

# Ihil Shraibman

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Kishinev

Moldova

Interviewer: Nathalia Fomina

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*Ihil Shraibman is an old man of medium height, with thick gray hair, gentle features and shrewd eyes. He turned 91 this year. It takes an effort for him to move around his two-bedroom apartment. His sweet-looking and energetic wife Marina, who is much younger than him, is always by his side. She treats him tenderly and sweetly calls him Ihilenka. I admire Marina: she is a real writer's wife. Marina is Russian, but she's learned Yiddish to understand her husband's creative works and assist him. She knows the history of the Shraibman family very well, and when Ihil has a problem with remembering something, she comes to his help. The spouses often switch to Yiddish. Yiddish is Ihil's mother tongue and he switches to it when he can't remember a Russian word. Ihil and Marina live in a nicely furnished apartment in Botanica, one of the central districts in Kishinev. Marina is a great housewife. She keeps the apartment ideally clean. We have our meeting in Ihil's study. There is a desk with a computer on it, a bookcase, a cozy sofa and a portrait of Markish Peretz [1](#) on the wall. Beside it is Ihil's portrait, made by Mihay Greku, an artist in Kishinev. Ihil is used to giving interviews as a writer and some of my questions like, for example, the one about his grandfather Zusia's appearance surprised him. Answering my questions Ihil often referred me to his creative works: 'I wrote about this a long time ago.' When I asked him to describe the Jewish holidays in his family he smiled: 'Don't you know about celebrations?'*

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## **My family background**

My paternal grandfather, Ihil-Avrom Shraibman, came from Vadul-Rashkov in Bessarabia [2](#). There are two towns called Rashkov: Ukrainian Rashkov and Vadul-Rashkov in Bessarabia, located on the bank of the Dniestr River. When in 1918 Bessarabia became Romanian territory [3](#), the Dniestr formed a border between the USSR and Romania and there were no more boats sailing across. We used to say: the Dniestr has been closed. Vadul-Rashkov had no more communications with Odessa port, the railway station was a long distance away and the town grew poorer. Jews resided in the central part of the town, and the Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian population lived in the suburbs. The streets were narrow and curved and one-storied cottages were close to one another. There were sign boards: 'Butcher's' or 'Tailor's' on some of them. In spring and fall the streets were

impassable. There were four synagogues, a cheder, elementary and talmud torah schools in the town. My grandfather Ihil-Avrom was a cantor. He died six years before I was born. This happened in the 1900s. I was his first grandson and was named after him.

My grandmother Hana was very kind like all grandmothers, and very smart. I can't remember her maiden name. She owned a small grocery store where she sold tea, coffee and cereals. She also sold kvas [a kind of beverage] and dried sunflower seeds, popular with Jews and Moldovans. The store was in the house and the house wasn't big. There were two rooms and a kitchen with a big Russian stove [4](#). The house was lighted with kerosene lamps. The house was plainly furnished: there was a square table, a few chairs, a bedroom and a wardrobe. My grandmother had many children. I remember almost all the names. They were religious like all Jews in the town. They celebrated Sabbath, followed the kashrut and went to the synagogue.

I remember my father's older brother Shapseh very well. Uncle Shapseh was tall and handsome. He had beautiful black eyes, but he was blind. Shapseh lived with Grandmother. He made his living by lotteries. My uncle and his old companion traveled to smaller towns with lottery tickets and rewards: clocks, samovars or silver cups. They sold their lottery tickets for five lei [the national currency of Romania] each. After selling tickets they returned home, invited a few residents of Rashkov and arranged the lottery. They wrote the winning numbers on paper strips and the rest of paper strips were blank. Then the winnings strips were picked and my uncle and his companion delivered the rewards to the winners' homes. When I was eight, my uncle fell ill suddenly during one of his trips, died and was buried in some distant town: relatives failed to come to his funeral.

My father was the second son in the family and after him came Meyer. They said in the family that Uncle Meyer was going to study in the yeshivah, but this dream of his wasn't to come true. He had to help Grandmother with the store and take care of the younger children. However, Meyer spent every free minute reading his books. When his time came, he married Zisl, a Jewish girl from our town. He got some training to become a shochet, moved to the faraway village of Shepteban' and worked as a shochet for the rest of his life. In the 1960s a Jewish woman from Shepteban' told me that Uncle and his family wanted to evacuate during the Great Patriotic War [5](#), but Germans captured them before they managed to cross the Dniestr. Uncle Meyer, his wife Zisl and my cousins Malka and Tsylia were beaten to death with sticks with sharp ends.

