

**SLICES OF SHTETL LIFE**



**ONE OF MY FATHER'S FAVORITE STORIES FROM THE OLD COUNTRY. (A STORY THAT YEARS LATER BECAME A WHIMSICAL CHILDREN'S BOOK RETOLD (a little differently) AND ILLUSTRATED BY ONE OF MY FAVORITE ARTISTS, MARGOT ZEMACH)**

A man lived in a crowded one room house, and his brother in law moved in with his family.

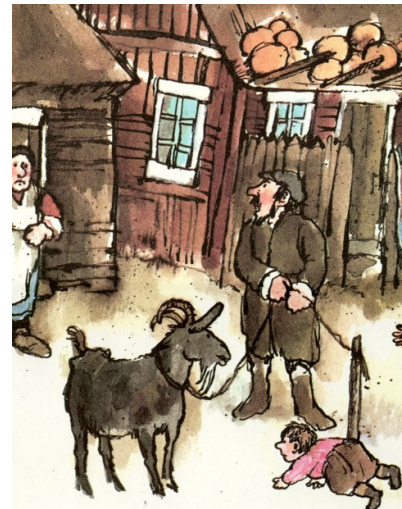
It was too crowded. Life was

difficult. He went to the rabbi and complained.

**“WHAT SHOULD I DO?”**



**The Rabbi told him to bring the goat in the house, and he**



**did.**

**It didn't help and he came back to the rabbi and complained.**



**The rabbi told him to bring the cow in the house.**

**He did as the rabbi suggested. He brought the cow in.**

When that didn't work told him to bring the chickens in the house. He did as the rabbi suggested. He brought the geese and chickens in. His life did NOT get better.



He went back to the rabbi. The house was noisy, smelly, awful. What can I do now? The rabbi thought for a minute. Then came up with a solution. He told the man to take all the animals out of the house.

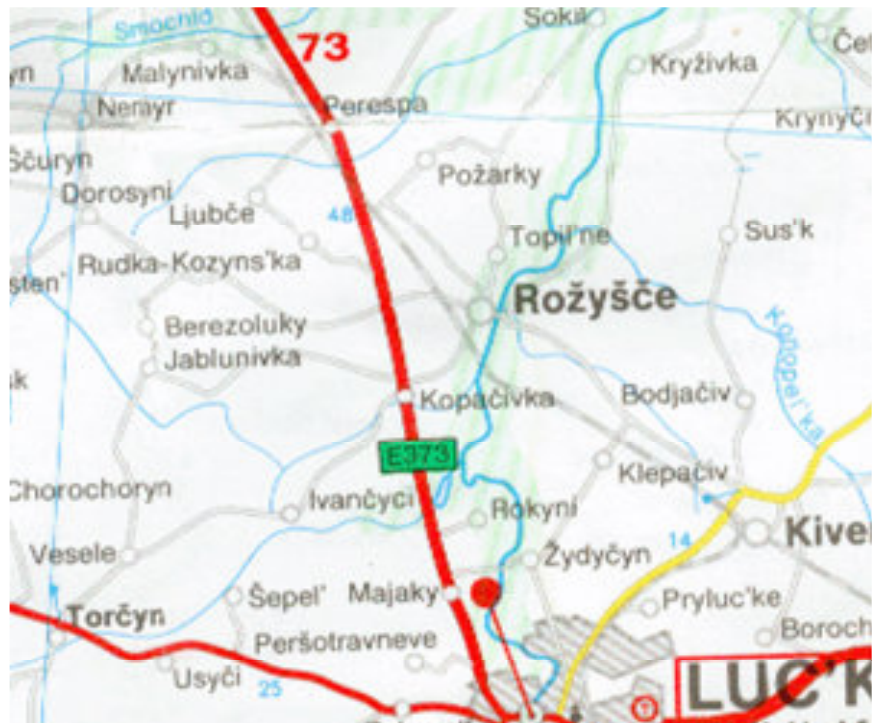


The man did as he was told. A day later he went back to the Rabbi. This time he was happy. Now that the chickens were out of the house things were *much better*.





