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(MUSIC: MIKDASH MELEKH)

TITLES: THE SHTETL
 FACT AND FICTION
 WITH DAVID G. ROSKIES
 OF THE
 JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
 OF AMERICA
 (MUSIC FADES OUT AFTER THE TITLES)

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NARRATOR: IF WE LIVED IN A SHTETL , A JEWISH MARKET
 TOWN IN EASTERN EUROPE PRIOR TO WORLD
 WAR I, WE WOULD PROBABLY BE AWOKEN EACH
 MORNING TO THE SOUND OF THE SHAMES, THE
 SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANT, GOING FROM HOUSE TO
 HOUSE CHANTING AS FOLLOWS:

4

AM KODOYSH, SHTEYF OYF UN GEYT
 LAVOYDES HABOYRE
 KI LEKAKH NOTSARTA
 UTSAY, OD MOSAY TISHKAV!

5

HOLY PEOPLE
 ARISE AND GO TO SERVE THE LORD
 THIS IS WHAT YOU WERE CREATED FOR
 GET UP! HOW LONG CAN YOU LIE THERE?

6

INDEED, THE SHTETL VIEWED ITSELF AS A
 KEHILAT KODESH, A HOLY CONGREGATION, BEARING
 WITNESS TO GOD'S PRESENCE IN EXILE. At
 MOMENT'S NOTICE, THE SHTETL POPULATION WAS READY

7

TO ANSWER THE CALL OF THEIR CHOSENNESS.

8

A TOUR OF THE AVERAGE SHTETL WOULD BEGIN WITH THE BES-MEDRESH, THE HOUSE OF STUDY. THIS WAS THE CENTRAL MEETING GROUND FOR THE ENTIRE JEWISH COMMUNITY. HERE YOU COULD FIND A MINYEN AT ANY TIME OF DAY. HERE THE GRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE SHTETL, THE YESHIVA-BOKHERIM, DID THEIR INDEPENDENT STUDY. HERE A TRAVELER COULD FIND TEMPORARY LODGING. THIS IS WHERE GOVERNMENT DECREES WERE READ ALOUD AND ON THE SABBATH OR A HOLIDAY ONE COULD HEAR A SERMON FROM A WANDERING PREACHER.

9

FROM THE BES-MEDRESH OUR TOUR WOULD TAKE US TO THE MAIN SYNAGOGUE. SOME SHTETLEKH HAD MAGNIFICENT WOODEN SYNAGOGUES DATING BACK TO THE 17th CENTURY OR COULD BOAST OF MASSIVE STONE SYNAGOGUES, BUILT LIKE FORTRESSES, DATING BACK TO THE 15th CENTURY.

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LESS VISIBLE BUT EQUALLY IMPORTANT TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY WERE THE NUMEROUS SHTIBLEKH, THE HASIDIC HOUSES OF PRAYER WHERE THE FOLLOWERS OF THE RIZHINER, KOTSKER, BELZER AND OTHER HASIDIC MASTERS WOULD CONGREGATE.

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ON THE SAME STREET OR AROUND THE CORNER, WE WOULD COME UPON THE HADORIM, THE ELEMENTARY

SCHOOLS WHICH MET, NOT IN A LITTLE BRICK SCHOOL HOUSE, BUT IN THE HOMES OF THE TEACHERS THEMSELVES. BOYS USUALLY BEGAN THEIR STUDIES HERE AT THE AGE OF THREE AND BY THE AGE OF FIVE WERE READY TO CELEBRATE THE KHUMESH-SUDE. THIS CEREMONY, WHICH RIVALED THE BAR MITZVA IN IMPORTANCE, MARKED THE BEGINNING OF THE BOY'S TORAH STUDY. THE CEREMONY WAS REHEARSED, WEEKS IN ADVANCE, AND WENT SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

THE FIVE YEAR-OLD, DRESSED IN HOLIDAY CLOTHES AND WEARING WATCHES AND JEWELRY BORROWED ESPECIALLY FOR THE OCCASION, WAS ASKED TO STAND ON TOP OF A TABLE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM. NEXT TO HIM STOOD TWO BOYS CHOSEN TO ACT AS BENTSHERS, BLESSERS. THEN ALL THE BOYS WERE COVERED WITH A TALES AND THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE ENSUED BETWEEN TEACHER AND PUPIL:

TEACHER: YINGELE, YINGELE, WHAT ARE FATHER AND MOTHER DOING NOW?

BOY: MY FATHER AND MOTHER ARE HAVING A GRAND CELEBRATION NOW.

TEACHER: IS IT BECAUSE YOU ARE BEGINNING TO STUDY THE TORAH THAT YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER ARE MAKING THE GRAND CELEBRATION?

BOY: YES, REBE, THAT IS SO, YOU GUESSED RIGHT.