Uncle Zusia was my father's youngest brother. His wife's name was Tuba. They had a son. His name was also Ihil. Uncle Zusia died before the war. Tuba and Ihil were killed by the Fascists during the war. When my grandmother died in 1931, my father and his brothers argued about the inheritance grandmother had left. It wasn't much, but the brothers never restored their good after that.

I also remember my father's two sisters. One of them was Feige-Beile. She was very beautiful. She married a Jewish villager and moved to live in his village. She and her husband occasionally visited the town, I remember. She died from consumption when I was about ten.

There is an interesting story about my father's other sister Reizl. I remember her. She was very beautiful. This happened on the other bank of the Dniestr at the time of the Civil War [6](#) in Russia, when Ukrainian Jews were looking for rescue from Petliura's [7](#) pogroms in Bessarabia. It happened in winter, when the Dniestr was covered with ice. I even remember Mama giving food to some refugees in the kitchen. They were heading to Kishinev from where they were hoping to move

abroad. One night two guys from the other side of the Dniestr knocked on the door, pushed it inside and entered the house. Everybody was asleep. One of the guys said, 'Erez Yisroel' ['Land of Israel' in Yiddish]. Grandmother and her daughters woke up, 'What's the matter?' The guys were wearing military uniforms and this scared my grandmother, but they happened to be no militaries. At that time people wore whatever they could get. One of them, Ovsey Zayatz, saw Reizl and stayed to live with them. I think he lived in Rashkov for about two years. He married Reizl and opened a store. Later they moved to Bucharest, looking for a better life. They stayed there for a year or longer since Reizl visited us once. She stayed a week in Rashkov and then they moved to Canada. Ovsey was a nice person. He worked in Canada as a private teacher. Later some of his former students lent him some money to open a grocery store. He did well and became a rather wealthy man. They had children. They wrote to us and even used to send their relatives ten dollars as a gift during the Romanian rule.

My papa was born in the 1880s during the tsarist rule. He could read and write in Yiddish, but he had no profession. He also knew Romanian and some Russian. He had to support the household after my grandfather died. In winter he went around villages working for tobacco producers. He sorted out the tobacco, had very little sleep – two or three hours per day. He came back home in spring before Pesach. Papa was very kind, taciturn, reserved and not a merry person at all. I thought he was handsome. I remember him with and without a beard. I liked him, when he didn't have a beard. He looked younger then. He always covered his head. He didn't go to the synagogue on Sabbath, but he did on holidays. He and my mother were neighbors and fell in love with each other. Mama always said they were very much in love and had married for love.

I remember my maternal grandfather, Zusia Chokler, very well. He was born and lived in Vadul-Rashkov. He took over any job at hand to support his numerous household. During the tsarist rule he was a ferry man on the Dniestr. On the days of fairs he hauled wagons, Moldovans, Jews, bulls and chickens from one bank of the river to the other. Grandfather Zusia also dealt in lotteries, but the main occupation of his life was architecture. Grandfather Zusia designed and constructed houses. My grandfather built one of the four synagogues in town. This was the synagogue for the commonest people in the town, who had no craft. There was an open book made on the front wall of the synagogue with two lions with their forelegs up on both sides of the book. Over the lions there was an engraved inscription in Hebrew: 'By the effort of rab Zusia Chokler'. When my brother Isrul was born, Grandfather Zusia put me on one knee and him on another to tell us fairy tales that we could listen to for hours.

My grandmother's name was Yenta, but I can't remember her maiden name. I remember her. She was a housewife like all Jewish women at the time. She was short and always had her head bandaged: she suffered from frequent headaches. Grandmother Yenta stuffed pillows with feathers. There was white fluff everywhere in the house. My grandfather's household was kosher and they all celebrated Sabbath like all other Jews in the town: they had a festive dinner and lit candles. They went to the synagogue on holidays and fasted on Yom Kippur. My grandmother and grandfather had four children. My mother had a brother and two sisters.

My mother's older brother Srul died young. I can hardly remember him. My brother, born in 1920, was named after him. My mother's older sister Ida was a spinster and lived with Grandmother Yenta, helping her to stuff pillows. Ida wore her hair in two plaits. She died before the war. The

other sister, Dvoira, married a man from Kodyma [today Ukraine] before the Russian Revolution [8](#) and lived in the USSR. I never met her. When Bessarabia was annexed to the USSR in 1940 [9](#), we received a letter from them, but then the Great Patriotic War began and we never met.

My mama Reizl was born in Vadul-Rashkov in 1892. She finished elementary school and two grades of secondary school. Mama was beautiful. She had long thick hair, blue eyes and extraordinarily soft skin. She had a good sense of humor and laughed a lot. Mama loved my father and us, her children, and always said that love was most important of all things in life.

