The Reform Advocate

Volume XVIII, Number I: Fall 2026

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ROOTS OF REFORM JUDAISM

Inspired by the past, embracing today, shaping tomorrow



Immigration

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teaming shore. . ." These famous words, taken from the poem *The New Colossus* by noted Jewish-American poet Emma Lazarus, were written in 1883 for a nationwide effort to fund the pedestal of the soon-to-be-arrived Statue of Liberty. On its base, these words are now read by millions who visit the statue each year. They are among the most poignant written about the immigrant experience and speak to America's traditional role welcoming people to our shores from around the world.

Several months ago, a group of distinguished rabbis, educators, cantors, and scholars joined a new initiative for Roots of Reform Judaism – the creation of the ***Clergy & Scholar Collaborative*** (CSC). This collective of committed individuals has been meeting regularly, helping RRJ with its plans, vision, and programmatic direction. The CSC has been instrumental in suggesting potential subjects for upcoming *Reform Advocates*, new booklets, scholarly efforts for social media and podcasts, and other resources.

At one of the meetings, Rabbi Rachael Miller from Temple Emanuel in suburban Atlanta, recommended an *Advocate* issue focusing on a challenging issue of today – immigration and how immigrants have been treated when coming to America. The goal was not to debate today's politics, but to examine the experiences and values that Jewish immigrants have brought to this country over the last two and a half centuries. To put the contemporary issue into context, our senior scholar, Dr. Lance Sussman, helped us understand how immigration is woven throughout the entire Jewish narrative, starting with Abraham and Sarah. You will see this in his article in this issue. Our CSC advisor, Dr. Gary Zola, reminded the group that in America, and within the Jewish community, prominent leaders and even rabbis opposed the immigration of Eastern European Jews to these shores.

That discussion was the genesis of this issue of the *Reform Advocate*. We begin with Dr. Sussman's, as he discusses Jewish history, Reform Judaism, and the challenge of immigration. We welcome essays from Lynda Barness, sharing the story of the Seixas family who settled in Savannah in the 18th century, and Rabbi Ben Zeidman of Temple Mount Sinai of El Paso, who provides an historical perspective of the Jewish immigration to south Texas, through the eyes of Rabbi Martin Zielonka, who served Temple Mount Sinai for 38 years.

While the first section of our *Advocate* looks at immigration through an historic lens, the second section's essays focus on specific immigrant stories from the 20th century – some noted individuals, and others less known, but all with interesting perspectives. These stories span those of families arriving in the eighteenth-century, to Russian immigrant-songwriter Irving Berlin, to family stories from the years of the Holocaust. We were all immigrants. Our families came from somewhere, looking for that "lamp beside the golden door." Many found it, and sadly, many did not.

I hope this *Reform Advocate* issue gets you thinking and talking about your family stories, especially with the next generations. We would love to read your family stories and share them with our many readers. Let us hear from you!
(send to jsilverstein@rootsofreform.org)
With best wishes for 5787.



Devotedly,

Ken

Rabbi Ken Kanter

Love the Stranger: Jewish History, Reform Judaism, and the Challenge of Immigration

By Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D.

Immigration has played a central role in Jewish history for thousands of years. In the Torah, our foundational stories as a people are about immigration. Abraham and Sarah were from Mesopotamia and immigrated to Canaan. Moses and the Children of Israel migrated from Egypt to the Promised Land. Both stories begin with leaving a place of long-term domicile and re-rooting in a distance place they sought to make their home. In subsequent traditional Judaism, the Jewish people are in Exile and condemned to wander the earth until they are divinely restored to Israel. From these experiences of displacement and being the outsider, the Torah taught us "to love the stranger," – the foreigner in your land, the migrant, the resident alien – because "you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (23:9)

The centrality of immigration in the Jewish experience continues to the present day. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the modern Zionist movement urged the immigration of Jews throughout the Diaspora to Israel. By contrast, in Early and Classical Reform Judaism, the idea of Diaspora was normalized. In contemporary Reform Judaism, both the Diaspora and the State of Israel are both home and immigration and pilgrimage remain dynamic.

Modern scholarship has demonstrated that the immigrant experience is best understood on a multigenerational basis and is tied to the concepts of acculturation and assimilation. Marcus Hansen (1892–1938), a leading historian of North Atlantic immigration, played a pivotal role in the study of the transplanting of Europeans to the United States. He is best known for his insight that in immigration 'the third generation want to remember what the second generation wants to forget." According to Hansen, the first generation, the generation of immigrants faces the daunting task of moving from one county to another, learning a foreign language, and establishing themselves in a new land. The second generation, Hansen taught, seeks to acclimate to the new place of residence and separate itself from the place of their families' origin. By contrast, the third generation becomes curious about where their families originally came from and seeks to remember the world of their forebearers. Another scholar, Herbert Gans (1927–2025) subsequently investigated the cultural orientation of the third and subsequent generations and developed the idea of "symbolic ethnicity" which allows for multi-generational acculturation and resistance to complete assimilation.

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American Reform Judaism has its own internal story of immigration. During much of the nineteenth century, German Jewish immigrants came to the United States and began to transplant German Reform Judaism in America. In the first generation of Reformers, many, such as Rabbi David Einhorn, even wanted to maintain the use of the German language in the United States. Others like Isaac Mayer Wise argued for the use of English in American Reform temples. After the Civil War, a second generation of American Reform Jews almost universally preferred English and a minimum of Hebrew in their worship. During a third generation of Reform Jews, the movement began to absorb large numbers of East European Jews who reintroduced a number of discarded ritual practices and eschewed the use of German. On the other hand, outreach efforts to seed

Reform congregations in first generation Russian Jewish enclaves in American cities generally failed. Not surprisingly, the arrival of a sizable number of German refugees during the 1930s including immigrant rabbis aligned with the preference for the use of English in Reform services although many of the new German Jews created their own organizations, especially burial societies.

During the twentieth century, Reform Judaism's view of immigration became increasingly complicated. Reform protested the passage of the anti-immigration policies in the 1920s, by the Federal government but only participated in limited rescue operations during the Holocaust. Nazi era German Jewish refugees were accepted but often begrudgingly in Reform synagogues although thousands fought in the American Armed Forces and dozens became rabbis in the Reform movement. Representative Emanuel Celler (D-NY) who was closely aligned to the Reform movement, took the lead in reversing the 1920s National Origins Acts. Thereafter, Reform Jews strongly advocated for the immigration of Russian Jews but failed to attract large numbers of new American Jewish immigrants from Russia, Israel, South America, and Iran to their congregations. Moreover, American Reform has generally been resistant to outmigration. Reform leaders in the 1950s were involved in dissuading the Israeli government from recruiting American immigrants to move to Israel but later encouraged mass participation in student exchange programs and Birthright Israel.

Although American Reform Judaism began primarily as a movement of German speaking Jews when it transplanted to America, the greatest demographic change in Reform took place not as the result of the absorption of East European Jews but because of the rise of intermarriage and, to a lesser extent, adoption, toward the end of the twentieth station. Today Reform Jews are heirs to dozens of different ethnic, racial and religious in-migrations. I once asked a recent Bar Mitzvah what language he like to like to learn in addition to Hebrew. His answer was Gaelic in honor of his maternal grandparents. In essence, the Reform Jewish movement has become a melting pot of global immigration defined not by common ancestral stories but by a religious community bound together by a set of common values, current practices, and mythic memories.