TEACHER: WOULD YOU FIRST LIKE TO RECITE SOMETHING FROM THE TORAH?

17

BOY: OF COURSE, THAT IS WHAT I WAS CREATED FOR. ALTHOUGH I AM NOT FIT TO RECITE ANY TORAH, EVEN SO, I SHALL SAY A FEW WORDS: TEACHERS AND FRIENDS. WHY DOES THE TORAH START WITH A BEYS, BEREYSHIS, AND NOT WITH AN ALEF? BECAUSE WHEN THE LORD CREATED THE WORLD, HE BLESSED IT TO HAVE PERMANENCE. BEYS STANDS FOR BARUKH, BLESSED AND ALEF STANDS FOR ARUR, CURSED. HAD THE LORD CREATED THE WORLD WITH AN ALEF THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

18

BENTSHERS: BEND YOUR HEAD AND WE WILL BLESS YOU: YOU SHALL HAVE A WIFE WITH TWELVE CURLS AND EACH CURL SHALL CONTAIN THE SANCTITY OF THE TRIBES.

19

- 1) AT THIS POINT THE ASSEMBLED GUESTS SHOUT MAZL TOV
- 2) THE BOYS ON THE TABLE ARE SHOWERED WITH CANDIES AND NUTS
- 3) THEN THEY ALL CLIMB DOWN AND
- 4) CELEBRANT SITS NEXT TO HIS TEACHER IN FRONT OF AN OPEN BIBLE.

20

T: WHAT ARE YOU STUDYING, YINGELE?

BOY: KHUMESH.

T: WHAT DOES KHUMESH MEAN?

BOY: FIVE.

T: FIVE WHAT?

B: FIVE BOOKS IN THE TORAH.

T: WHICH BOOK DO YOU STUDY?

21

B: VAYIKRO.

T: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF VAYIKRO?

B: HE CALLED.

T: WHO CALLED, THE ROOSTER ON TOP OF THE STOVE?

B: NO, GOD CALLED TO MOSES, TO TELL HIM THE LAW OF SACRIFICES.

22 T: WHAT IS THE LAW OF SACRIFICES?

B: A LAMB THAT HAS A BLEMISH IS NOT TO BE SACRIFICED ON THE ALTAR.

T: WHAT IS A BLEMISH?

B: A LAMB WITH A BLIND EYE OR A BROKEN LEG, IS SAID TO HAVE A BLEMISH.

T: AND A LAMB WITH A BLIND FOOT OR A BROKEN EYE, IS THAT A BLEMISH?

B: NO.

23 OTHER SHTETL INSTITUTIONS THAT PRESERVED THE INTIMATE BOND BETWEEN JEW/GOD:

- A) MIKVEH - RITUAL BATH
- B) CEMETARY

24 ∴ SHTETL JEWS, IN THEIR INSTITUTIONS, DID IN FACT SANCTIFY JEWISH LIFE IN EXILE.

ONLY HASIDIM DEVELOPED THIS INTO A CONSISTENT THEOLOGY.

25

SONG OF THE KOTSKER HASIDIM:

YOU DON'T RIDE TO KOTSK

YOU GO ON FOOT.

BECAUSE KOTSK IS IN PLACE OF THE TEMPLE.

YOU HAVE TO MAKE A PILGRIMAGE TO KOTSK.

26

KEYN KOTSK FORT MEN NISHT.

KEYN KOTSK GEYT MEN

27

VAYL KOTSK IZ DOKH BIMKOYM HAMIKDESH (2)

KEYN KOTSK DARF MEN OYLE REGL ZAYN.

28

REGL IZ DOKH DER TAYTSH A FUS

KEYN KOTSK DARF MEN GEYEN TSU FUS.

ZINGENDIK UN TANTSNDIK.

29

UN AZ KHSIDIM GEYEN KAYN KOTSK)

) 2x

GEYT MEN MIT A TANTS.)

30

(WHAT IS THE MEANING OF PILGRIMAGE?

PILGRIMAGE MEANS TO GO ON FOOT. SINGING AND

DANCING. BECAUSE WHEN HASIDIM GO TO KOTSK, THEY

DANCE ALL THE WAY THERE.)

* * * * *

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IF THIS IS FACT, HOW CAN WE RECONCILE IT

WITH THE IMAGE OF THE SHTETL IN YIDDISH FICTION?

FOR HERE WE HAVE I.L. PERETZ TRAVELING

AROUND ON A STATISTICAL EXPEDITION IN THE SAME

LUBLIN PROVINCE OF POLAND WHERE KOTSK IS
LOCATED. THE YEAR IS 1890.