My parents got married when they were 19-20 years old. They had a Jewish wedding with a chuppah. They rented an apartment. After the wedding my father opened a store and Mama was a housewife. I was born in Vadul-Rashkov in 1913. We often changed apartments and I remember four-five apartments that we rented. There were usually two rooms and a kitchen in these apartments. Then one acquaintance moved to America and sold his house to my father for a very low price. There were two rooms, a kitchen and a cellar in the house. However, we didn't live there long. It was in a quiet spot and too remote for the trade to go well. My father built another house near where Grandmother Hana lived. We moved into this house with two rooms and a store in it. The former house was ours, but nobody lived in there. My parents had ten children. After me my brother Isrul, named after Mama's brother, was born. Then came Iosif, Buzia, Feiga, Shapseh, Luba, Zisl [Zina], Hana [Anna] and Ida. Shapseh and Luba died in infancy, Feiga died at the age of ten, when she was at school and even wrote poems.

We celebrated Jewish holidays at home. I remember Vadul-Rashkov before Pesach, when there was a lot of sunshine in the town. The windows in the houses were open, some people were engaged in whitewashing their houses, some were dusting their beds and the others were digging around the trees. Mama always did a general cleanup before Pesach. She cleaned the windows and doors, whitewashed the kitchen and burnt out the crockery. When the house was clean she took out the Pesach crockery. All I remember is that all children had little wine cups with handles. Mama made keyzele, the matzah pudding, gefilte fish and chicken broth. She baked latkes from matzah flour. We bought ordinary wine for Pesach. My father conducted the first two seders, reclining on cushions and according to all the rules. He followed the rules of the Haggadah where they were described in detail. It also contains di fir kashes, the four questions and the answers to them. Initially I posed the questions, being the oldest and then my brothers took over: 'Mah nishtanah halaylah hazeh mikol halaylot' in Hebrew. My father put an afikoman, a piece of matzah, away and we were to look for it. However, I don't remember getting a gift for it. We didn't have guests on seder – just ourselves.

Shavuot came after Pesach. Mama only cooked dairy food on Shavuot.

We fasted and went to the synagogue on Yom Kippur. On Rosh Hashanah Mama made round-shaped challah and we ate apples with honey.

The children loved Chanukkah. And I remember it well. We lit chanukkiyah on this holiday. We cut out the inside of a potato, poured oil in it, inserted a wick and lit it. Every day another candle was added. They were on the window sill. We, the kids, were given some money, a little bit, of course, considering that there were so many of us. We also received a dreidl. Mama also made potato latkes.

## Growing up

I was born on Purim. I remember how hamantashen and fluden were made. My wife Marina always makes hamantashen on Purim. Jam and nuts were to be prepared in advance. We also took shelakhmones around, but this was not as colorful as Sholem Aleichem [10](#) described, when children and adults took gifts to their relatives and acquaintances. However, there were no purimspiels, though my father told me that in his youth there were real performances in Vadul-Rashkov.

I went to cheder before I turned six. My teacher Dovid-Iosif was short, hunchbacked and very old. He never raised his voice. He taught us the aleph-beth, reading and writing. After finishing cheder I went to the Jewish talmud-torah school, also an elementary school, but more secular than the cheder. Then I finished a Romanian elementary school. The director of the school was Jewish and there were Jewish pupils in it. Then I finished two grades of a secondary school. There was a public library in Vadul-Rashkov. I liked reading in Yiddish, Romanian and Russian. There were books in Hebrew, Yiddish, Romanian and Russian in the library. The Romanians closed it at some time, but later they reopened it. I was about nine years old then. I remember that day well. I was waiting for the library to open, sitting on the stairs. I was the first one to come in there and register. I went to the library to borrow books almost every day. Within a few years I read all the books in this library. I remember the librarian advising the visitors who had a problem choosing a book to read: 'Ask the boy over there' and I recommended them a book to read.