As the son of a German Jewish immigrant, I was made painfully aware of the complexities of our family's integration into the Reform movement. As a congregational leader I found myself championing the cause of immigration to the United States as a haven for refugees in search of freedom and prosperity including the adoption of a Vietnamese Boat family as well as extensive participation in the Russian immigration movement. As a grandparent I have learned to absorb many stories of origin and make them part of my story as a Reform Jew.

Today, Reform Judaism remains deeply committed to the precept of "loving the stranger," fighting for immigrant rights and proudly embracing the diverse immigrant roots of its own members. Some synagogues have even declared themselves to be sanctuary congregations for new immigrants to America. Whether our movement can move beyond nostalgia and personal narratives at a perilous moment in American immigration history is yet to be seen.



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Rabbi Martin Zielinka, The "One-Man Immigration Bureau"

By Rabbi Ben Zeidman

When Rabbi Martin Zielonka came to serve as Rabbi of Temple Mount Sinai in El Paso, Texas, he found himself in a frontier border town. Born in Berlin, Germany, in 1877 and brought to the United States at the age of three, he was a graduate of Hebrew Union College's class of 1899. The final student to stand before the open ark and receive the blessing of ordination from the founder of the historic American Reform Jewish institutions, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise. Following a year in Waco, Texas, Rabbi Zielonka came to call El Paso home for the remainder of his life and his career (thirty-seven years).[1]



Rabbi Martin Zielonka

Rabbi Zielonka worked incredibly hard to help nurture El Paso to grow from the "wild west" into a modern city. He built institutions but also was greatly concerned about the plight of the individual. In 1921, with what was an influx of Jewish immigration to Mexico, he became aware of an increasing number of arrests and deportations of Jews in the El Paso community. Some were seemingly crossing the border from Mexico on their way elsewhere in the United States to meet up with family. Others were dedicated employees of local Jewish businesses.

As Rabbi Zielonka investigated during the first few months of 1921, he learned from those held in US custody as well as from Jews who had recently immigrated from Mexico (and who did so with the plan to then cross the US border) that "in Germany the respective consulates of the newly formed governments and republics in Eastern Europe have made a tremendous source of income from issuing passports to whomsoever seeks one; and it is significant to emphasize that the Mexican consulates in Berlin and the port cities of Europe are inducing immigrants to sail to Mexico on the promise of obtaining plenty of work and good pay with the sole purposes of receiving a fee of ten dollars a [visa]."[2]

Rabbi Zielonka grew concerned. The message that these Jews were getting was that while they may not be able to enter the United States directly from Europe, they would either find a welcoming environment in Mexico or relatively easily make their way into the United States by land. This led to arrest and deportation, not to mention the risk of one's health and life in the effort.

> According to information, there must be not less than one hundred young men stranded in Mexico, who came over under false inducement. Another steamer is expected within the next few days, the result of which might be appalling.[3]

What was Zielonka to do? Perhaps it feels like he followed the usual script! He appealed to the wealthy community and established Jewish institutions which were based in New York City. In March of 1921 he departed with high hopes. He stopped in Houston and Galveston to discuss the issue with colleagues and friends. His next stop in New Orleans gave him the opportunity to discuss the issue with Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, who was in town to deliver a lecture, and several others (including Archibald Marx, who would later re-enter the story). When he arrived in New York, he met with a veritable "who's who" by making his way from meeting

1 "Rabbi Martin Zielonka," David Lefkowitz. Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, No. 35 The Johns Hopkins University Press: 1939, pp. 326–328.

2 Rabbi Martin Zielonka. March 1, 1921. "Information on Jewish Immigrants to Juarez and Veracruz," Mexico. SC-5345. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

3 Ibid.

to meeting over several days attempting to appeal to each for help: Felix Warburg, the head of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, Cyrus Sulzberger, the American Jewish Committee (they met at Temple Emanu-El) including Louis Marshall, the Yiddish newspaper "The Day (Der Tog)" and its editor Mr. Sarasohn, and the leadership of the Jewish Industrial Removal Committee.

Rabbi Zielonka worked incredibly hard to help nurture El Paso to grow from the "wild west" into a modern city.

Over the course of Rabbi Zielonka's trip he realized that it might not be possible to stop Jews from leaving Europe. Simultaneously, it became clear that no one was interested in giving American authorities the idea that the Jewish community was actively supporting illegal immigration. So, he requested that these institutions and leaders in New York support the establishment of a position in Mexico City and Vera Cruz to try to help Jewish individuals when they arrived (and thus hopefully stem the flow of Jews who were risking grave circumstances by crossing the border illegally).

Warburg, Zielonka's first meeting in New York, was less than enthusiastic (he worried that the Jewish community might be mistakenly assumed to be supporting illegal efforts). On the other hand, Zielonka remarks on Sulzberger's sympathy for his cause (and it was he who arranged many of the meetings for Zielonka). The Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society determined their hands were tied unless they received formal request from the American Jewish Committee and the funding to do so from the Joint Distribution Committee. Instead, the American Jewish Committee commended Zielonka to the Jewish Industrial Removal Committee. The Industrial Removal Committee reported to Zielonka that it had, through Joint Distribution Funds, already been involved in trying to stop Jews from departing from Europe thinking they might be able to get into the United States (given that such entry, if attempted, would be illegal). Similarly, Zielonkla was able to convince the Yiddish paper to help advertise this in Europe. But Zielonka's notes on his trip to New York conclude with the decision of the Industrial Removal Committee to cable their Europe office with the instruction to establish an office in Vera Cruz "for purpose of finding employment in Mexico for refugees among them. We are informed this is feasible to a limited extent."[4] Just reading Rabbi Zielonka's report of the trip is exhausting, and one gets the sense that despite everyone's sympathy he is getting "bounced" from meeting to meeting.

It seems that Rabbi Zielonka was not particularly happy with the results of the trip. Whatever happened with the Industrial Removal Committee's cable to Europe, Zielonka does not give up on the effort to provide help to needy Jewish immigrants. "At this time, 1921, Rabbi Martin Zielonka of El Paso, Texas, became aware of the conditions in Mexico, made a trip to New York, and attempted to arouse the interest of different national Jewish organizations. After all had declined to take action on the matter, Rabbi Zielonka laid the matter before District Grand Lodge No. 7, B'nai Brith, at its Convention in Dallas, Texas, on May 2nd, 1921."[5] This is how the formal record of the proceedings from B'nai Brith Grand Lodge's thirteenth convention (which took place in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1930) describes their organization's entrance into the issue. In classic frontier fashion: When the great Jewish institutions in the big city (New York) could not make it happen, Zielonka did not give up. With grit and determination, he turned to friends and colleagues who were similarly motivated, and they figured it out together. Remember Archibald Marx (with whom Zielonka met during his brief turn in New Orleans on the way to New York)? In May 1921, B'nai Brith gives Zielonka and Marx permission to work on their behalf to see about establishing local committees in Mexico City and Vera Cruz to help those Jewish immigrants who were in dire need.[6]

4 Ibid.
5 "Proceedings of the Thirteenth General Convention of the Constitution Grand Lodge," B'nai Brith, April 27–30, 1930. Cincinnati, Ohio, pgs. 239–240.
6 Ibid, pg. 241.