32

WHILE TRAVELING THROUGH THE PROVINCE TO
TAKE A JEWISH CENSUS, I ONCE SAW A JEW STUMBLING
PAINFULLY ACROSS THE THICK SAND. HE SEEMED TO
BE SICK; HE COULD HARDLY DRAG ONE FOOT AFTER THE
OTHER. TAKING PITY , I ASKED HIM INTO MY COACH.
THE JEW CLIMBED UP, GREETED ME WITH SHOLOM
ALEICHEM, AND BEGAN ASKING AFTER ALL THE LATEST
NEWS.

I ANSWERED, AND ENDED WITH A QUESTION. "AND
WHERE ARE YOU FROM?"

"FROM THE DEAD TOWN," HE MURMURED.

I THOUGHT HE WAS JOKING. "AND WHERE IS THIS
DEAD TOWN? ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON?"

"NO," HE SAID, SMILING, "IT'S RIGHT HERE,
IN POLAND."

"A DEAD TOWN IN POLAND?"

"OF COURSE. THE GENTILES DON'T KNOW IT
AND HAVE NEVER GIVEN IT A NAME, BUT IT'S HERE.
A JEWISH TOWN, AN EMINENTLY JEWISH TOWN."

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INTERVIEW CONTINUES:

AN INTELECTUAL LIFE COMPLETELY DIVORCED FROM REALITY:

OUR LOCAL RABBI EXCHANGES LETTERS WITH THE
WISE MEN OF THE WORLD. BACK AND FORTH FLY

8

34

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS CONCERNING THE MOST VITAL PROBLEMS OF LIFE: EVERYTHING IS TAKEN CARE OF. NOT LONG AGO, FOR EXAMPLE, A GRASS WIDOW WAS RELIEVED OF HER MARRIAGE TIES, THOUGH IT HAPPENS SHE HAD ALREADY LIVED MOST OF HER LIFE IN LONELINESS. WELL, TO BE SURE, THE IMPORTANT THING WASN'T THE GRASS WIDOW BUT THE IDEA OF THE GRASS WIDOW, THE PLEASURE OF THE DIALECTIC.

35

LIKE JERUSALEM - THE TOWN DESCRIBED AS AN AGUNAH, ABANDONED WIFE.

REMNANTS OF GRAND HISTORIC PAST OF POLISH JEWRY:

WE HAVE A SYNAGOGUE. ONCE, THEY SAY, THERE WERE PAINTINGS OF THE BEASTS AND BIRDS ON THE WALLS. ON THE CEILING WERE PICTURES OF ALL THE INSTRUMENTS KING DAVID PLAYED. OF COURSE I NEVER SAW THEM, BUT THE OLD PEOPLE TALK ABOUT IT."

36

"AND NOW?"

"NOW? DUST AND COBWEBS. A WOODEN CHAIN, CARVED OUT OF ONE PIECE, STILL HANGS FROM THE CEILING, FALLING, CHARMINGLY, TO ONE SIDE OF THE HOLY ARK. NO ONE REMEMBERS WHO MADE THE CHAIN, BUT IT MUST HAVE BEEN A MASTER. A REMARKABLE CHAIN!

37

IS PERETZ LYING? WHY IS HE OUT TO DESTROY THE IMAGE OF THE SHTETL IN WHICH THE INSTITUTIONS OF PRAYER AND LEARNING NO LONGER PRESERVE THE BOND OF JEW/GOD?

PERHAPS THE ANSWER LIES IN THE STRUCTURE OF SHTETL SOCIETY?

38

HOW THE SHTETL WAS RUN: THE THREE K'S:

KAHAL: ELECTED BODY OF JEWISH FUNCTIONARIES

KLEY-KOYDESH (THE HOLY VESSELS): RABBI, KHAZN, SHAMES.

39

KHEVRE: VOLUNTARY SOCIETIES (GRASS ROOTS)

GMILES KHASODIM/FREE LOAN

HAKHNOSES KALE/PROVIDING FOR THE BRIDE

KHEVRE KADISHE/BURIAL SOCIETY - MOST

POWERFUL OF ALL

WORKERS' ASSOCIATION: TAILOR, COBBLERS.

40

41

HOW SOCIAL ORDER WAS MAINTAINED

1) FOR MEMBERS OF KHEVRE: TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT EXPULSION.

2) PENALTIES IMPOSED BY KAHAL

42

A) NO HONORS IN SHUL

B) NO PARTICIPATION IN TOWN CELEBRATIONS

C) NO ONE ALLOWED TO RENT CRIMINAL APARTMENT OR STORE.

D) WOMAN OR CRIMINAL'S WIFE - CANNOT USE

43

RITUAL BATH

- E) NO ONE WILL GIVE HIM WORK
- F) NO MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENTS WITH HIS FAMILY
- G) NO ONE WILL SELL HIM KOSHER MEAT
- H) HIS CHILDREN CAN BE EXPELLED FROM HEDER
- I) MUST PAY MORE TAXES

44

45

MORE SUBTLE, LESS COERCIVE FORM OF SOCIAL CONTROL:

FEAR OF AYNORE

DETERRENT AGAINST CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

EXAMPLE: WON'T DRIVE YOUR FANCY CADILLAC TO SHUL.

