

Jakob Kaplan

A Reminder for my Descendants — the Story of a Jewish Soldier's Widow in the Russian Empire

From the book:

“Report : some days in the life of a Tartu Jew”

Translated from Estonian by Berk Vaher

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Soon, deep and pure snow will cover again my almost forgotten grave in the liberators' land in Tartu, 46 Roosi street, where I have lain for nearly eighty years already. There is a small tombstone of white marble which bears writings in Hebrew and Estonian. The upper part of the tombstone has been smashed by thugs. The stone itself had been pushed down but the city reinstalled it. Once or twice a year, the children of my grandson living in Palestine pay a visit to my grave. They are descendants of Aaron or *kohens*, i.e. belonging to the priesthood, and attending the graveyard is prohibited for them, but although I have received a strict upbringing, I would probably forgive them.

Two people among the living still remember me — my younger grandchild Samuel who is now over eighty, and Gita, the wife of his brother or my elder grandson Misha. She became my son's daughter-in-law three years after my death in 1926. That dark young woman, at the time a high-school girl and later a student of the University of Tartu, was one of the locals and should be a hundred years old in three years. She is living in Palestine, the land promised by G. to our forefathers — the so-called sleepers of Hevron (*Yesheney Hevron*) Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, where she arrived after many sufferings and hardships in Narym, Siberia, and later in the north Urals from where she returned with my grandson — her husband Misha, almost blind, and only thanks to the oculists of her dear birth town, Dr. Schotter and Dr Kropman, she can still see.

I came to Tartu for the first time in autumn 1877 after my husband got killed in the Russian-Turkish war, 26 Tishri 5638 by the Jewish calendar. I came with my daughter and two sons to my brothers.

I was born at a very harsh time — in 1840 (three years later according to other sources) in the Vevye settlement in Lithuania. It had been a part of the Russian Empire for nearly a century already and the Cantonist Law had been in force for thirteen years — in fact, it was the inquisition for children. The law enforced by the Emperor Nicholas I on 26 August 1827 gave permission to conscript children since their twelfth year. (That law can be seen in the reading hall of the Estonian Historical Archive, 4 Liivi street.) The law was breached and even seven-year-olds were recruited! The screams and heart-splitting crying of the children who were taken away and of their mothers resounded in my ears until the end of my life. I was born in a big family and got two names at once, as was the custom then — Dvora-Malka (word-for-word, “bee-queen” in Estonian), the surname was Zakovitsh but actually that name did not say much. For money, my brothers received different surnames such as Zakovitsh, Zak, Rosinko, Gordon, Murshak, Kaplan. Kaplan was also my husband's name, he had the right name as he was conscripted in war, i.e. he was not the only son of the family and also the lineage — priest = Kohen = Kaplan — was right.



Grandmother's tombstone on the Jewish graveyard

Of Tartu, 46 Rooski street

The army service lasted for 25 years but in fact that was not so, the reconing started from the age of 18! (In Estonia, there were Cantonists in Tallinn, Tartu, Rapla, Mustvee). A large share of children were forcefully baptized, especially after my birth, in the 1840s. There were cases when those unhappy children committed suicide after being baptized, they drowned themselves, whereas some took no heed of that inquisition and remained true to the faith of their fathers. Later, they developed into the Jewish congregations of Tartu, Narva, Helsinki, Vyborg and many others. That terrible time lasted until the death of Nicholas I. The taunt of Cantonists ended no earlier than in 1856 when Alexander I ascended to the throne. The Jewish congregations had to yield much more recruits than other congregations. That damned system was raising criminals who caught little boys from other congregations like the whites had caught slaves in Africa. Those