In 1923, Rabbi Zielonka returned and found that the work was too great for such an approach, so support for a more formal structure was requested (with a significant investment of funds) and B'nai Brith was so inspired that it supported the effort. A volunteer from Vera Cruz, J.L. Weinberger, was hired (despite his Weinberger's own protestations); a building was rented which accommodated some meeting spaces with a dental clinic, sick ward, staff quarters, and a dining room. A loan process was established to fund immigrants and help support them in starting businesses. A program was also established to provide Spanish classes to help them learn the language.[7]

...in 1930, Rabbi Martin Zielonka reported on the work of his committee and was proudly able to say that the Mexican Jewish community no longer needed the heavy-handed support...

Nine years later, at the B'nai Brith Grand Lodge Thirteenth Convention in 1930, Rabbi Martin Zielonka reported on the work of his committee and was proudly able to say that the Mexican Jewish community no longer needed the heavy-handed support of the organization:

> When other agencies failed to appreciate the gravity of the situation developing in Mexico the B'nai Brith stepped in and entered a new field of endeavor. The result of that effort is a new Jewish world center, developing into a virile group, that is now ready to take its place in world Jewry. . . .Approximately one hundred and forty thousand dollars have been spent in Mexico. Approximately eight thousand immigrants have been helped during that period: this means the cost, for making these men and women self-supporting, over a period of over five years, has been approximately sixteen dollars and fifty cents per capita.[8]
>
> This work has been done so well and the Jew in Mexico has established himself so well that the time as at hand when we should gradually withdraw and place the future burden upon the Jews resident in Mexico.[9]
>
> When future Grand Lodges meet, they will refer with pride to the fact that we fostered, not immigration to Mexico, but the development of a new Jewish Community on the Western Hemisphere; that we safeguarded the good name of the Jew in the United States by encouraging the immigrants to stay in Mexico and discouraged their illegal entry over our borders.[10]

Rabbi Martin Zielonka did not do this work to support Jewish immigrants alone. Instead, he had a force-of-will which inspired others to help make it all happen. A force-of-will which led historian Hollace Weiner to become "a one-man immigration bureau."[11] Zielonka's impact continues to make a difference on entire communities and the individuals who live in them. In Mexico, in El Paso, and beyond. During his thirty-seven years of service to Temple Mount Sinai, Rabbi Zielonka established still-existing medical institutions, college education programs, he was involved in many efforts – large and small – to live a life of service to further the mission of the Jewish people: To represent the highest values of Torah and Jewish tradition to the larger world. Rabbi Martin Zielonka's memory is a true and lasting blessing.



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7 Ibid, pg. 241–253.
8 Ibid, pg. 316.
9 Ibid, pg. 317.
10 Ibid, pg. 318–319.
11 Weiner, Hollace Ava. Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999. Pg. 104.

From the Founding Fathers to Lady Liberty: The Seixas Family and Emma Lazarus

By Lynda Barness

The issue of immigration was one of the many topics debated by America's Founding Fathers. Geroge Washington was unequivocal in his view in a letter in 1788: " I had always hoped that this land might become a safe & agreeable Asylum to the virtuous & persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong. . . ." One of America's colonial families directly connects some of the first Jewish immigrants who came to America to the Statue of Liberty and beyond. Their story begins with an immigrant named Miguel Pacheco da Silva – his Marrano name – who was known as Abraham Mendes Seixas when he reached London after fleeing from Portugal during the Inquisition. When Abraham was discovered as a Jew, a loyal servant helped smuggle him out of the country some time after 1725. He and his crypto-Jewish wife, Abigail Massius, went to London with their three children, Judith, Rebecca, and Isaac, where they were married a second time, this time as Jews, and were able to create a good life in their adopted country.

This Sephardic couple's son, Isaac Mendes Seixas, left London after the death of his father in 1728. First, he went to Barbados and then made his way to New York in 1738. It appears that Isaac was the first in the Seixas family to arrive in the new world. Just two years later, Isaac married Rachel Levy, a daughter of Moses Levy and his second wife Grace Mears. The Levys were Ashkenazic Jews of German origin. Isaac and Rachel caused a bit of a ruckus when they were married at Shearith Israel, New York's first synagogue and a Sephardic congregation, because it was considered a "mixed marriage." However, over time the drama faded, and this Sephardic synagogue welcomed its Ashkenazic co-religionists.

And here we join the days of the Founding Fathers. A son of Isaac and Rachel Mendes Seixas, Gershom Mendes Seixas, was born in colonial America in 1745. He was later known as the "rabbi of the Revolution." The title, however, is a misnomer, as he was not an ordained rabbi; in fact, there were no ordained rabbis at all in the colonies during this time. But twenty-three-year-old Gershom, who had his bar mitzvah at Shearith Israel in New York City and continued to learn Hebrew and study Judaism there, was named the *hazzan* (cantor) of the congregation in 1768. At the beginning of his career there, he served as the religious functionary and read prayers during services, and in addition he served the community as mohel (circumciser) and shochet (ritual slaughterer). And his position grew over time, including providing pastoral services and as an early preacher in the colonies.

When the Revolutionary War began in 1776 and the British captured New York, *hazzan* Gershom Seixas took a bold step, gathering Torah scrolls and other ceremonial objects and guiding his congregation from the city to Stratford, Connecticut, where he stayed until 1780. By this time, his wife Elkaleh (Myers Cohen) was pregnant, but they lost this child three weeks prior to the move. While in Stratford, another child, Sarah (also called Sally) was born.

Gershom was called to a congregation in Philadelphia where he served Mikveh Israel with distinction for four years, from 1780 to 1784. He then returned to his home congregation, Shearith Israel, where he served for the rest of his life. After being married for ten years. Elkaleh died, leaving Gershom with three children. A year later, Gershom married Hannah (Manuel), and she bore him eleven children. There are letters extant between Gershom and his daughter Sarah (Sally) that make it clear that the Seixas home was a loving and lively place with the father fully involved in the life of

his family. When Gershom died at seventy-one years of age, there were still ten children living at home.

Gershom's siblings had their own success stories that were meaningful in the birth of the new nation. Two were among the twenty-three Jewish officers in the Revolution. No where else in the world could a Jew command a non-Jew at this time. Gershom's brother Abraham Seixas, who served as a captain in Georgia and South Carolina militias, was married to Richea Hart, and had eleven children. He eventually settled in Charleston.

Brother Benjamin Seixas was also an officer, serving as a Third Lieutenant in the Fusiliers Company of the First Battalion of the New York Militia. He was married to Zipporah Levy, and they had twenty-one children. He was also a privateer, owning vessels that were sanctioned by the patriots to act as pirates to destroy the British navy. And later he was one of the founders of the New York Stock Exchange. The significance of this large and growing Seixas family cannot be underestimated. In a way, they became the foundation of the Jewish community and the growth of the Jewish population in the colonies and in the new United States. It is said that it became like one big family in the new world.