46

SHTETL: RIGID MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

POSITION/STANDING GOVERNED BY

- 1) TALMUDIC LEARNING
- 2) WEALTH
- 3) YIKHES, INHERITED STATUS

47

SO STATIC, THAT ALMOST EVERYONE HAD A NICKNAME THAT STUCK WITH HIM/HER FOR LIFE.

A MEMOIR FROM LITHUANIA IN THE 1920's:

48

"SHOLEM THE JACKET" - A SMALL JEW WHO WALKED AROUND IN A COTTON JACKET. HE WAS IN HIS SEVENTIES, BUT YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE CALLED HIM BY THAT NAME. HE WOULDN'T EVEN GET INSULTED ANYMORE.

49

A GROUP OF BROTHERS ALL HAD LONG NOSES. ON ANY COMMUNITY MATTER THEY ALWAYS SUPPORTED EACH

50

11
OTHER TO THE BITTER END. "OH, THE NOSES,"
PEOPLE WOULD SAY AND IT WAS OBVIOUS WHOM THEY
MEANT.

51
"KAISER" WAS A POOR JEWISH PEDDLER WHO WAS
CROSS-EYED. HE HAD A "CUNNING STERN LOOK."
ACCORDING TO SHTETL NOTIONS, ONLY A KING LOOKED
THAT WAY. HIS SON WAS CALLED "THE SUCCESSOR,"
HIS WIFE WAS "HER ROYAL HIGHNESS," AND HIS
DAUGHTER, "LITTLE PRINCESS." EVEN GOYIM CALLED
HIM "KING."

52
THE FAVORITE VICTIMS WERE SONS-IN-LAW WHO
WERE BEING SUPPORTED BY THEIR WIVES' PARENTS.
A MERE REMARK ON THE PARENTS' PART COULD STICK
WITH THE YOUNG MAN FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE.
A FATHER BOASTED THAT HE HAD FINALLY FOUND A
GROOM, A REAL "WINNER." THUS THE SON-IN-LAW WAS
CALLED "THE WINNER" FOREVER AFTER.

53
"PROFESSOR" WAS THE NAME GIVEN TO A SON-IN-
LAW WHO WORE GLASSES. A QUIET FELLOW WHO WASN'T
QUITE MATURE YET- WAS KNOWN AS "THE LITTLE DONKEY."
SOMEONE ELSE, WHO KEPT ^{HIS} MOUTH OPEN MORE THAN WAS
NECESSARY WAS NAMED "THE CROW."

54
THE SHTETL KNEW THE MOST INTIMATE SECRETS OF
EVERYONE'S LIFE. ONE POOR FELLOW HAD THE MIS-
FORTUNE TO BECOME THE FATHER OF A SON THREE MONTHS
AFTER HIS MARRIAGE. THAT EARNED HIM THE NICKNAME
OF "THE HERO."

55

INTRA-SHTETL NICKNAMES

ZAMOSHTSH BIRTHPLACE OF PERETZ HATED AND
FEARED BY TRADITION-MINDED JEWS FOR BEING A
CENTER OF ENLIGHTENMENT

NUMERICAL VALUE γ-ϖ-γ-ד-י = 443 =

APIKOYRES (APOSTATE) → ZAMOSHTSHER FRESE

56

PORISOV = PARAH SOF (COW'S END) - PORISOVER
VEYDLEN.

JUST AS EVERY PERSON HAD HIS/HER PLACE IN
SHTETL SOCIETY SO EACH SHTETL HAD ITS PLACE IN
JEWISH GEOGRAPHY.

THIS SEEMS TO SUGGEST A PERFECTLY STATIC,
UNCHANGING, STABLE SOCIETY

57

BACK TO PERETZ:

"DO YOU HAVE MANY DISPUTES?"

"AS LONG AS MEN LIVE. . . . BUT IN THE
CEMETARY THERE IS PEACE. ONE BURIAL PLACE FOR
EVERYONE. AND WE ALSO OBSERVE EQUALITY IN THE
RITUAL BATHS."

"WHAT ELSE DO YOU HAVE?"

"WHAT ELSE DO WE NEED? ONCE WE HAD A HOSTEL
FOR TRAVELERS BUT GAVE IT UP. TRAVELERS CAN
SLEEP IN THE HOUSE OF STUDY - IT'S EMPTY AT NIGHT
WE ALSO HAVE A PLACE FOR THE SICK."

"YOU MEAN A HOSPITAL?"