In 1921 Ruchel's daughter Leika was married in Rozyse North of Torcyn. Leika's mother was Ruchel, Schlomo Moshes sister. Ruchel was **not** in the formal portrait that survived. Ruchel was the mother of Leika, Zev (Ahouvia's father) Raizel, Beila, and of course the bride Leika. Shlomo's older sister Leya was in the picture. She was accompanied by her son, Rafuul, a bricklayer. Chia Kaila came with her daughters Surca and Fay. Leika's sister Raisel



was not in the picture, but Raisel's son Yonkel posed for the picture.  
 Back row: Yonkel(Raisels son) The Groom. Leika (Zev Ehrlich's sister) Surca  
 Front Row: Fay Chia Kaila Leya (Shlomo's older sister) Rafuul, her son, the brick layer  
 (Rafuul was Rifka (Misha's mother's) 2<sup>nd</sup> husband

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**Itzhak Olenick (Landsmann):** Nussan Tessler had a daughter, Pinsia. Every year she gave birth to a child. Her husband didn't know what to do. He wasn't too intelligent. The rabbi told him to behave himself, but that didn't help. So one day he came home from the big shook. It was raining. Terrible. His wife was giving birth. His pants were wet. The midwife was helping.

The husband hung up his trousers on a chair.

His wife said take away the angel of death from my eyes. She said that's the one that gave me the trouble. The pants.

One Jews said: when I go to the market and sell a horse and I come home I would kill all the Communists. I'm a Capitalist.

When I go to the same market and I don't sell a horse and I come home I'm a Communist.

When he fought with his wife he used to curse her by saying your name should be in a carriage (baby carriage) i.e. you should die and have a baby named after you.

He said one Jew likes to follow another. When one Jew has to go to the bathroom, they all have to go. He used to curse a fellow Jew by saying: that Jew is so crooked he can steal the Tephillin from the Ukrainian Priest.

Every Jew had a nick name. Aaron the shamus was called Aaron Beregees. Beregees ... watch out. He had a blind horse. When he drove the horse he yelled "Beregees. Beregees."

Then there was Yossel Malech Hamovetz (angel of death). He had big eyebrows. He made a bet with Simcha the grave digger. He said when I go to the cemetery I don't worry about anything.

In Torchin they believed that when someone dies you can't leave the body until it is buried. But in addition there was a superstition against digging a grave and leaving it empty.

One day someone died. Simcha dug a hole in the ground and they couldn't bury the body because of bad weather or something. Someone had to spend the night in the grave. Yossef bet Simcha, the grave digger, that he wasn't afraid to stay in the grave overnight.

He went to the cemetery that night, climbed in the grave, and went to sleep.

After he was asleep, Simcha fastened Yossel's Kapote (coat) To the bottom of the hole with a wedge (flatten). Then he climbed out of the grave.

Later in the middle of the night Simcha called to Yossel.. He said "Hey big shot. You said you aren't afraid. This is the voice of so and so. You're stuck. Try to move.



And when Yossel tried to sit up he couldn't. And he was scared. Simcha caught Yossel. The next day and said I played a dirty trick on you.

Eta the Gabeta used to guard the cemetery. From Rosh Hodesh Elul until Rosh Hashanah was harvest time for her. Why? That month people used to visit the cemetery. And who had

money for a stone for the grave? So they would ask Eta, "Where is my father? My sister?"

She came with a stick, hit on the grave and said "Chia, this is Eta the gabetza. I talk to you. Your son talks to me. You talk to God" Sometimes she knocked on a stranger's grave. She didn't know. She got lost. She was kosher, honest.

Then there was Stalya's son-in-law David. He was a carpenter, a plain Jew. When he prayed his melodies came from his soul. Even the laughter was full of tears.

Pinhas the Tova never finished a sentence. He used to say de fah instead of fastash.

Haska Chaim Mottels sold grain. I used to work for him summers.

Once Haska was driving to Harochon on two horses, spakas, white with a touch of black. He saw Pinchas was going down with a basket to buy butter or eggs. He said Pinchas sit down, I'll give you a ride.

Pinchas said: I don't have time. I have to go.

Haska saw Pinchas on Shabbos and said Rav Pinchas, why didn't you ride with me?

Pinchas said, OK. Next time I'll ride.

The next time he saw Pinchas walking with a heavy bag. Pinchas had been shopping.

Haska said do you want a ride?

Pinchas got in but left his bag by the road.

He asked Pinchas, "Why did you leave your bag?"