It is important to note that Gershom's brother Moses Seixas was the *parnas* (president) of the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island. It was he who wrote the 1790 letter welcoming George Washington to their city and congratulating him on his election as the first President of the United States under the 1787 Constitution. Washington responded to Seixas's letter repeating the phrase "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." For American Jews, Washington's letter to the Jews of Newport was the proclamation of a new age in the history of the Jewish people. America was the first country to reject antisemitism as part of its national creed.

Another sibling of Gershom Seixas, a sister Grace, was a gifted and prolific writer, and the Seixas family relished her gifts. She married Simon Nathan, who served as the president of synagogues in New York and Philadelphia. Together they had one son, Isaac Mendes Seixas Nathan, who was married to Sarah Mendes Nathan and had eleven children. One, a daughter Esther, married Moses Lazarus in 1840 and had seven children, including a daughter Emma, whose poetry is well known today. In 1883, when she was thirty-four, Emma Lazarus wrote a sonnet called "The New Colossus," which included the words that that are inscribed on the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Emma's poem redefined the symbolism of the Statute of Liberty from a statement about freedom to the recognition that the United States was a nation of immigrants and their descendants. It is an open-armed welcome to those who seek liberty in this new land, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances.

Emma Lazarus, who died at the age of thirty-eight, did not live to see her words installed on the plaque of the Statue of Liberty, but clearly her words continue to resonate. The Seixas family had a role in America from the Founding Fathers to Lady Liberty and beyond. Theirs is a story of daring immigrants who became patriotic Americans and served their new country, leaving their imprint on the new nation for generations to come.



***Lynda Barness** has had a diverse career path. Most recently, she is the founder of LB Literary Projects and is a publishing professional, both as an author and advising and editing for academic publications. This followed her earlier careers as a real estate developer and home builder and as the owner of a wedding planning company. Barness is the author of four books and the editor of more. Barness and Rabbi Lance J. Sussman, Ph.D., have partnered in literary projects since 2022.*

America's Song Writer – Irving Berlin

By Rabbi Ken Kanter

This article is adapted from The Jews of Tin Pan Alley by Rabbi Kenneth A. Kanter. He is the Rabbinical Director for Roots of Reform Judaism.

It would be impossible to discuss the American music industry or the American popular song without mentioning Irving Berlin. He was the twentieth-century counterpart to Stephen Foster, a comparison Berlin himself enjoyed making. As one critic commented years after Berlin had made it to the top, he was a "poor Jew who won fame and fortune triumphing not through education or skill, but This knowledge of the common heart."

Legend has it that after Berlin became rich and famous, he built a "pianistic contrivance" that would take stock harmonies and modulations derived from the Massenet-Grieg method of fifty years before and fit them into the traditional thirty-two bar tune at the touch of a lever. Although the story is apocryphal, it is true that Berlin had an uncanny knowledge of the interests and tastes of the common man. Perhaps he understood the public taste so well because he grew up as a common man.

Born in Temin, Siberia on May 11, 1888, Irving (originally Israel) Berlin was the youngest of the eight children of Moses and Leah Baline (the original family name). His father was a *shochet* and *chazan* in the village. In 1893, in search of opportunity, the family came to America. Irving Berlin was later quick to point out that although they left Russia as a result of anti-Jewish pogroms during the reign of Tzar Alexander III, they were no political refugees. The impetus to leave was provided by a pogrom that took place when he was four years old. While the Cossacks ravaged the village, the family took refuge in the nearby woods, hiding under blankets.

When the Balines arrived in America with their few possessions, they moved into an apartment in a dingy basement on Monroe Street, the Lower East Side of New York. Years later, describing the family upon arrival, Berlin said, "We only spoke Yiddish and were conspicuous for our 'Jew clothes'". A few weeks later, the family rented a more commodious apartment on Cherry Street. Moses found work as a kosher butcher supervisor, also teaching Hebrew and choir music in a small synagogue near their home. Leah, typical of the immigrants of the day, did not understand any language except Yiddish. She kept a kosher home, and although the family could ill-afford one, always had a kosher cook.

. . . Berlin had an uncanny knowledge of the interests and tastes of the common man. Perhaps he understood the public taste so well because he grew up as a common man.

Quite naturally, Irving Berlin grew up well-versed in the lifestyle and milieu of the Lower East Side. Profoundly interested in singing even as a child, he was a member of the synagogue choir and went to Yiddish theater whenever he could afford it. His musical ear, as well as his unique ability to recall any melody he heard, was clearly an inheritance from his father the *chazan*, but whereas his father had enjoyed cantorial music, young Irving developed a taste for the sentimental ballads of the 1890s.

The family's financial problems were compounded by the death of Moses Baline in 1896. Four of the older children found work in sweatshops, and young Irving

helped out by selling newspapers and delivering telegrams. At fourteen, having completed only two years of formal schooling, he ran away from home and began to earn his living as a singing waiter in saloons and bars – the fulfillment of an ambition dating back many years. His mother was horrified, but as Berlin later explained, he could not have done otherwise. "Music," he said, "was in my blood."

Berlin's singing got him jobs in various New York nightspots, among them Callahan's in Chinatown and Chatham's on Doyer Street . . . In 1906, Berlin was hired as a singing waiter at Pelham's Café on Pell Street. In addition to entertaining the patrons while serving them, he had to write and sing parodies of current popular songs and also had to help clean up when the café closed – all of this for the munificent sum of one dollar per day. Callahan's was just down the street and had gotten favorable press when two of their employees wrote and performed a song ("My Mariuccia Takes the Steamboat"). Pelham's management decided that they needed a song and told Berlin to write one. With music by the saloon's pianist, Berlin composed his first song, "Marie from Sunny Italy," which was published by Joseph Stern and Company in 1907 and earned him 37 cents in royalties. The printer inadvertently changed his name from Israel Baline to Israel Berlin. Taking the change one step further, he adopted Irving as his first name.

In 1908, Berlin wrote his next song, "Dorando" a poem about an Olympic runner who had been in the news of the day. He approached Ted Snyder, who had just opened publishing house. Snyder offered him $25 if he could write the music as well, so he dictated the tune to an arranger who worked for Snyder. This was the first time Berlin composed the music for a song, and it pointed up a failing he would bemoan the rest of his creative life – his inability to write down is own music down. Lacking musical training, he was always dependent on the services of a musical stenographer to get his inspirations on paper. He "heard" the songs in his head and then had to have a transcriber put them into writing. His only piano playing skill was playing on the black notes – the key of F sharp. He later had a special piano built, designed so with the turn if a lever, it would play in any key he wanted while he continued to play on the black keys. With "Dorando," Berlin and Snyder established a fruitful songwriting partnership.

Around the same time, Belin wrote "Sadie Salome, Go Home" with lyrics by Edgar Leslie, the first of his Yiddish-type songs. Set in the form of an opera aria, the song helped make Fanny Brice a star when she debuted it at a benefit. Yiddish-type songs would become one of the musical forms for which he became renowned, along with the ragtime genre, and pastiche songs, which were a mix of ethnic and cultural songs combined as a single style.