58

"NO, NOT A HOSPITAL. JUST A HUT WITH TWO ROOMS. IT USED TO BE THE HOUSE OF THE RITUAL-BATH ATTENDANT, BUT THEN THE TOWN DECIDED THAT THE ATTENDANT WOULD BE SATISFIED WITH ONE ROOM AND THE OTHER COULD BE USED FOR THE SICK. BESIDES, NO MORE THAN THREE SICK WOMEN STAY THERE. ONE IS AN OLD CRONE WITH PARALYZED LEGS, BEDRIDDEN FOREVER. ANOTHER'S LEGS AND ARMS ARE PARALYZED. AND THE THIRD IS AN INSANE GRASS WIDOW. THE BEDS OCCUPY THREE OF THE CORNERS AND A STOVE FILLS THE FOURTH. IN THE MIDDLE WE HAVE A LITTLE MORGUE, JUST IN CASE - "

59

THE GRUESOME DETAILS KEEP PILING UP. WHEN THE NARRATOR ASKS HIM ABOUT COMMERCE IN THE TOWN, THE JEW REPLIES:

"WE EXPORT PHYLACTERIES AND IMPORT LITTLE SACKS OF HOLY EARTH FROM PALESTINE. BUT THAT ISN'T THE MAIN THING. THE MAIN THING IS THE COMMERCE WITHIN THE TOWN. TAVERNS, GUEST HOUSES, OLD CLOTHES - THAT'S THE WAY WE JEWS GET ALONG."

"A PAUPER LIVES ON HOPE; A MERCHANT ON AIR; AND THE MAN WHO WORKS THE SOIL - THE GRAVEDIGGER I MEAN - HE NEVER LACKS."

60

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY LIMITED TO ITEMS OF NO COMMERCIAL VALUE TRADE - PURELY INTERNAL.

EVERYWHERE YOU TURN: DEATH, GRASS WIDOWS, CEMETARIES.

AGAIN: THE COMMUNAL, COMMERCIAL, CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS

DON'T FURTHER THE CLOSE INTERACTION OF JEW/JEW BUT ARE ALL INSTRUMENTS OF DOOM.

61

3rd PARTNER IN THE TRIAD: THE GENTILE

SHTETL JEW PRECARIOUSLY LOCATED BETWEEN:

- 1) LANDOWNER/PEASANT
- 2) CITY/VILLAGE
- 3) POLISH ROMAN CATHOLICS/UKRAINIAN GREEK ORTHODOX

62

MADE HIMSELF INDISPENSABLE TO ALL/CRYSTAL OF TRADITIONAL LIFESTYLE -- SATURATED SOLUTION OF GOYISHNESS. NOT ISOLATION FROM CHRISTIAN WORLD.

63

INSULATION FROM CHRISTIANITY LEHAVDL SYSTEM TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THE TWO/DOUBLE VOCABULARY.

64

CEMETARY:	DOS GUTE ORT, BESOYLEM, BESAKVORES	TSVINTER
COFFIN:	ORN	TRUNE
HOLIDAY	YONTEF	KHOGE
NEIGHBORHOOD	YIDISHE GAS (JEWISH STREET)	MOKEM (PLACE)

65

2 WORLDS MET ON MARKET DAY

66

JEWS - INDISPENSABLE TO EVERY FACET OF ECONOMY ALMOST ENTIRE MC; JEW MONOPOLY IN ESSENTIAL AREAS

67

- 1) TAILORING MAN/WOMAN
- 2) LEATHER WORK
- 3) LUMBER TRADE

68

4) DRY GOODS, IRON GOODS, SMUGGLING

69 5) * DISPENSING VODKA

ONLY 10% OF JEW LABOR FORCE SERVICED JEWS EXCLUSIVELY

- 70
- 1) RABBIS, TEACHERS, RITUAL SLAUGHTERERS
 - 2) BATHHOUSE KEEPERS, SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANTS,
MATCHMAKERS.

71 NO REAL SOCIAL INTERACTION - PURELY FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

- 1) IN MARKET PLACE
- 2) TAVERN
- 3) HOME: DOMESTIC HELP, SHABES-GOY.

72 NO ECUMENICISM, THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

73 JEWS = CHRIST KILLERS

GENTILES = IDOL WORSHIPERS

74 INSTEAD: SIGNIFICANT CROSS-FERTILIZATION

FOLK RELIGION, POPULAR BELIEFS, STORIES, SONGS,
DANCES.

HASIDIM - SAME PEOPLE WHO SANCTIFIED EXILE - DISCOVERED
HIDDEN SECRETS IN PEASANT SONGS

75 OH YOU FOOLISH MARK.

WHY TRAVEL TO THE FAIR?

YOU DON'T BUY, YOU DON'T SELL

YOU ONLY MAKE TROUBLE.

