of which they were part?

Answer: Through shtetl entertainment. While the shtetl was still intact, a great deal of room for release existed. Wise men could act like fools, children could mimic adults, adults act like children and fools could act like sages.

Comment: The shtetl did not recognize a distinction between the sacred and the secular. Everything existed in one system; religion and life were one and the same.

13. Question: Where in the shtetl did one go for entertainment?

Answer: One did not go outside for entertainment. The system was all-inclusive. It was in the heder, the study house and the synagogue. For example, the Purim play (shpil) was a traditional form of shtetl entertainment, and one in which the most ludicrous behavior was acceptable. (See pp. 230-31 in The Shtetl Book, for a description of the Purim play around 1915). The Purim-shpil bridged the social gap between the learned and the simple.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Shtetl culture was vibrant. We should not let our knowledge of its later fate affect our view of what it was and what it accomplished.
- B. Through this course we have been able to learn to distinguish between historical reality and our own imaginings. Like all societies, the shtetl had its strengths and weaknesses.
- C. Hopefully, this course will have helped us to:
 1. Appreciate this unique part of our history; and
 2. Perhaps recognize what part of the shtetl we would like to include in our lives.

SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lesson I: Introduction to the Shtetl in Fact and Fiction

1. Joshua Rothenberg, "Demythologizing the Shtetl," Midstream, March 1981, pp. 25-31. Argues for the extraordinary vitality of the Polish shtetl between the two World Wars.
2. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, editor. The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe. Schocken paperback. A first-rate historical introduction to a major anthology of biographical and autobiographical portraits spanning 150 years of East European Jewish life.
3. For the most succinct discussion of how Jews got to Eastern Europe and how their fortunes changed, see the essays by Israel Halpern and Bernard Weinryb in The Jews: Their History, edited by Leo Finkelstein. Schocken paperback.

Lesson II: Tracing Your Roots

1. Jonathan Boyarin & Jack Kugelmass, editors. From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry. Schocken Books, 1983. The first major collection of memoirs and narratives translated from yizker-bikher, complete with maps, illustrations and bibliography.
2. The Shtetl Finder: Gazetteer, edited by Chester G. Cohen. Available from the author: Box 583, Woodland Hills, California 91365. A useful guide to place names and local histories.

Lesson III: The Shtetl in Fiction

1. Ruth R. Wisse. The Schlemiel as Modern Hero. Chicago University Press paperback. A delightful little book that places the schlemiel

and the people of Kasrilevke at the center of Yiddish and American-Jewish fiction.

2. Ruth R. Wisse, editor. A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas, Behrman House, 1973. This anthology of five novellas on the shtetl is unfortunately out of print. Maybe your synagogue library is lucky enough to have a copy.

3. Joachim Neugroschel, editor. The Shtetl: A Creative Anthology. Marek Publishers 1979. This \$25 anthology is well worth the price, as it contains examples of shtetl fiction not available elsewhere.

Lesson IV: The Life Cycle

1. Elizabeth Herzog & Mark Zborowski. Life Is With People. Schocken paperback. This classic anthropological study has its problems but it is still the best overview of shtetl lifestyles.

2. Barbara Meyerhoff. Number Our Days. Now out in paperback. This award-winning study of a Golden Age Club in California can be used to discuss the continuities of group behavior from Eastern Europe to America.

3. Similarly, Samuel C. Heilman's Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction, Chicago University Press paperback, 1976, is a study of a contemporary orthodox shul in Philadelphia which will help you focus on continuity and change in Jewish religious practices.

4. The most complete and up-to-date listing of Yiddish sources and resources is by David N. Miller, in The Third Jewish Catalogue, JPS, 1980.