Berlin married Dorothy Goetz, sister of composer/producer E. Ray Goetz, in February 1913. After returning from a honeymoon in Cuba, she died of typhoid fever in July that year. Berlin was grief-stricken, and he attempted to deal with his sorrow in the best way he knew – by writing a song. Following her death, the scope of his activities widened, resulting in a number of successful hit songs. Convinced that they had to do something to keep Berlin with the firm, publishers Snyder and Waterson became Snyder, Berlin, and Waterson. This lasted seven years, until Berlin opened his own firm in 1919. When Berlin broke with Snyder and Waterson, he was earning $2000 a week as a Vaudeville headliner. He brought an enormous commodity to his new firm – namely all of his own songs.

Drafted into the Army in World War I, Berlin wrote the show *Yip Yip Yaphank*, which raised $35,000 towards a service center at Camp Upton, New York. The show included the song familiar to many, "Oh How I hate to Get Up in the Morning" and opened on Broadway in July 1918. Anxious to prove himself a good American, one of the songs he wrote for this show was "God Bless America." Ultimately, he did not include it in the show but would later revive it.

Around the same time, Berlin became the theater owner of The Music Box, establishing a partnership with Sam H. Harris and Joseph Schenk. Opening with a specially written musical, the *Music Box Revue*, the show continued for three years, producing some of his most memorable songs, and generating tremendous earnings.

By 1929, Berlin was in a dry spell, convinced that he was through musically. The Depression had wiped

out more than $5 million he had accumulated over the years, leaving him with very little except the ownership of his songs. But by 1932, his fortune turned when Rudy Vallee recorded two of his songs. Both became hits for RCA and for the Berlin Publishing Company. His 1933 show, *As Thousands Cheer*, included the song "Easter Parade" which later became the title song for the Fred Astaire-Judy Garland movie in 1948. In 1935, *Top Hat* starring Fred Astraire and Ginger Rogers was a triumph on the motion picture screen. In 1938, a compendium of Berlin songs was assembled for the movie *Alexander's Ragtime Band*.

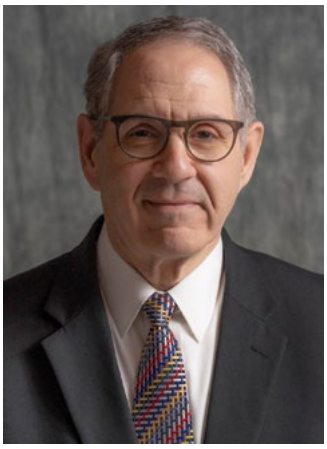
Berlin achieved lasting success with a revitalized version of the song he had put aside and forgotten nearly two decades earlier – "God Bless America." While on a trip to Europe, he got a first-hand glimpse of fascism and Nazism. On his return home, popular singer Kate Smith asked him to give her a song for a patriotic broadcast she was doing. He recalled the melody he had considered for *Yip Yip Yiphank*, altered the lyrics slightly, and made Smith promise that any profits from the song be donated to America's scouting movement. She agreed and "God Bless America" became an overnight success. Over the years it earned the Boy and Girls Scouts of America and Campfire Girls more than half a million dollars.

During World War II, Berlin wrote several songs to boost the defense effort. He created an all-service musical, *This is the Army*, to raise money for the USO. It opened on Broadway July 4, 1942, with an all-serviceman cast, including Berlin himself singing "Oh How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning", taken from his World War I show. Six of the original members of the chorus who sang it for the first time in 1918, joined the cast in 1942. The show toured the world, raising millions for the Army Relief Fund. Berlin received no money for this effort but was awarded the Medal of Merit from General George C. Marshall.

In 1940, Berlin wrote the most popular movie of his career, *Holiday Inn*. The film was a box-office hit, starring Bing Crosby, who introduced Berlin's most successful song – "White Christmas." The song has been recorded in more than three hundred versions, and at the time, Bing Crosby's version sold 25 million records. More than five million copies of the sheet music have been sold, and there have been over a million instrumental arrangements. It is an irony of sorts that the most popular songs about Christian holidays, Easter and Christmas, should have been written by a Jew from Russia. Perhaps, that more than anything else, tells the story of Tin Pan Alley.

Berlin wrote a number of musicals after the war, including *Annie Get Your Gun, Miss Liberty*, and his last musical, written in 1960, *Mr. President*. After *Mr. President*, Berlin went into retirement. He momentarily returned to the public eye for an 80th birthday celebration held for him on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. He was feted by stars and dignitaries, including President Lyndon Johnson who concluded his speech with "God Bless Berlin."

Berlin continued to work well into his nineties, running his publishing house, and tightly controlling any infringement of his copyright. The immigrant mentality did not easily fade away. Berlin always considered himself a Jew, and when his daughter married outside the faith, he asserted his Jewishness by requiring that a rabbi co-officiate. He was self-effacing when it came to his talent saying, "Popular songs will never be missed, but Chopin and Liszt will live on." He remains one of the most successful songwriters of all time. Irving Berlin died in 1989 at the age of 101. Jerome Kern described him simply: "Irving Berlin has no place in American music. He is American music."



Rabbi Ken Kanter is the Rabbinical Director for Roots of Reform Judaism.

Arrival in New York

By Monique Rothschild

Monique Rothschild's book, *Stateless*, is the story of her parents Hildegard Freundlich Rothschild and Ernest (Ernst) Leonard Rothschild, both of whom were born in Germany and sought asylum in France in 1933. Both went to Paris where they met the following year. When France declared war on Germany in 1939, Ernest, along with thousands of German Jews, became an enemy alien and was imprisoned in one or more of many internment camps. Following months of separation, Hilda located her husband at a labor camp outside the small town of Bellac, where Monique was born. After many months of frustration, danger, and disappointment, the Rothschild family, with the assistance of HIAS and Varian Fry, was finally able to find passage to America on the Spanish freighter S.S. Navemar.



Hilda and Ernest on the rooftop terrace of their Paris apartment building. Circa 1938.

September 12 to October 14, 1941

Oppressive humidity and heat greeted the passengers as they emerged slowly from below-deck to join the growing throng at the railings of the *S.S. Navemar* when at last, it pulled into the Red Hook Docks, in Brooklyn, on Friday, September 12, 1941. They were weary and malnourished, and they could not yet see the Statue of Liberty nor read the words of the Emma Lazarus poem "The New Colossus" inscribed on the bronze plaque at its base:

> Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Whether or not the new immigrants knew that such welcoming words awaited them, they certainly were yearning to breathe free. Having been huddled together unbearably for more than five weeks, they were ready to disembark, to greet their waiting families and friends, to take a bath, and to put on freshly laundered clothing. Victor Bienstock, a writer with the International Jewish Press Bureau, reported on what he saw when he boarded the ship while it sat at the dock:

> It was a nightmare spectacle—Hollywood could have used it for a setting in a new production of Dante's Inferno. The great, gloomy caverns, the tiers of bunks rising on all sides. Old men and women gasping for breath in the insufferable heat, lying

> motionless on their bunks, while children tossed and cried. Everyone hungry, everyone thirsty, everyone dirty . . . and over a half-million dollars in passage money was paid on this ship.