76 MARK = YETSER HORE (MAN'S PASSION FOR EVIL)

FAIR = WORLD OF MATERIAL PLEASURES

CUSTOMER = JEW

MERCHANT GOD

TO HIGHLIGHT THIS HIDDEN MESSAGE, A PASSAGE FROM PSALMS:

MY SOUL THIRSTS FOR YOU
MY FLESH LONGS FOR YOU.

i.e. ALL THIS ENERGY FOR EVIL AND PLEASURE SHOULD BE
CHANNELED INTO THE LOVE OF GOD.

TSOMA (5) LEKHO NAFSHI
KOMA (5) LEKHO BESORI.
EKH TI DURAN MARKU
SHTO TI YEDYESH NA YARMARKU.
NYE KUPLAYESH, NYE PRODAYESH
TOLKO ROBISH SVARKU.

* * * * *

NOW, COMING BACK TO PERETZ

SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO SAY ABOUT JEW/GENTILE
HERE LIES THE KEY TO HIS BLEAK, DEPRESSING PORTRAIT
OF JEW/GOD JEW/JEW

(MUSIC)

LIKE SO MANY TOWNS IN EASTERN EUROPE
TSHEKHANOVKA BELONGED TO THE LOCAL SQUIRE.
CENTURIES AGO, WHEN POLAND WAS EXPANDING, THE
JEWS WERE INVITED TO SETTLE THESE TOWNS AND
WERE PERMITTED TO ENGAGE IN COMMERCE.
IN RETURN FOR PRIVILEGE/PROTECTION - TAXES AND
OTHER FORMS OF PAYMENT TO THE SQUIRE.
IN THE CASE OF TSHEKHANOVKA, THE CHARTER WAS
NEVER GRANTED. THE MESSENGER WHO WAS SENT TO

77

78

79

80

PAY FOR THE CHARTER RAN OFF WITH THE MONEY AND THE COMMUNITY WAS TOO POOR TO RAISE THE FUNDS ANEW. CULTIVATED A SINGLE RICH FAMILY IN TOWN, BUT IT TOO EVENTUALLY WENT BANKRUPT. MEANWHILE THE TOWN WAS GROWING AND STILL NO OFFICIAL RIGHT TO EXIST. THE ONLY WAY TO RAISE THE NECESSARY CAPITAL: TO AUCTION OFF THE ENTIRE TOWN AND BUY IT BACK AGAIN!

IF THIS SOUNDS OUTLANDISH, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IS EVEN MORE UNBELIEVABLE. NO SOONER DOES THE BIALIFF SET FOOT ON THE CEMETARY AND BEGIN TO AUCTION IT OFF, THEN THE DEAD RISE FROM THEIR GRAVES IN PROTEST! THEY RETURN TO TOWN AND SOON THE DEAD OUTNUMBER THE LIVING. SOON THERE'S NOT ENOUGH FOOD TO GO AROUND, AND THE LIVING BEGIN TO DIE OFF FROM HUNGER.

(MUSIC FADES OUT)

[81] AN ALLEGORY WITH AN UNMISTAKABLE MESSAGE:
SINCE JEWISH LIFE IS UNTENABLE
THEREFORE SHTETL SOCIETY = DEAD TOWN IN WHICH
PEOPLE HAVE LOST THE WILL TO LIVE.

[82] SINCE NO ONE IN OUR TOWN HAD REALLY LIVED,
HARDLY ANYONE REALLY DIED. NEITHER GOOD NOR EVIL,
NEITHER SINNERS NOR SAINTS! ONLY DAYDREAMERS IN A
WORLD OF ILLUSION! AND WHEN SUCH A DAYDREAMER

ENTERS THE GRAVE HE REMAINS A DAYDREAMER; ALL
THAT HAS CHANGED IS HIS LODGING, NOTHING ELSE.

* * * * *

83] SHTETL ENTERS INTO LITERATURE AT THE VERY
MOMENT WHEN IT IS BEGINNING TO FALL APART
WRACKED BY DISSENSION FROM WITHIN
THREATENED BY FORCES FROM WITHOUT.

TWO RULES OF SHTETL FICTION:

- 84] 1) WRITERS THEMSELVES ALL RENEGADES FROM TRADITION
NAL SOCIETY IN LARGE URBAN CENTERS: WARSAW,
ODESSA, NY.
- 2) SHTETL THEY PORTRAY IS AN IMAGE, LITERARY
CONSTRUCT/THE SHTETL OF FICTION IS NOT THE
SHTETL IN FACT.

FOR PERETZ: SHTETL = SYMBOL OF JEW VULNERABILITY AND INTERNATIONAL
DECAY.

85] FOR THE OPPOSITE IMAGE SHOLEM ALEICHEM (PERETZ'S CONTEMPORARY
(DREYFUS IN KASRILEVKE) ADDRESSES THE SAME PROBLEM:
CONFRONTATION OF JEW/GENTILE ARRIVES AT OPP. CONCLUSION.