On 13th March 1926, when I was to turn 13, I was to have my bar mitzvah. Bar mitzvah is an important day in the life of a Jewish boy. On this day he becomes a man. He has one square leather box with phylacterias inside wrapped upon his arm, and another one placed on his head. On bar mitzvah the boy is supposed to say a speech in Hebrew about the Jewry and his faith in God. My seide ['grandfather' in Yiddish] Zusia prepared me for this most important event. I remember him visiting us – we lived in a basement then – to teach me my speech. However, literally a few days before my bar mitzvah my aunt Ida ran in agitation and woke up my parents: my grandfather had died. Mama and Papa put my brother Isrul and me into their bed and went there. They came back at dawn and took Isrul and me to our grandfather's home. Little Buzia and Feiga stayed at home. When we came, my grandfather was lying on the floor wrapped in takhrikhim under a black blanket. There were candles on the floor. There were people all around him crying. My brother Isrul and I were standing and not crying. Then I remember he was carried to the cemetery. Then we walked back home. On our way we stopped by a stream. My father said, 'Well, Grandfather isn't here any longer' and started to cry. I cried, too. After a while we went on home. My father loved Grandfather Zusia dearly. He was very smart. The adults sat shivah, but I didn't. I made my speech by myself.

When I turned 14, I took up teaching in the village of Shestachi, 15 kilometers away from Vadul-Rashkov to help my father support the family. I had four pupils: three boys and a girl and three adults, their parents. One had two children and the two others had one each. They agreed to accommodate me during the winter: I stayed and had meals during a specified time period with each family. I taught them reading and writing in Hebrew. The boys were older than me and weren't quite eager to study. They made me tell them fairy tales and stories. Every Friday afternoon I walked back to Rashkov and on Sunday morning I returned to Shestachi. On my way home I was plotting stories for the boys. I earned a few hundred lei in this season.

At the age of 16 I went to the seminary in Chernovtsy [today Ukraine]; it trained teachers for the Tarbut school [11](#) in Hebrew. There were such schools in every town in Bessarabia. However, I already became a leftist. It resulted from my reading: if one read Itshack Perez [12](#), one became a leftist for sure. In my opinion, the Jewish literature was leftist, rather than Communist. In Chernovtsy I didn't hesitate to join the 'Krasny Shkolnik' [Red pupil in Russian], an underground youth organization; it was some sort of Komsomol [13](#) for pupils. We had secret meetings and distributed proclamations. I remember bringing some to the seminary where I gave them to the first-year students. One of them reported on me to the director. Our director Mark, chief rabbi of Bukovina [14](#), taught us religion. The next day Mark told me to come to his office after classes. He took a proclamation out of a drawer: 'Is this yours?' - 'Yes.' - 'You must know who you give them to. Don't be stupid again.' He could have expelled me, but he didn't. He never touched upon this subject again. I also remember Doctor Porat, our literature and language teacher. The students loved him.

However, I never finished the seminary. The Siguranza [secret police of Romania] arrested me and a few others three months before we finished the third year. I was taken to the jail in Chernovtsy. There were 28 inmates in the cell. Most of them were young people. The jail was for the prisoners waiting for a trial. I was released before the trial and went home to Rashkov before Pesach. Families were hiring tutors for their children at this period and I went to teach in a few houses. I stayed in Rashkov for a few weeks between Pesach and Shavuot. On Shavuot the gendarme chief arrested me in the street. He kept me in the cell till late at night. He had received an order from Chernovtsy to send me out to the trial and had no right to arrest me, but he rather wanted to get his one hundred lei. My father brought him the money in the evening and the gendarme released me. The next day he sent me over to the station on a horse-drawn carriage. My parents were seeing me off. However, when I arrived at Chernovtsy, my comrades decided that I shouldn't go to court. They collected some money and sent me over to Iasi [today Romania]. Somehow I wasn't looked for.

When I turned 19, I was conscripted to the army. I served in a regiment in Iasi. However, the Romanian power didn't entrust rifles to Bessarabians. We were doing drills. On the eve of 10th May, the national Romanian holiday, we took the oath of loyalty to the King [King Carol II] [15](#), and participated in the parade. On 11th May we were ordered to give back our uniforms, took our old clothes from the attic and were sent to do field work 10 kilometers from Iasi. If somebody could afford to pay 1000 lei, they could stay at home. There was a halutz camp nearby. The campers were preparing to move to Palestine. They were trained to do agricultural work. Many young people adopted Zionist ideas in the camp. One acquaintance of mine from Rashkov moved to Palestine then. To move there one had to obtain a certificate from a Zionist organization.

When my army service was over, I moved to Bucharest from Iasi. I stayed a while in a dormitory. Its director was my acquaintance from Rashkov. Then I went to work as a prompter at the Jewish theater. This was when I heard the name of Avrom Goldfaden [Avrom Goldfaden (1840-1908): Jewish playwright (Hebrew and Yiddish), founder of the Jewish theater in Russia and the USA. Comedies 'Wizard', 'Two Duffers', 'Schmendrik', plays 'Sulameth' (1880), 'Bar-Kohba' (1882), the father of Jewish theater]. Avrom Goldfaden arrived in Iasi from Russia and was going to publish a magazine. He met the 'Broder zinger' [Brody singers] group and created the first theater in Romania on the basis of this choir. Our theater staged Jewish plays: Sholem Aleichem's, Mendele



Moykher-Sforim's [16](#) plays, Rappoport's play 'Gadibuk' staged by Yevgeniy Vachtangov [Vachtangov Yevgeniy Bagrationovich (1883-1922): Soviet producer and writer] at the 'Gabima' Moscow Jewish theater, the play was translated by Bialik [17](#) for the theater. There were also numerous rag plays in Yiddish. I wasn't that interested in working for the theater. I started writing.