The arrival of the *Navemar,* nicknamed the Nevermore by its passengers, was front-page news in the *New York Times* and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* newspapers. The headline in the *New York Times* proclaimed: "1,1200 Refugees Reach New York in Horror Ship." The article read:

> . . . a nightmare of the sea was sighted in the sunlight off New York Harbor . . . the rust-gold Spanish freighter, one of the most horror-stricken voyages since the days when slaves were shipped below deck from Africa.

"On its decks," one reported: "reposed piles of garbage cans, deck chairs, and sundry other items scattered in wanton order." Two sanitation inspectors and a nurse stayed on board during the relocation of passengers. One public health inspector refused to eat during his time on the freighter, preferring to go hungry rather than eat food from the galley. Representatives of The Joint called the ship's conditions "criminally inadequate."

The overcrowding was so dangerous that some disembarking passengers told reporters that the *Navemar* was "Hell on Water," and "A Floating Gurs," referring to the French internment camp at the foot of the Pyrenees. One article quoted Captain Manuel Martinez: "It was a grand trip. The passengers seemed to be very well satisfied with the treatment they received." Unbelievable! The passengers could not have agreed less.

The turmoil that prevailed at the embarkation in Seville was repeated at the point of disembarkation. Because the ship was flying the flag of quarantine, no one could disembark without receiving a clean bill of health. Those passengers who were weakened by serious illnesses such as typhoid fever were quarantined for as long as six months in the hospital on Ellis Island. Following their discharge, some were required to report to the New York City Board of Health for years afterwards, until officials determined that they were no longer carriers of the disease. Hilda, Ernest, and Monique were quarantined on the island for three days, until they were deemed sufficiently healthy to leave. The last page in Ernest's visa was stamped on September 15, 1941.

For those three days, at least they received adequate nutrition and fresh water. The time in quarantine also afforded Ernest and Hilda an opportunity to discuss what lay ahead as their infant daughter crawled freely in a clean, open space. They were grateful that they had survived the sea voyage. Now, they came face-to-face with their new circumstances.

Hilda's repudiation of all things German was evident from the moment of her arrival in America. The *Navemar's* manifest, compiled by the U.S. Department of Emigration and Naturalization, noted that Ernest spoke German, French, and English, that Monique spoke no language at all, and that Hilda spoke only French and English, no German. The manifest recorded Ernest's profession as a writer and Hilda's as housewife. The passengers were also classified by race—Hebrew was their option.

When, at last, they were able to join Hilda's sister Inga, the two sisters had a reunion that was joyful and tearful. But, in the midst of their happiness lurked darker reflections on the unknown fate of their parents. Inga and her husband Sidney lived in Knickerbocker Village, a massive apartment complex in the Two Bridges neighborhood of Manhattan's Lower East Side.

As soon as the opportunity arose, Sidney handed Ernest two postcards from his mother Recha in Paris that had been forwarded to him. Both had been originally addressed to Ernest at the Hotel St. Louis in Marseille. Neither card had reached him either in Marseille or in Seville. If they had, he might have replied with words of comfort to his suffering parents. Remarkably, however, someone in Marseille had forwarded the cards—in pencil—to the U.S. forwarding address that Hilda had provided when she was in Marseille. Dated July 25 and July 26, 1941, while he was in route to Seville, her postcards were mailed from Paris and written in French:

My dear Ernst, *July 25, 1941*

I was instantly shocked when I received your letter of the 19th to learn that you were unable to leave with Hilde. I certainly hope that you will leave soon. You must write to Lester about your sad situation as soon as possible. Both of us are always very ill. I cannot consult a doctor. From day to day, I grow weaker. Someone would give me an appointment if I get the authorization.

Words cannot describe how uncomfortable we are here. No sofa. 2 beds. 2 armoires. We must eat and do everything in the same room. Papa asks me every day when we are leaving. He misses you so much and always asks me when you will come back. Write to me quickly and tell me when you are leaving. What to do in a world without children, without the essentials, without everything. Oh, how sad I am. I kiss you with all my heart. Maman

The following day, July 26, Recha posted an even more impassioned note to Ernest, expressing her fear that it would not reach him. She begged him to write soon, as they longed for news of him, Hilda, and the baby.

Perhaps this card can no longer reach you; write me soon to say whether you are staying longer; but I hope the contrary is true. It is all so sad for me. What did the baby say when she saw the boat? She must be adorable; how I love and kiss you sincerely.

Ernest never heard from his parents again. He may have written to them, but no other correspondence from them was ever found among the many letters from friends and family that he saved.

Inga also had correspondence to share. Letters that she had received from their parents Irma and Paul Freundlich in Hamburg, including this one from Paul dated August 30, 1941:

My dear beloved Sid, my dear beloved Inga!

I am deeply worried about my dear beloved Hilde and her sweet Monique, and wonder if they have arrived in the meanwhile. Please God that the journey is behind them and they are in good health. I greet and kiss you my golden Hilde, and you my sweet Monique, and wish you, with all my heart, everything that is good and much luck. How happy I would be to hear that Ernst, too, has arrived in the meantime.

Your devoted,
Father

Another of Paul's letters, written on September 11, just one day before the Rothschilds arrived in the U.S., exulted, "When I am sad I need only look at the picture of my sweet Monique and at once I am filled with pleasure when I see her jolly, smiling face." It was signed Opa (grandpa). Irma's postscript asked Hilda about the baby, and said wistfully, "How much I would love to take her off your hands my dear Hilde, so that you could have it a little easier."

Each letter from the Freundlichs reaffirmed their love for their daughters and offered prayers that the sisters would be reunited someday. Significantly, they never included themselves in these hopes for a reunion, although they did write about their unsuccessful attempts to escape with Cuban visas. Throughout their final years, and despite the humiliations and hardships of life under Nazi domination, Irma's and Paul's faith in God and their Jewish heritage remained unshakable. In a letter dated September 19, 1941, they wrote:

We are getting ready for the New Year's holiday and have every reason to thank the Creator because, in spite of everything, we have good news from you, and we beg Him to protect you and watch over you, all together.

On September 21st, the first day of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, they wrote:

We hope God will help you. We spent the holidays healthy—all things considered, five girls and women sat tight in our three seats, and how wonderful it was. A friend saw the picture of Monique and gushed at how cute she is . . . we had a nice service at the only open synagogue.

We had a very festive service with a good cantor and a marvelous sermon by Rabbi Carlebach.

In another note to Inga, Paul wrote: "May our God watch over you . . . my beloved Hildele, you my dear Ernest, and my sweet Monique." Who can know what feelings of anguish these words aroused in their readers? That letters mailed from the U.S. were still being received in Germany was apparent when the Freundlichs wrote about Inga's baby, Ingrid, and about Hilda's enthusiasm for Cincinnati, though she had yet to set foot in that city.

Like his wife, Ernest, too, had a long-awaited and longed-for reunion. His daughter Janet (née Gabrielle), now a beautiful 16-year-old, had arrived in the States with her mother, Peggy, in 1934. Their meeting took place at the Saks Fifth Avenue store in Manhattan where Peggy worked. As profoundly moved as Ernest was, the occasion was likely an awkward one for each of them. Father and daughter had not seen one another for nearly ten years and had had little contact from the time of her parents' divorce in 1928, when Janet was just three.