86] I WONDER IF THE DREYFUS AFFAIR MADE SUCH
AN IMPRESSION ANYWHERE IN THE WHOLE WORLD AS IT
DID IN KASRILEVKE.

PARIS, THEY TELL ME, BOILED LIKE WATER IN
AN OVERHEATED KETTLE. NEWSPAPERS WROTE, GENERALS
SHOT THEMSELVES, FRENCHMEN RAN ABOUT THE STREETS

87

LIKE CRAZY PEOPLE, THROWING THEIR HATS IN THE AIR. ONE FRENCHMAN SCREAMED, "LONG LIVE DRYFUS!" ANOTHER SCREAMED, "LONG LIVE ESTERHAZY!" AND ^{AS} FOR [^] THE JEWS, WHILE ALL THIS WAS GOING ON, THEY WERE SMEARED WITH MUD BY EVERYONE, EXACTLY AS USUAL. BUT THE AGONY, THE PAIN AND DESPAIR THAT KASRILEVKE LIVED THROUGH FROM ALL THIS, THAT, I TELL YOU, PARIS WILL NEVER MATCH, NOT UNTIL THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH.

HOW, IN KASRILEVKE, DID THEY EVER FIND OUT ABOUT DREYFUS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

FROM ZEYDL.

88

ZEYDL REB SHAYE'S IS THE ONLY ONE IN TOWN WHO SUBSCRIBES TO THE HEBREW HAZEFIRAH AND EVERYTHING THAT GOES ON IN THE GREAT WORLD OUTSIDE THEY DISCOVER FROM HIM. THAT IS, NOT FROM HIM BUT, TRUTHFULLY, THROUGH HIM. HE READS TO THEM AND THEY TRANSLATE. HE RELATES THE FACTS AND THEY INTERPRET THE CORRECT MEANING. HE GIVES THEM EXACTLY WHAT IS IN THE NEWSPAPER AND THEY OFTEN GIVE HIS WORDS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE MEANING. WHY? BECAUSE THEY UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING BETTER.

89

KASRILEVKA -

- 1) UNTOUCHED BY INDUSTRIALIZATION. ONLY MAN WHO READS A NEWSPAPER-IN HEBREW!
- 2) JEWISH MINI-EMPIRE LIVE IN PERFECT HARMONY

WITH EACH OTHER.

FIRST REACTION TO NEWS ABOUT DRYFUS - SCEPTICISM AND SCORN

[90] BUT LATER ON, WHEN ZAIDLE CAME AGAIN TO THE SYNAGOGUE AND TOLD THEM A WHOLE NEW STORY, THAT IT WAS ALL A FALSEHOOD, THAT THE JEWISH CAPTAIN, DRYFUS, THE ONE WHO HAD BEEN IMPRISONED, WAS THE SOUL OF INNOCENCE, AND THE WHOLE BUSINESS WAS JUST A PLOT OF A BUNCH OF GENERALS WHO WERE FIGHTING ONE ANOTHER, THEN THE ENTIRE SHITETL INSTANTLY TOOK DREYFUS TO HEART. HE BECAME ONE OF THEIRS, A KASRILEVKA.

KASRELEVKA = JEWISH PEOPLE IN MINATURE

[91] HOWEVER SAMLL AND ISOLATED, K.ARE ABLE TO REDUCE ALL EVENTS TO MANAGEABLE SIZE/BRIEFLY TO BRUSH UP ON OUR HISTORY:

DREYFUS STOOD TRIAL IN 1894 - CONVICTED OF TREASON IMPRISONED ON DEVIL'S ISLAND/1899: FRAMEUP EXPOSED ZOLA'S J¹ACCUSE, RETRIAL CALLED = TIME OUR STORY TAKES PLACE.

TENSION MOUNTS AS DREYFUS SETS OUT FROM DEVIL'S ISLAND FOR PARIS:

[92] ON THE GREAT DAY WHEN THE NEWS CAME THAT DREYFUS HAD ARRIVED SAFELY OVER THE OCEAN, KASRILEVKE DECALRED A FEAST DAY. AND IF THEY HADN'T BEEN ASHAMED TO, THEY'D HAVE CLOSED DOWN

ALL THEIR BUSINESSES.