I had started writing back in Vadul-Rashkov. Itshack Perez was my idol. I showed my first works to my friends. In Bucharest I had my first publications. In 1936 I sent my first story to the 'Signal' magazine in America. It was published in Yiddish. The title of the story was 'Erscht tretn' [First steps]. I also wrote two short stories. However, I wasn't even aware that they were short stories. I thought it was poetry. Unrhymed poems were in fashion at that time. The first miniature was entitled 'Lign schtein in dem hant fun sculptor' [Lie stone in sculptor's hands], and the second one was 'Testament.' I thought I would adopt a genre based on what they published. They published the story and miniatures and since then I've written stories and miniatures.

I married Olga Kalyusskaya, who came from Vadul-Rashkov, in my second year in Bucharest. She was a midwife. We met at one of my friends' place. I don't think she was interested in me, when we had seen each other before living in Bucharest: she was a damsel and I was still a pup. Olga was eight years older than me. She was born to the family of Yefim Kalyuski, a farmer. Olga's father had died and I could hardly remember him. Olga left Rashkov after finishing school and finished a midwives' course in Bucharest, I think. She was an extraordinarily kind person and people liked her. She had many friends. Actually, we didn't register our relations, but started living together. Later, when the Cuzists [18](#) came to power we registered our marriage in the town registry. I continued working at the theater and writing. I had my stories published in newspapers in Warsaw and America. My first book of short stories and essays, 'Meine Heftn' [My notebooks], was published in Bucharest in 1939. This was an edition of 1000 copies and I paid for the publication. I was planning to have ten such notebooks with general page numbering and later have them bound to have one thick book and I left 500 brochures of 1000 for this purpose, but it didn't work. I only managed three notebooks, when in 1940 repatriation to Bessarabia began. I didn't consider staying in Romania since nobody stayed. Firstly, there were already German officers in Romania. Germans had one foot in Bucharest already. And, secondly, the Iron Guard [19](#) already persecuted Jews. The Iron Guards pinned swastikas on Jews if they bumped into them in the streets. They beat Jews brutally, if they resisted.

In 1940 Olga and I arrived in Kishinev and rented an apartment. I liked the town a lot. It was beautiful, an old Jewish town: there were many Jews living in the town and there was Yiddish heard everywhere. However, there were no publications in Yiddish in Kishinev besides the 'Word of cooperator,' a small newspaper of a cooperative association. Romanian authorities had closed the 'Undzere Tsayt' [Yiddish for Our Time] Yiddish newspaper back in 1938. I had my works published in the 'Der Shtern' [The Star] newspaper in Kiev. My first story, 'Happiness,' about our departure from Romania was published there. It also published three other stories that I wrote. Olga worked at the Jewish hospital. This hospital is still there. It had belonged to the Jewish community, but at that time this was the state owned hospital #4. The Jewish community was no longer in Kishinev.

On my first days in Kishinev I met the Jewish poet Yitsyk Fefer [Fefer, Yitsyk (Isaac Solomonovich) (1900-1952): a Soviet Jewish poet.]. He was a captain and was mobilized to the army service in Kiev. He had heard about me from a girl in Orhei; she had met me in Bucharest. He also wrote in

Yiddish and was interested in my writing. Fefer suggested that I organize a creative meeting and we appointed the day for the meeting. There was another young Jewish writer who had arrived from Bucharest. We had met in Bucharest. His surname was Kishinevski. I didn't see him after the war. He must have perished during the war. I was admitted to the Union of Wof the USSR [creative public organization of professional Soviet literature workers, established in 1934]. I became a writer and didn't have to get a regular job.