bastards were called *hapuns*. So we were living in the not very blissful time. Vevye is situated in a nice place, about a kilometre from the lake of same name, on the territory of the landowners Oginskis. Some musicians and public figures have sprung from that family of Polish nobility. About 40% of the Vevje population were Jews, there were Poles and Tatars living in the neighbourhood, further away also Jews-Karaims who now are treated as not Jewish. (By the way, the Ambassador of Lithuania in Tallinn is a Karaim lady). There were also Lithuanians living among others. At the time of the World War II, the Lithuanians were the ones who on the Jewish New Year's Day of 5702 (22 September 1941) at first beat the Vevye Jews to half-death, took them to the borough of Semilishok, where they murdered everyone on 6 October 1941. So much, then, about my beautiful birthplace where, by the way, everybody was literate, the men of course could also speak Hebrew, some of them knew Aramaic. Whatever the Russian stuff was in 1795-1915, it was still better than the time of the red sorcerers — those even banned the language...

When I became 18, the construction of the Petersburg- Königsberg highway was just about to be completed, the highway was to have a big influence on the whole area later. I got married to Moshe-Mordhai Kaplan. He was born in Tavrig, that was a much bigger settlement than Vevye and was situated 8 kilometres away from the German border. The wedding was held according to all the rules and of course I wore a wig ever since until the end of my life. Our life was rather eventless, everybody was talking about the good emperor now. There were lots of new and unseen things: the railway, all kinds of factories, many books, newspapers... In general, the Jews in Vilno and after 1843 in the Kovno gubernia were educated people. Both Vevye and Tavrig were still parts of the Kovno gubernia at that time. Besides their own world, they belonged to two other worlds — the Russian and the German ones, there was also some Polish influence, even though after the third division, that country existed no more (and there would be the fourth in autumn 1939). Our centre was Vilno with its printing-offices and religious schools. The especially big influence was exerted by the Vilno Gaon who passed away in 1797 at the age of 77, i.e. the genius of Vilno or Elias of Vilno — the HAGRA. That educated man was our guide also in the more difficult circumstances: in the Cantonist companies and battalions from Aland to Irkutsk, the memory of him kept us in our faith.

Today, there are the graves of six Cantonists on Papinsaari of Aland — (when asking about the place, one has to call it Prästo, for the people on the isles are no particular admirers or *ihailijat* of Finnish), in the forest, about 1.5 kilometres from the highway. The men served in the Bomarsund fortress which was blown up in 1856, and died there between 1831 and 1850. The graves are listed as heritage. On the initiative of Jakob, the elder son of my grandson, a Hagra jubilee stamp was released in Palestine, Israel, in 1997 and a booklet with photographs of the Papinsaari cemetery of Jewish soldiers in 1992.

We were also living in Vilno then and keeping up with the times, people were getting to know the wide world, we could also speak German. In 1846, a great man of our nation, our guardian and protector Moshe-Montefiore (1784-18851) visited Vilno on his way to Nicholas I. My great-grandchild Jakob attended the Portuguese-style Bewis Marks synagogue of London in 1999, it was established in 1701 and there is still a place for that great Jew in it, it is separated from the others by little chains and no one will sit there. Abraham Katzenelbogen, son of Simha (1798-1873) was also living in Vilno, he wrote an interesting booklet called "The Steam Engine" ("Mehonat Hakitor"), it was published in 1846 in Danzig, witnessing the advancement in the thinking of the people at that time. Our family had connections with all the brothers — the ones in Yamburg, Ingria; in Oranienbaum; as well as the Murshaks and the Rosinkos in Livonia. The latter were living in Tartu already before 1860 and the brother's grandson Hermann was murdered by the red bastards on 9 July 1941 alongside 192 absolutely innocent Estonians, including a teacher and children's writer,

Jüri Parijõgi. The Hebrew translation of the latter's "Steel Boy" was published in Palestine in 1953.