FINALLY, TRIAL BEGINS § POOR ZEYDL IS BELEAGUERED EACH DAY BY ENTIRE SHTETL POPULATION FOR LATEST DEVELOPMENTS. AT LONG LAST, DAY OF FINAL VERDICT ARRIVES:

[93] WHEN YARMO, THE JANITOR, UNLOCKED THE GATES OF THE POST OFFICE THEY ALL RUSHED INSIDE AT ONCE. YARMO BECAME VERY ANGRY - HE'D SHOW THEM WHO WAS THE BOSS HERE - AND HE DROVE THEM, WITH CURSES AND INSULTS, OUT INTO THE STREET. AND THERE IN THE STREET THEY WAITED AND WAITED FOR ZAIDLE TO MAKE HIS APPEARANCE. AND WHEN AT LAST ZAIDLE APPEARED, AND WHEN AT LAST HE PICKED UP THE PAPER AND READ ALOUD TO THEM THAT NICE PASSAGE ABOUT DREYFUS, THERE AROSE SUCH A ROAR, SUCH A PROTEST, THAT THE VERY HEAVENS MUST HAVE SPLIT. AND THIS PROTEST WAS NOT AGAINST THE JUDGE WHO HAD JUDGED SO BADLY; IT WAS NOT AGAINST THE GENERALS WHO HAD SWORN SO FALSELY NOR AGAINST THE FRENCHMEN WHO HAD COVERED THEMSELVES WITH SO MUCH SHAME. NO, THIS PROTEST WAS AGAINST ZAIDLE, WHO READ TO THEM

[94] "IT CAN'T BE!" KASRILEVKE SCREAMED WITH ONE VOICE. "IT CAN'T BE! THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH HAVE PROMISED THAT THE TRUTH MUST ALWAYS COME OUT ON TOP, JUST AS OIL COMES TO THE TOP OF WATER!

WHAT WILL YOU TELL US NEXT? WHAT LIES? WHAT STORIES?"

"IDIOTS!" SHOUTED POOR ZAIDLE WITH ALL THE STRENGTH OF HIS LUNGS, AND HE PUSHED THE NEWS-PAPER RIGHT INTO THEIR FACES. "HERE! SEE WHAT IT SAYS HERE IN THE PAPER!"

"PAPER" CRIED KASRILEVKE. "PAPER! AND IF YOU STOOD HERE WITH ONE FOOT IN HEAVEN AND ONE FOOT ON EARTH WE STILL WOULDN'T BELIEVE YOU. SUCH THINGS CANNOT BE! NO, THIS CANNOT BE! IT CANNOT BE! IT CANNOT BE!"

WELL, AND WHO WAS RIGHT?

95

ORIGINAL VERSION, WRITTEN IN 1902, ENDED:

"AND SO IT REMAINED UNTIL THIS VERY DAY."

BUT TRUTH WAS STRANGER THAN FICTION AND DREYFUS WAS EXONERATED IN 1906. TO EXPLOIT OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FINAL OUTCOME, S.A. CHANGED THE ENDING.

DOUBLE IRONY:

1) ACTUALLY ZEYDL IS RIGHT BUT K. ARE MORAL VICTORS.

2) REALITY ALSO ON THEIR SIDE. ZEYDLE IS DOUBLY WRONG.

HIS TRUTH, BASED ON EMPIRICAL FACTS ALONE, ON MERE NEWSPAPER REPORTS, IS SEEN TO BE LACKING AS COMPARED TO THE ULTIMATE TRUTH PROCLAIMED BY THE NAIVE AND FAITHFUL JEWS OF K.

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SO WHO WAS RIGHT: PERETZ OR S.A.?

BOTH WROTE ABOUT SHTETL IN ITS TIME OF CRISIS,
BOTH USED IT AS A SYMBOL FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE.
S.A. USED THE SHTETL OF K. IN ORDER TO REAFFIRM
THE BOND BETWEEN JEW/GOD AND TO OFFER HIS HOPE
THAT WE SHALL PREVAIL IN THE END.

THE KEHILAT KODESH LIVES BY ITS FAITH.

IT'S STRENGTH = COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY.

ALL OF K. VS. ZEYDL.

AGGRESSION IS CHANNLED INTO LANGUAGE, NOT INTO
ACTION. AS FOR PERETZ, THE SHTETL REPRESENTS
THE COLLAPSE OF ALL STRUCTURES, VALUES.

JEW/GOD: LEARNING, WORSHIP

JEW/JEW: DISPUTES, DEATH

JEW/GENTILE: DELICATE BALANCE IS BROKEN AS
JEWES EXIST ON BRINK OF
DESTRUCTION,

97

(MUSIC: ELI ATO)

NARRATOR PAUSES.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD CONFIRMS PERETZ'S NIGHTMARE.
THE SHTETL WAS DESTROYED IN EVER-GROWING WAVES OF
VIOLENCE.

98

- 1) POGROMS OF 1905-06
- 2) W.W. I - GALICIA, POLAND
- 3) CIVIL WAR - UKRAINIAN POGROMS
- 4) HOLOCAUST

[99]

THE SHTETL SHEL MATA, SHTETL ON EARTH, IS
SURELY GONE. PERHAPS THE SHTETL SHEL MAALAH,
THE CELESTIAL SHTETL, WITH ITS UNSWERVING FAITH,
LIVES ON WITHIN EACH OF US.

(FINAL CREDITS)