In addition to their families, Ernest and Hilda spent time with some of their friends in New York – journalists from his years in Berlin and others from their time in Paris, who were already settled there. A few had come safely from Europe to the States with the help of Varian Fry. Some of the better-known writers, including Ernest's cousin Bruno Frank, had already achieved recognition in Hollywood or in New York or at the Cranbrook Academy of Arts in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Others, like Ernest, would never regain their professional footing, or the cultural advantages of their earlier lives.

Almost from the moment of his arrival in New York, Ernest engaged in a lively exchange of letters with friends who were already in the U.S. One letter from Bruno Frank contained a $50.00 bill. He apologized that he could not send more and asked Ernest not to thank him. He offered some sage advice – to focus on learning English and know that the first 18 months could be hard. "With your linguistic talent, you will be fluent in six months, and then you will find a position." Optimistically, he also wrote, "As consolation, at least, we know one thing. That the palliative healing influence of this country is quickly showing itself on everybody."

Ernest received one letter that was addressed to Herr Leonard Rothschild at 26 Gramercy Park, a building which, at that time, was the Hotel Irving. The welcoming letter was sent by Erwin Piscator, a literary associate of Ernest's in Berlin and the founder of the famed Drama Workshop at the New School for Social Research in Greenwich Village.

Like many refugees, the Rothschilds arrived in the United States destitute. What savings they had possessed had been spent on travel documents, guides, and to bribe border officials in France and Spain. They were totally dependent on their relatives in New York and Cincinnati.

Despite all the attractions New York City offered, the Rothschild family did not remain there long. Inga tried her best to persuade Hilda, and Ernest's friends tried to convince him to remain in New York, but the crowds and traffic made Hilda tremble with fear. A reviewer of the 2016 novel *Unspeakable Things* by Kathleen Spivack agreed with Hilda: "How wrong New York is for exhausted, cold refugees who want only to find solace. The city is too loud, too bright."

One of Ernest's cousins had come from Cincinnati to New York to greet him and to spend time with her sister, Helen Jacobi, to discuss how they might be of assistance to their newly arrived relatives. Her description of Cincinnati sounded to Hilda like the kind of place in which she would like to live – smaller, quieter, and less stressful than New York. The image of a city built along a river and growing out along green hillsides also helped Hilda persuade Ernest that this would be the best place for them to settle and raise their daughter.

Accordingly, on October 13, 1941, after spending one month in New York, the family boarded the 3:00 p.m. overnight train, New York Central's Ohio State Limited, bound for its terminus in Cincinnati.



***Monique Rothschild**'s book, Stateless, is the story of her parents Hildegard Freundlich Rothschild and Ernest (Ernst) Leonard Rothschild, both of whom were born in Germany and sought asylum in France in 1933.*

Pretending Suitcase Game

By C. Marlene B. Samuels

To celebrate my eighth birthday, my father presented me with my first-ever suitcase. Child-sized with hard, glossy handles, it was a perfect replica of Mom's grown-up one. Dad insisted that having a "valise-case" was critical to being permitted to grow up. He explained that turning eight was an especially significant birthday, more so because mine fell on Saturday. This coincidence imbued it with an importance on par with a Bat Mitzvah.

Pride invaded his voice as he detailed my birth date's attributes. "You should know that besides your number eight birthday falling on Shabbat, already guten mazel (good luck), it's the *hundret-sechs-und-achtzig* (one-hundred and eighty-sixth) from this year! Something else interesting," he continued, "it's the twenty-seventh Shabbat of the year." Not one thing he detailed made any sense or difference to me. All that mattered was that it was Saturday, so we'd spend uninterrupted time together.

Unbeknownst to me then was why he'd assigned such importance to the eighth year of my life. He insisted it was the best time for him to begin teaching me life's most important lessons. As he explained it, "These are the things – maybe even tricks – what you will need, not only for getting into the good lines but for staying in them." Dad's lessons were about anything but the birds and bees or outdoor safety. Instead, they could have been labeled, "life and death lessons," the epitome of that term. His lectures focused upon the survival skills he mastered, those that had been essential to his surviving the notorious Auschwitz concentration camp.

"But daddy, why is turning eight more important than when I turned seven?" I asked in earnest. "What about when I'll turn nine? I'll be a year older so won't nine be more important than eight?"

"This isn't easy for me to explain but maybe you're old enough to understand what I'm telling you." He said, his voice full of uncertainty. "Eight is the most important year because, the youngest children what I saw in those places from hell where I was, never were younger. *Vershtayst du* (you understand)?" I understood none of it but nodded anyway to keep from disappointing him.

"Papa, where were the younger children?" I asked, totally confused.

"Nowhere, that's where!" He snapped, "Kaputt is where, finished by Nazi bastards!" his eyes on a distant horizon.

Dad's mission: teach skills he knew I'd need if I was to get into the good lines should *die soldaten bastards* return. He considered the Pretending Suitcase Game to be educational the way non-survivor parents regarded visits to museums with their children to be educational. "But you must remember something else. Getting into the good lines is one thing but staying in them is a whole other business."

After Mom pulled the front door closed and headed to Saturday appointments with her private dressmaking clients, I was delighted that Dad and I would have all day to play games, especially the Pretending Suitcase, my absolute favorite!

My new suitcase is the integral part of every Saturday game he and I played because each game required me to pack correctly for the challenging journeys Dad described. These games had an important rule: packing was to be completed within a set timeframe. Each game was a journey my father introduced in which he described the challenges I'd face.

"Du must mitnehmen alles vos du kanst auf sich behalten, auch in die tacshen!" (You must take with you everything that you can hide on yourself, also in your pockets).

I embraced his warning, "There is a good chance your *valise-case* will be taken from you by bad men in green-gray uniforms and big black boots." My ability to keep that thought in mind while I packed was critical to the problem-solving I was expected to master. Dad was adamant that I was prepared for such eventualities. Consequently, he reminded me frequently as he elaborated scenarios for our games. "Better not to depend much on what you put inside from your little suitcase!"

On Saturdays, my pre-World War II rabbinical scholar father from Warsaw – who was a post-war tailor – morphed into a creator of fantastically complex games. His creations challenged my intelligence with one objective: educate me about death-defying survival skills.

While relaxing, he relayed harrowing tales about the dangers and violent deaths he'd escaped. "You must learn all what I had to learn for myself before the war. Nobody did I have to teach me, no one to help me."

"Why not, Papa?"

"Because when I turned sixteen, my mother sent me to yeshiva, the only way for a poor fatherless Jewish boy like me to become respectable."

"Why were you fatherless? What happened to your father?" I asked, unaware that my father also may have had a father.

"Why? Because my father fought in World War I and got wounded in his stomach. Medicine wasn't like now. For maybe two years he was sick and when I was five, he died. It was *churban* (disaster). My mother had to support me, my two brothers, and my sister when such a thing for women was not easy, especially not for Jewish women in Poland."

"So why were you in Auschwitz? I thought you were in yeshiva?"