Especially good letters came from the Rosinkos: they praised their clean and well-cared hometown, the people in North Livonia were educated and rather wealthy in town as well as in the country, despite the fact that the landowners were German, not the sons of the indigenous people whose language resembled that of the inhabitants of Ingrian and Finnish grand duchy. There were also some of our Jewish students studying at the University of Tartu and, since 1875, there was a Jewish school where my great-grandchildren could study later. The life showed its kind side, there were almost no Catholics, the people were benevolent and tolerant with us. Meanwhile, the Cantonist schools and army settlements had been abolished on the emperor's order, and the blessed year 1874 came for the Jewish people as well as the other nations of the empire, when the overall compulsory military service was enforced. The sword of Damocles disappeared and we could breathe in relief. I was living peacefully and in harmony with my husband and children. My husband was rather irascible indeed, but then he descended from *kohens*...

Vilno has a remarkable importance also in the history of the liberators, i.e. Estonians, that was the site of the infantry cadet school where many Estonians received their military education, among them General Johan Laidoner. And that knowledge was later excellently put into practice on the battlegrounds.

I did not go to Tavrig anymore. The fate of the Jews there did not differ in any way from the other Jews of "Marne Lite" ("Mother Lithuania"). Terrible times lay ahead: some people were deported to Komi where the majority were starved to death; after that, during the Nazi occupation (2 July 1941, 3- 10 July 1941 and 16 September 1941) all Jews were murdered by the Lithuanians and also by the Germans, in Vizhbutai as well as elsewhere — on the highways outside the town and also in Antoshunia. On 16 September 1941, the Lithuanians murdered 513 souls, the drunken Lithuanian killers took gold teeth and clothes from the living (underwear was not touched). Small children were not killed with a gun but their skulls were smashed by beating them against stones and trees. In 1940, about 2000 Jews were living in Tavrig; six souls in 1959. The archive of the congregation went missing during the World War II. We had lived in Lithuania certainly for more than 600 years. Unfortunately I do not know where we had come from — maybe from Germany, maybe from the lands of Tauria — in any case, our Yiddish differs from the language of those who have lived on the Western Polish as well as the Galician, Ukrainian, Romanian and Slovakian territories — the language can betray your country of origin, whether you are *a litvak* or not. Neither are we mostly Hassides, but *misnagdim* (the opposers) — the prayer and the religious rites differ from those of the above mentioned.

So we were living, until all of a sudden came an abrupt change — the Turkish war broke out in 1877. Though it had been heard and read about the Balkan disturbances in the previous years, it was all quite unexpected to me. It was still far away. Indeed, we in Lithuania also used to be visited by fundraisers from Jerusalem, Hevron, Tsfat (in Galilee), Tiberia, which were all parts of the Ottoman Empire. Many Jews were also living there (in Turkey, Bulgaria, Mesopotamia). My husband was not very young anymore either, but the chance would have it that he was conscripted and in a couple of months, the message of Job arrived that I am a widow and with that came the right to live in whatever place of the empire. Where and when our husband and father perished, whether it was on the river Danube, on the way to the battlefield or in battle, I would never learn. Without knowing the grave of my dear husband, I was a widow for 46 years. My descendants in Palestine will light also now, 123 years after his death, a candle in his memory and say the prayer that is partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic, the *kaddish*. A quorum is needed for that, however

— ten men who are over 13. The rumour has it that my husband got the medal of St George, my great-grandchild attempted to make an enquiry about it and in 1958, he wrote to the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union, where all the Russian army files until 1918 can be found. From there, the son of my grandson received a rather interesting, polite and extremely original answer: let the man (i.e. my husband who was killed in October 1877!) come and settle his things out for himself. The son of my grandson could not answer anything but that all those who had signed the document (three persons) could go to the place where he is.

There were over 500 men from Livonia in that war, the Finnish guard also took part in the bloody battles. There were especially many Jews in the 16th and 30th infantry divisions and there was no lack of them on the opposite side either... I recall a rather sad analogy: in 1944, sons of one and the same mother and father were fighting against each other on the banks of the Narva river — for example, Eevald from Rapla county was in the Red Army, his brother Raimond in the German one. Both on the “right” side... A Jewish song also hails from the Turkish war: the women ask a soldier why he is so sad, and he responds that he comes from Plevna, Balkan, etc.