I believed in the Soviet Union and if some things were wrong we believed them to be temporary difficulties. There were, for example, Red Army soldiers selling watches in the streets: it made a bad impression. Shortly after the establishment of the Soviet regime food stores started running out of food products. There was an earthquake in Kishinev in fall 1940. We jumped outside through the windows. However, only old and worn buildings were damaged or collapsed. In early 1941, residents of Kishinev began to be deported. None of my acquaintances suffered from this, but I heard about such occurrences. One morning I saw trucks with people. They were taken to the railway station at night and put on trains to Siberia. On 21st June 1941 the Union of Writers organized a meeting dedicated to the 1st anniversary of the establishment of the Soviet rule in Kishinev. It was conducted at the conservatory on Saturday. The meeting was opened by Bukov [Bukov, Yemilian (1909-1984): a Bessarabian poet, wrote prose after the war], chairman of the local department of the Union of Writers of the USSR. I read my story in Yiddish, it wasn't the best one, but it was about the revolution.

### During the war

The next day Kishinev was bombed: the war began. I was mobilized to the army and the following night I slept on the floor at a school building. Early in the morning we walked to Vadul-Voda. From there we moved across the Dniestr, Ukraine, heading to the east. I met Liviu Delianu, a Moldovan Jewish writer, in this group. We kept together. Though we were mobilized, we weren't sent to the front line forces. We were moving to the rear of the country. Later I got to know that the Soviet commandment didn't trust the Bessarabians, as they were former nationals of Romania. We reached Dnepropetrovsk and the front line was moving after us. From there we moved to Zaporizhzhya and then reached Transcaucasia where we worked in a kolkhoz [20](#) for a few months. When the German troops approached the Caucasus we moved on to Central Asia.

So I happened to be in Uzbekistan. My wife Olga found me in Tashkent [today capital of Uzbekistan]. In the evacuation agency we obtained an assignment to the kolkhoz named after Stalin of the village of Savat kishlak. There were three Stalin kolkhozes in this district. However, we couldn't go to the kolkhoz since Olga fell ill. She was taken to hospital. There was a chaihana inn [tea-house in Uzbek] in the district town where kolkhoz workers could stay when they visited the town. Olga happened to have caught fever that resulted in pneumonia. She was dying. I went to Tashkent to get sulfidin [a sort of medication]. I bumped into Sidi Tahl, an actress of the Jewish theater, whom I had known since Bucharest, at the railway station. Sidi and her husband helped me to get two packs of sulfidin. This saved Olga's life.

When she recovered, we went to the village. Olga had her head shaved in the hospital and she wore a white kerchief on her head. Though she was still weak, she went to work as a midwife in the kishlak [Central Asian village]. She picked up the Uzbek language promptly and the Uzbek residents understood her. I was sent to work at a school, but this was an Uzbek school and I



couldn't teach there. All I could do was work as a secretary. The huts in the village were made of straw and clay. They had flat roofs where the locals dried grapes and apricots. These huts were called 'kibitka.' Olga and I rented a hut from an Uzbek woman, whose husband was at the front. There were other people in evacuation from the Jewish kolkhoz [21](#) from near Odessa. They were mostly children, women and old people. There were also Ukrainian and Russian people in evacuation.

My father, mother and sisters Zina, Hana and Ida also found us in Uzbekistan. Some time later a crew was formed from those in evacuation and I was appointed its leader. At first we worked in the field harvesting wheat. I was provided with a donkey, being a crew leader. Early in the morning I was the first one to show up in the field. My donkey was loaded with two linen bags full of flat bread cookies. I measured field sections for each crew member and also one for myself. I also worked with a reaping hook. It was 40 degrees above zero. The heat was oppressive. There was a little hut in the field. Starting from about 11 o'clock we took shelter in this hut. At 4 pm we went back to work, when the heat reduced. We worked till dark.

I wrote in the evenings in our kibitka hut. I wrote the book 'Dray zumers' [Three Summers]. It contained short stories describing our life and work in the evacuation. This was a good book that I wrote in my own manner without taking into consideration the specifics of the 'Soviet style.' I sent a few short stories from this book to the 'Der Emes' [Truth in Yiddish/Hebrew] publishing house in Moscow. Shortly afterward I received a letter from the secretary of the Bureau of Jewish Writers at the Union of Writers of the USSR, Peretz Markish. He wrote that he liked the 'Chaver Brover' [Comrade Brover] story from this book and he wanted to publish it in his almanac 'Tsum Zig' [Towards Victory]. This big almanac was published in spring 1944 and my story was one of the first in it.

Olga gave birth to a baby in this kishlak. It died and we buried it in the kishlak. In 1944, when we moved to the Ursatievskaya railway junction, our second son Edward, Edik, was born. By that time I had submitted my book 'Dray zumers' for print. Peretz Markish invited me to a creative meeting in Moscow. There was a train to Moscow via Tashkent from the Ursatievskaya station, but it was impossible to get tickets. No tickets were sold, and that was it! People stood in lines and begged, but no! A week or two later we finally managed to get on a freight train with other passengers to Moscow. It took us a whole month to get to Moscow. The meeting in Moscow was a very interesting one. I read stories from the book 'Dray zumers.' There were at least 50 Jewish writers at this meeting. Markish was chairman of the meeting. He opened it. The other writers also spoke and said many warm words about my book.