"I was drafted into the army from yeshiva, but Nazi soldiers captured our battalion, Jews and Gentiles. They separated us into different lines – one for the Jews, one for Gentiles – and Jews they marched to trains that took us to concentration camps, Auschwitz, Birkenau, or others. Gentiles went to prisoner of war camps. But not us. We were different." But he was losing patience with me and all my questions.

"Papa, why were Jews different? Was something wrong with them? Is something wrong with me, too? And were those places far away from where you were in different lines? How did the Jews get there?"

"How? We walked! For days, those Nazi bastards made us to walk – no food, no water, nothing – forget from all this! Now we play our game." And Dad described, in astounding detail, journeys on which I'd be sent, including scenery, sounds, and weather. His adventures allowed me to prove my survival skills since all of them informed my packing. How appropriately I packed determined my score to get into the good lines. After a nap, Dad summarized the Challenge for Today. "You must pack fast, smart, and always for something like what you could pretend is a trip to Hell."

I focused intensely, certain that would help me attain a high score in whatever situation described. Dad glanced at his watch. "Okay now! *Schnell, schnell*, (quick, quick) go collect all what you'll need in your valise-case!" He announced. "They will let you to have ten *minuten* for this packing business." Always there was the unknown he referred to as "they."

"Yeah, it's important what you take *mit*," he said, checking his watch again. "More better, think what it is you can leave behind, no? So, I'll ask you one question: what is it you can forget like it was never before in your life? *Vershtayst* (understand)? Sometimes, more important it is to think what you don't need not what you do, yes?" I sensed Dad's quizzes were to reassure himself that I grasped the true purpose of our games.

"Ask from yourself – before I'm explaining you trouble for today's game – these most important questions: How should I pack? Where will they make me to go? How long will I be gone? What weather will be in such a place? What will they let me? Remember, ask these before you pack your valise-case, yes?"

Dad concocted brutal challenges for every game, journeys designed to test my intuitive survival skills. In some, I'd be conscripted into labor brigades to dig ditches in harsh conditions – torrential downpours, driving snowstorms – or the opposite end of the spectrum, under blistering summer sun. "Imagine hot like what is more hot than in the mountains in summer, but different because no shade or trees will be there. Then maybe it will be cold, like Montreal in winter,

but you'll have no coat because the Nazi bastards took from you, yes? Not just the coat but your valise-case!"

He insisted he imagined these situations, but I knew he'd based them upon his experiences. He created an adventure in which I would be installed in a rat-infested crumbling apartment building in cities with curious names: Bialystock, Grodno, Timur Morash or Esztergom. "Remember, once you go inside such places," he explained, "they will make you to live in a small space but *mit* two, even three families. This you can do, yes?"

"Of course, Papa, why wouldn't I?" I was quick to reassure him, eager to alleviate worries he articulated about my brother and me.

I listened to his deep voice relay tales, in Yiddish, of his Grodno childhood and teen years in a Warsaw yeshivah. The places he named stretched my imagination. I whispered them as though practicing multiplication tables.

Pretending Suitcase evolved and Dad assigned categories to each part. First was, "When They Come for You," next, "Where They Make You Go," and last was, "Your Good-line Score." All games required me to pack my birthday suitcase correctly for the adventures described. The sole purpose: get me into good lines, but moreover, keep me in them.

I chased around collecting whatever I imagined would be best for Dad's described adventures and stuffed my valise-case. He clapped his hands loudly signaling the end of packing-time. He was ready to score my efforts. I dragged my over-stuffed suitcase to the sofa. Dad lifted it up and sat next to it. Excited, I hopped up and down as he released two brass levers. The lid flew open.

"*Ach, sehr sehr gut!* (very very good)" he said, working his hands through its contents and exaggerating his facial gestures. An increasing nervousness enveloped me as I watched his bushy eyebrows knit together. He was about to announce my final score when suddenly, I saw his forehead contort. He shook his head as though something had obstructed his vision, and, ever mindful of my potential distress, whispered, "Dolly does not belong inside your valise-case, okay? You understand, yes? You don't need this dolly because too much space she takes when more important things should be where she is. Next time, forget Dolly!"

"But Papa," I protested, "I love Dolly! Besides, Dolly wants to go, too!" My eyes brimmed with tears.

"No, Dolly does not want to go! No Dolly, no nothing wants to go. This I know for sure. You're thinking you need this babydoll. I know what, God willing, you should never in your life know. You're a little girl so because of this you're a *bissel* (little) confused between what means to want and what means to need, huh?"

He pulled me against him, holding me so tightly I felt his heart thumping against mine. Next, my father kissed the top of my head and propelled me toward my room. Hope coursed through my veins that, during the week, Dad might forget all about our discussion concerning Dolly. If not, I felt comforted knowing that leaving Dolly in my room held the power to keep my father's forehead smooth.

"It's *gut*, excellent really! Much better from the last time. Not to be sad, okay? From this, you learn. Next time will be better with no Dolly, yes? Go fast, fast and put away all these things what you took out before mommy comes home. Be careful," he warned, "to remember every space today where you put things so next time you're packing your valise-case, this too will be faster, yes?"

"Next time, faster Papa!" I chirped. How well I scored reflected my father's teachings about how to remain in the living rows.

"Remember, get high scores and you'll have the best chance to be on trucks what will take you out when Hell is liberated." He smiled reassuringly after his explanations.



***Marlene Samuel** holds an M.A. and Ph.D. from University of Chicago. A research sociologist by training, she writes creative non-fiction by preference. Currently, she is completing her book entitled Ask Mr. Hitler: A Memoir Told in Short Story. (www.marlenesamuels.com)*

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Rabbi Kanter with Temple Emanu-El Planning Committee (January)



Rabbi Kanter at Temple Emanu-El in Sarasota



RRJ Friend BK Hipsher at CRT-Boston





A new RRJ Fan

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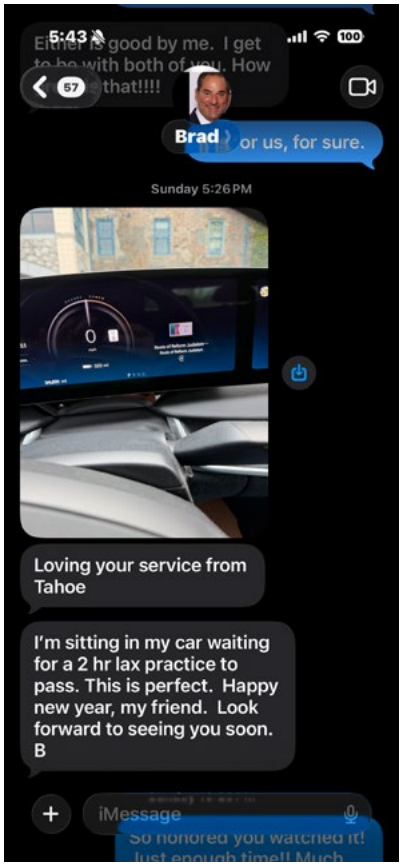
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Klaven family table set for Pesach



HHD JLTV photo while in car



Watching RRJ HHD JLTV photo in traffic

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