It was after that stroke of fate when I decided to say farewell to Lithuania and moved with my children to my relatives in Tartu. The family received me well and we decided together that it would be best to find work in Porhov, a county town of the Pskov gubernia, established in 1239 as a border fort of the state of Great Novgorod. There was also a small Jewish congregation, about four hundred souls, most of them soldier’s families just like mine. Ten years later in 1887, my daughter Hinde moved permanently to the USA and got married there to a young man named Kramer from the Ukraine. I stayed in Russia. My son Wulff drowned. The other son Eljakim stayed with me. Lyova, in fact Eljakim-Leib, got his name from both of his grandfathers — as was then our custom. His great-grandson also bears that name. The son went to the state school and studied there for two years, privately learning German and of course Hebrew like any man at the time. He had a very beautiful handwriting and that was also the reason why he was pressed for converting to Christianity — he could become a scribe, some kind of a clerk, officer etc., it did not suit us. I said that we will serve the emperor and fatherland (“Sluzhim tsaryu- otetshestvu veroi i pravdoi”), but we will not change our faith. I earned my living by selling the clothes racks, I also received the state benefit of a soldier’s widow. My son worked for several companies.

At that time, the Jewish soldiers and their sons used to marry a woman from Lithuania. And so, at the turn of the century, my son went with his Cantonist friend Fromtshenko to Vilno to propose to a woman. He married a beautiful and rich girl Gita from the Hanes family, three years younger than him. We called her Ida. Soon after my son’s wedding, we moved to the gubernian centre, Pskov, where my son established a comparatively big stationery store and a publishing house of postcards. The store was situated in the city centre, in a beautiful Art Nouveau house. Postcards issued by my son’s publishing house can still be found in the philocartists’ collections. The business contacts were mainly with Livonia — Tartu, also Vyborg. We visited our relatives in Tartu, Yamburg and other places, my daughter-in-law had relatives in the big cities of the empire. My life went well, I just missed my daughter dearly.

I went to see my daughter in America. The border between the German and Russian empires was then exactly 1110 versts long. When I crossed the border of the Russian empire, I was at once in Prussia and the difference between the two empires was instantly visible: the German side was much cleaner and at least from the wagon window I could see no drunkards. The one thing which was not different — there were many men in uniform on both sides. I got to Hamburg soon. I had booked a ticket well in advance to the fastest steamship at the time, “Deutschland”. The ship had

been in use just for a couple of years since the spring of 1900 and was owned by the Hamburg-American shipping company. It was a 663 feet long new ship with four chimneys, displacement 16 000 tons. The voyage was fine and there were plenty of emigrants from Europe in the 3rd class of the ship, among them were many Jews, especially from the eastern and southern gubernias of Russia. Families with children and old people, fathers already waiting in the new homeland in many cases. What concerns the emigration of Jews, then in my opinion the reason for it was the assassination of our good emperor Alexander II on 1 March 1881. And I am also sure that the murder influenced the history of the whole Europe as well as the world.

So, I arrived as a visitor at the Bronx of New York. The reception was naturally warm, it could not be otherwise: I had raised my children to be hospitable, just as it had been taught since my forefather Abraham. The daughter's family started to persuade me to stay with them for good (Hinde herself died in 1951), but I had no such plan and I only went on a voyage to see my daughter and her family. I was accustomed to living in more spacious places, but here there was noise and rumble all around. There was a most lively railway traffic in the vicinity, the railway was right above our heads — higher than the roofs. The people were living very tightly together, packed like sardines, and although it seemed that the whole part of town is a state of Jews who incidentally were speaking a different Jewish, not the Lithuanian one, it did not bring the place any closer to my heart. There was something disgusting and humiliating in the hustle of the crowds or rather the masses on the streets, in the work in the so-called sweat enterprises, especially in the clothes industry.

I bade them farewell and got back to Pskov. I was held in high esteem there, not only as a soldier's widow but also as a rich mistress, but especially because of my strict character and serious and pious conduct. I will not relate about my emotional life, there is also not much about the musings of our foremothers Sarah, Rivkah, Leah and Rachel in the Book of Books...