In fall 1945 we returned to Kishinev. We arrived on 8th November. I remember the day because we ate white bread sold on 7th November [22](#). We were told there was a parade in the town on this day. The town was in ruins. There were 'No mines' signs on many buildings. Another family resided in our apartment. I showed them my passport with the residence address stamp [23](#), but it didn't work. We were temporarily accommodated in the corridor of the Union of Writers. There was a wide sofa where Olga, I and our little son Edward slept. Edward was one year and nine months old. The board of directors had its meetings in the room a few stairs up from the corridor and we occasionally attended the meetings, standing on the stairs.

Mama, Papa and my sisters also returned to Kishinev from Uzbekistan. My brothers Isrul and Buzia also arrived in Kishinev. They had worked in the evacuation in Uzbekistan. Iosif went to the army at the end of the war and came as far as Berlin. Zina, the oldest of my sisters, went to work as a cashier and got married soon. Hana entered the Teachers' Training College and Ida, the youngest, went to medical school. My brother Isrul, who worked as a crew leader at the furniture factory, helped Papa to get employed by the factory. Iosif worked as an accountant and Buzia was a foreman at the carpet shop where Moldovan carpets were weaved. Our family lived in Kishinev. My brothers got married and had children in due time and so did my sisters Hana and Zina. Mama and my father lived with my childless younger sister Ida and her husband. Papa and Mama observed Jewish traditions after the war. They always had matzah on Pesach. They fasted on Yom Kippur and went to the synagogue.

### After the war

We resided in the corridor of the Union of Writers for about six months. There was an army kitchen facility near our former apartment. When this facility was vacated, the family living in our apartment notified us promptly. We moved into this facility before the other willing incumbents did. There were two rooms and a kitchen there and we lived there till we received an apartment from the Union of Writers two years later.

In 1946 my book 'Dray zumers' was published in Moscow. This was my first book published in the USSR. In 1948, after the murder of Mikhoels [24](#), the anti-Semitic campaign of struggle against cosmopolitanism [25](#) began, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee [26](#) was dismissed. Many writers, who I knew and corresponded with, were closely linked with this committee. In 1950 I was accused of nationalism and expelled from the Union of Writers. I expected arrest since many Moldovan Jewish writers had already been arrested. Rivkin, one of them, died in prison and the others were released after Stalin died [1953].

This was a horrible time, the time of fear that I can still feel. This was the fear, when one was even afraid of mentioning it. You know, if you are afraid, it means that there are grounds for you to be afraid. There were books written about famine: Hamsun [Hamsun, Knut (1859-1952): Norwegian writer, winner of the 1920 Nobel Prize in Literature.] wrote the book 'Sult' [The Hunger, 1890], and other writers... But nobody wrote a book about fear. I've never read one. Fear is a terrible thing! The hunger goes away, but not the fear. I was deeply depressed and had to stay in a mental hospital for six months. My wife Olga never left me. She was the kindest person. She was a faithful and reliable friend and she always supported me. She was always my first reader.

On 12th August 1952 a group of Jewish writers was executed: Dovid Bergelson [27](#), Peretz Markish, David Gofstein [Gofstein, David Naumovich (1889-1952): a Soviet Jewish poet], who lived in Kiev, Lev Kvitko [28](#), Yitsik Fefer. Many representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia were executed. Then there came the period of the 'Doctors' Plot' [29](#). There were rumors that echelons for sending Jews to the Far East were prepared [30](#). Rumors said that Stalin wished to deport Jews to save them from people's anger. I cannot tell how true this was, but there were such rumors. When Stalin died, this was over, but I felt no relief. I cannot say that I heard about Stalin's death with joy or relief... However, I think he was a merder [murderer in Yiddish]. He can be called so even for his execution of writers and Soviet intelligentsia. There were hundreds of thousands of camp prisoners [31](#), tens of thousands of them never returned home, and these processes started in 1937 [32](#). He issued

orders for all of these doings. In 1953 I was restored in the Union of Writers of the USSR. The 20th Party Congress [33](#) in 1956, and Khrushchev's [34](#) speech was nothing new to me, everybody knew something, but none of us imagined the extent of these crimes. We had hopes for improvements in the future then.