Pinchas said "It's enough that you give me a ride. I can't ask you to give my bag a ride too"







Misha: It's remarkable poverty. Now, I lived in a house; and this is already by the grace of the Fredmans that sent us some money. My mother remarried. The Fredmans were already in

the United States, and we were there, so we bought a little house from a farmer. It had a thatched roof, and there was no floor; just a dirt floor; and every Friday morning my mother used to take red paint and clay and paint the floor. The dirt is hard. And you take clay with a little water, and red paint, and just paint it. And you go from one end, you paint yourself into a corner; and get out through the door; and it dries. And we had a Shabbadiche house. And then you bake a challah, if you're fortunate enough to have money to buy flour; and it smells to high heaven. Oh, there was wood burning ovens that you used to put cholent and close it Friday; and you opened it Saturday morning after you come back from shul. And you had cholent. Friday night, usually there was soup, chicken. Was there hunger? Deprivation mostly. I remember many times we had bread, potatoes, or bread and potatoes. And they used to make some wonderful things out of them. You could make a potato soup; and then take a little flour, and you burn it in a frying pan with some fried onions and put it in a little oil, and you had an excellent soup. And it was filling to eat with some bread. There were eggs.. There was some milk, a quart of milk a day on account of the kids in



the house; and a piece of meat for shabbos. Personally I believe that people that came over from the old country are overweight because there is still, deep down in their subconscious, the feeling of hunger that they suffer from. You denied



yourself the food and you gave it to your child; and this was a distinctive drive for survival. Make them survive! Everything you wanted for your children. You always asked for a better life for your children, and you always tried to push out your children.

And this was the reason the Fredmans went to the United States; one took out the other; because there was a new world, new prospects; new opportunities; there, in Poland, you were doomed to the same type of vegetation for

*RAFUEL 2<sup>ND</sup> HUSBAND*

the rest of your days. You couldn't better yourself. From a small peddler you couldn't get to be an executive in the corporation because you never heard of a corporation. There wasn't such a thing.

Misha: Now Favish was a, thanks let's say to the Fredmans that sent him some money, he was a wealthy man by those standards. He was probably worth \$5000. So in those days, when you had a store it was being wealthy; and he was on all kinds of committees and things like that. He worked from 7 in the morning to 10 at night; no vacation; no compensation. That's what you worked to make ends meet. And some of them didn't. There were charitable organizations that knew couldn't make the quota this week, because Thursday you had to go to town to buy capons, flour, and whatever you needed to make the Shabbos. This is what you lived for all week.

You baked enough bread to last you for a week. So when you baked--you know it was this peasant bread, this real tough, heavy bread. You never ate it the day when you baked it because you could finish off a loaf in one day. You had to wait; you ate the old bread first, and you always had something left. It was always stale. It was more filling. You chewed a lot, you see, and this was the kind of bread I'm talking about.

Misha: Half-broken grain, with the bran, with everything. This pumpernickel here is nothing. I don't know if you remember in South Haven, there was a bakery and there was an old lady, Mrs. Cohen, and she used to bake a bread that baked for about 24-hours. And it was about 20 lbs. And you needed a saw to cut it; and when you took a wedge of bread like this, and a bowl of soup, watery soup, you sat down and you had a meal. Such a meal. I used to send her money and she used to ship me one of the 20 lb breads, and I used to cut them up in slices and take a piece to your father (Manuel), a piece to Uncle Dave, and boy, they enjoyed it so much. Complaining wasn't part of the makeup. It wasn't Baal a batish to complain. You had your lot and you had to be satisfied with your lot. The Book says in Ecclesiastes, "This one is a lucky one who is satisfied with his lot." You have to be satisfied with your lot too. The religion says "Be satisfied with your lot and the good lord will repay you in the other world." It was accepting your life and trying to make the best of it. A non-rebellious attitude towards life, because there are other values that should compensate you. You live a righteous life and you get rewards in heaven. And those who didn't accept it like myself, I was a Zionist, had less religion and more national desire.

Q: Where did you get that?

Misha: We had literature. We had reading. What-else could we do? There was no television; no radio. We knew there was another world; there is an outside world. We read all kinds of newspapers. Not everybody had a newspaper. There were 2 or 3 newspapers in town and they passed them around. You see, here you've got a paper, 2/3 is advertising. There was no advertising in the newspaper; there was the substance. In those days, in the 20's, a lot of people of the enlightenment; the Jewish enlightenment, the Haskala, were still alive; and they used to write articles --Ahad Haam; Poets-Peretz; books; stories that affect you spiritually. And you find when you read them different values. You escape mundane values. Of course, being young and having ideas we had a goal in life. Some of us went to hachshara.

At hachshara there were made camps, farms in which the people, Jewish boys who had never soiled their hands, were working on the land to prepare themselves to go to Israel. But we couldn't get to Israel, so we had to go to British colonial government headquarters. We had to wait for our certificate; and we would wait half your life. So we started organizing illegal migration. And this involved, simultaneously, our underground activity. So when the war came and the Russians took our towns, we were "counter-revolutionary Zionists." We had to escape, to take off.

VLADIMIR JABOTINSKY