Children were born in my son's family: the first one was a boy and, according to our custom, got the name of my dear husband, Moshe (Moses), we called him Misha. Soon, he also got a sister Fanni, we called her Fenya. Both of them were talented, studied diligently and also spoke French well, the Hebrew teacher visited the boy at home. The children studied in the Pskov grammar school. We lived in a new house where there also were a garden and a yard, I kept hens there. The hens had names, too, one of them was Ribushiha after an acquaintance of mine, Mrs Ribush, who talked a lot and very rapidly. (Nahum Ribush also came from that family, b. 1858 in Vitebsk; being a student of the University of Tartu, he stood at the cradle of the Estonian flag.) Once, the hen had gone missing, I sent my grandson to look for her. The boy found the hen and came to announce gladly that Ribushiha had fallen into an empty barrel and he had saved her from there. At the same moment, Mrs Ribush came to visit us and the embarrassment was very great...

Children liked French, there were French officers in Pskov at the time of the Great War, i.e. the World War I, and Misha showed them the beautiful old town. After I had returned from America, another war broke out, this time with the Japanese. None of our family participated in that war, but the same enemy was indeed fought against in the World War II by my daughter's sons far away in Oceania. Some of our acquaintances had gone to war from Tartu, for example Smeloh, later the coachman of the funeral service "Hevra Kadisha" (in Aramaic) of the Tartu congregation; his son Meir went to Palestine for good after having served in the Estonian Defence Force, that was on the year of my death. Meir was devastated until the end of his life by what he had seen in winter 1918/1919: on the ice of the frozen river Emajõgi, on the corner of Lao and Turn streets, the bolsheviks were beating people — tearing their clothes off, shooting them and throwing the bodies

into the ice-hole. Among them was our acquaintance Shtark, a father of seven children, a handsome man with a moustache; and our namesake Kaplan whose eyes were poked out and nose was cut off by those red bastards. Meir Smelaj worked until very old age and built with his own hands a beautiful house in Ramat-Gan, planted an orchard around the house, also went to Transjordan. Shvarts from Tartu also went to the Japanese war, after the escape from Pskov we lived in his house briefly, I could not remember anything good about that buddy.

We were wealthy people in our congregation as well as in town. The son had good connections with the Vyborg congregation. The Vyborg synagogue burned in the Winter War, the holy scriptures could be saved and all the members of the congregation started to build a new centre in other Finnish towns. As is known, Vyborg is still occupied on the basis of the Stalin-Hitler deal (MRP), even today, almost 80 years after my death. There were cases in Vyborg where speaking Swedish or Finnish was required from my son at the post office; he could still manage with German and Russian, though.

An unfortunate event interfered into that good life, however — my lovely daughter-in-law Gita fell ill, we took her to the capital — to the Petersburg hospital, she died there at 34. We buried her in Pskov, we set up a beautiful tombstone of black marble just as for me later, the red bastards destroyed it 50 years later...

A couple of years later, the Great War started. My son married for the second time, the wedding took place in Oranienbaum. The daughter-in-law whose name was Malka just as mine, came from the Medukhovski family of Jewish farmers and former Cantonists. She was tall, beautiful, very gentle and good woman, and the life went on nicely. My grandson Misha respected her like his own mother, unfortunately Fenta did not get on so well with her.

The bride was eleven years younger than my son, she had been born on the same day as my son, on the Hoshana Raba feast. Her grandfather lived to the age of 104 and I thought she would have a long life as well, unfortunately she died just six years after me and is buried on the same graveyard. My great-grandson Eljakim renovated the inscriptions on our tombstones with a paint brought from Palestine. Samuel, the brother of my daughter-in-law, was killed in the Great War, he was awarded with the Cross of St. George.

In September a year later, a daughter Riva (Rivka) was born into my son's family. His son will also become an officer in the Palestinian Defence Force and he will be killed in the Six Days War — in June 1967.

We were still living well but the situation changed rapidly and ever for the worse: there were burglaries and murders, and my son bought himself a revolver. The violent power of the reds came and the gun had to be thrown away into a ditch. There was a shortage of everything but we still had everything at home, we had good friends in Oudova (Estonians) and Ingria, they helped us and we helped them. They were educated people, excellent landlords and farmers, there were also some musicians among them. Unfortunately they would not follow the example of us and many other members of the Jewish congregations in Pskov — they did not want to leave their handiwork behind and they would not opt with about 40 000 Estonians to the newly formed Estonian Republic. In less than 20 years, when my family was living prosperously in Estonia, they paid a high price in blood — being robbed blind, deported to the cold land, shot down, humiliated and even having to deny their nationality. My son was arrested but miraculously he survived, G. saved him.

The feast came — *peisah* — the days of liberation from the Egyptian slavery and the congregation did not have any flour for baking buns of unfermented dough, or *matsas*. They came

to me. I was already 78 years old, was not scared of the power of self-appointed thugs, I had authority and my honour and I told the members of the congregation that as long as I still live in Pskov, there will also be *matsa* on the table of each Jew on the feast days. I went to the authorities, demanding not begging, I got the flour and no family was lacking *matsa*. The war was on, violence ruled everywhere and there was no sense in living in town anymore. We had nowhere to escape, we were cut off from my daughter and the relatives living in Livonia and my daughter-in-law was pregnant again... Where the trouble is biggest, the God is the closest!

On 25 May 1919, the Defence Force of the young Estonian Republic liberated us from the red plague. The reds in whose ranks there were many Latvians, had to escape. With Estonians, the army of the Russian whites also came to town, commanded by Bulak-Balakhovitch who had been born in Lithuania in 1883, and where the Estonian soldiers did not keep their eye on, murders and burglaries started to happen. They had their own slogan against Jews and communists and they were not lacking in cruelty... By the way, the personal tailor of Bulak-Balakhovitch was a Jew. Bulak-Balakhovitch used to serve in the Red Army but he crossed over to the whites. He was murdered in 1940 in Warsaw. The murderers were not found.

The commanders of the Estonian forces were young and slim men — K. Parts and N. Reek; General Ernst Podder left an impression of an elderly and very calm and respectable gentleman beside them, he later brought fame to Estonia with the victory in the *Landeswehr* War. The commander-in-chief of the army of the young state, General Johan Laidoner was also there. There was a parade and now we felt liberated from that vale of tears. Of the liberators, the above mentioned heroes, only General Podder died natural death, the lives of other Estonian heroes ended in the hands of the red hangmen. One of the streets in Tartu used to bear the name of E. Podder but the current city fathers have for some inexplicable reason preferred Pepler to the victor of *Landeswehr*.

On the second day after the arrival of the liberators, my younger grandson was born and he got the name of his uncle who had been killed in war, Samuel. The war raged on and we made the hard choice that the family would temporarily move to Livonia — now already to Estonia. We got fed up with the workers' and peasants' paradise in eighteen months. My son with his wife and now already with four children undertook a short voyage over the lake Peipus to wait out the peace and the disappearance of that crazy Soviet ghost, and then return home to Pskov. I stayed on the spot initially. The liberators also had battleships which invaded the port of Pskov right on the next day after the occupation of town, on the birthday of little Samuel, 26 May 1919. There were three ships: "Ahti", formerly "Olga"; "Tartu", formerly "Jurjev" (and briefly during the German occupation in 1918, "Graf Kirschbach"); and the third, a cannon boat like the others — "Vanemuine", formerly "Emperor", after the revolution, "President". The ships stood in the port of Pskov in flying colours and the people went there to admire them. The commander of "Ahti" was Midshipman Andrei Julle, the commander of "Tartu" was Midshipman A. Vunk, since June Midshipman Jaan Riis. The impeccable behaviour and dress of the crews stood out. The working clothes as well as the uniform were clean, the behaviour was orderly, worthy of sailors' honour, which was the complete opposite to the "revolutionary spirit" and extreme brutality of the Russian seamen which we had seen already for more than two years. I was already thinking that all the soldiers are negligent and beastly now, but suddenly those brave sailors appeared here on the river Velikaya like aliens from another planet.

My family also left on those ships, and not temporarily but forever. The son did not believe that they would depart forever, eight years later he was still writing to his sister in America that the

time is not ripe yet for returning home...

I stayed on the spot and exactly three months later, the liberators handed the town over to the whites, but those could not hold on for longer than a couple of days and the red sorcerers were back again. I remained in town for some more time, in autumn my son in Tartu sent his loyal housekeeper Mrs Nets to help me. The Nets family had their own house in Narva-Jõesuu, right behind the kursaal on Kudruküla street where my daughter-in-law founded a Jewish boarding house a couple of years later, but that was already after my death. Most of the visitors of the boarding house were from Tartu, there were also people from Tallinn and Finland, but all that came later. Then, however, me and Mrs Nest came on foot over the frontline near Irboska, we had wrapped ourselves in large kerchiefs like Setu women.

The ships that had brought my family to Tartu were standing in the anchorage at the end of Lao street, near the sawmill of our namesake Kaplan. On the first day of the Jewish new year before the evening prayer, our people went to pray there, the “Tashlih” prayer was read. A longer version of that prayer is the famous HIDA (Haim-Josef-David-Azulai) (1724- 1807) prayer for sailors, captains, birth-giving women etc.

My son had managed to send some wagons of stationery to Tartu but those went missing; more precisely, in abuse of our trust and reaping benefit from the times of war, they were robbed from us by Leo Mirwitz, what with him being from a respectable family. In spite of that, our family got back on our feet again like phoenix rising from the ashes. We lived on Uue-turu street, house no. 9, there was also the stationery store, but all that happened already after me. Lucky chance had it that just when we came to Tartu, the rabbi of the local congregation was Haim Fishel Epstein who had been born in 1874 in Tavrig— in the same town as my beloved husband who was taken from me by the war so long ago already, more than forty years ago... Rabbi Epstein was quite a personality and while in Tartu, he lectured on Jewish theology, philosophy, and ethics at the University of Tartu (founded 1632) in the years 1917— 1920. Rabbi Epstein was the president of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada in 1930; wrote on rabbinical law and Jewish ethics.

I could live in the Estonian Republic — in a peaceful land, in a quiet congregation — in a humane way and without fear for four more years. My health got worse, it was hard to breathe, the last days I lied constantly sighing in my room, in the company of my son’s daughter Riiva, she was already six by that time. And even though apparently I could say just as my forefather Jacob said to the pharaoh that... “few and evil have the days of the years of my life been and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers...” (1st Book of Moses 47, 9); I could still thank G.: my family respected me and was now all together around my deathbed. My descendants and family members would be in many wars to come, and serve in the Russian, British, American, Estonian and Israeli armies from the Solomon Islands to the Suez canal and from Kurland to the river Rhine. But I am lying here where I arrived years ago as a widow with three children and still I forgive them — my men, priestly descendants, that they have not forgotten me, their great-grandmother, and come to pray on my grave when they come again from Palestine to visit their free hometown.

The country of the liberators-Estonians also had to suffer hard, but Estonia is free again and persists, as I believed when I sent my family on a ship. Let the Almighty protect them! And I finish my little story according to an old custom: “And let the Redeemer come to Zion soon, in our days” — “UBA LEZIJON GOEL BIMHERA BEYAMENU, AMEN.”

I died on the Hanukka Eve — 23 Kislev 5683 — in December 1923. For a long time I am no

more, but I still live in my descendants, I have bequeathed them persistence, faithfulness to one's principles and creed and the knowledge that one should never let no-one spit on one's plate.

Fleshvan 5761 - November 2000 Palestine, Tel Aviv