I wasn't a Zionist, but when Israel was established in 1948 I was glad for Jews. I knew how important it was for Jews to have their own country. However, I wouldn't say I was a great supporter of Israel, but my sympathy was growing in the course of time. I was particularly worried about the liberation wars in Israel: the Six-Day-War [35](#), the Yom Kippur War [36](#). So many victims! There are still victims in Israel. In the 1970s first mass departures started in Kishinev. There were meetings conducted where those people who decided to move to Israel were declared traitors in public. My acquaintances also started moving, but I never went to the railway station to see them off. My wife did, but not me. I've never considered departure to Israel, America or elsewhere. I didn't want to leave here.

Khrushchev's thaw was truly a thaw. Since the 1960s the situation in the country and the attitude toward people was changing. The 1960s was a good time. The situation of the Jewish writers in the country was improving. The 'Sovetskiy pisatel' [Soviet writer] publishing house was publishing books in Yiddish: five books per year at the most. In 1961 the 'Sovietische Heimland' magazine was established. Its chief editor was Aron Vergelis [Vergelis, Aron Alterovich (1918-2001): Soviet Jewish writer]. My miniatures were published in the first issue on 1st August. Three-four years later I was assigned to the editorial board of the magazine. Members of the editorial board were to gather twice a year in Moscow. Besides, other writers were involved in editorial board meetings to reach a wider audience. Manuscripts of new books were sent to members of editorial board for review and references, so to say.

Everything was fine at my home. My beloved son Edward was a cheerful and quiet boy. He went to the kindergarten since we both worked. At the age of seven Edward went to a music school. I wanted him to become a musician. My friends recommended me the best violin teacher for younger children in Kishinev. His name was Veschkautsan. He auditioned Edward and said he was a gifted boy. He taught Edward for four or five years before Edward went to study with another teacher. He spent a lot of his time playing the violin. His first teacher demanded that he played a few hours per day. I had to sign up his timetable and his teacher made sure that he followed it. Edward had all excellent marks.

Olga and I often spoke Yiddish at home and Edward can speak and write Yiddish. However, I didn't specifically teach him Yiddish. At that time I still had the fear of being arrested. If somebody got to know that I taught my son Yiddish they might have formalized the accusation of nationalism made to me earlier. After finishing school Edward entered the conservatory in Kishinev. Olga died in 1967. Her death was a hard blow for me: I lost my wife and a faithful friend. We buried her in the Jewish cemetery. We buried her in a coffin and I didn't order the Kaddish. I didn't want to follow the ritual at the time. After Edward finished the conservatory he was offered a job at the Moldovan State Symphonic Orchestra.

I wrote a lot in the 1960s and often went to work to the Creative Houses of the Union of Writers of the USSR [specialized recreation homes to create conditions for creative work]. One of the most popular of these was located in Maleyevka near Moscow. I went there for a few years in a row in

March. Each writer could have a room on his own. There were nice doctors in these centers. I met many famous writers from Moscow and other Soviet republics. I have many bright memories and books in many languages that the authors gave me. In summer I worked in the writers' creative house in Yalta. I also went to Dubulti near Riga. In the Creative House in Pizunda [town and cape on the Black Sea in Georgia] I met Arkadiy Raikin [Raikin, Arkadiy Isaacovich (1911-1987): a popular Soviet actor, director of the Soviet Theater of Miniatures], he stayed in the House for Actors nearby. I often walked with him and his wife. He liked to speak Yiddish to me. He was a wonderful person. I wrote most of my works in Creative Houses. My three novels were written there: the trilogy 'Zibetsnyorike' [The Seventeen-year-olds], 'Veyter' [Further] and 'Zibn yor mit zibn hadoshim' [Seven Years and Seven Months]. They are based on my biography. You know that every writer writes about himself. Whatever he composes it's still about himself. In other words, if he doesn't have himself in his mind, he has nothing to write about. And if he has his life inside, all events and details, they make material for his works. So, the main material for a writer is his life. Even if he narrates it on behalf of his characters.

On 25th June 1968 I met Marina in Pizunda. I was staying in the Creative House in Gagry [town by the Black Sea in Georgia]. She came on vacation to Gagry with a group of teachers from the Ural. They had stayed 18 days, when one day, when the weather wasn't so good, they decided to go to an organ concert in a cathedral in Pizunda. They were going back to Gagry on the boat of the Union of Writers when we met. Marina was under 30, she had thick auburn hair, bright eyes and an astonishing smile. When we met, we held hands and never parted since then. She stayed in Gagry and from there we traveled to Sochi where Edward came on tour. We stayed in Sochi for a month. Then Marina went back home to Kurgan in the Ural and I returned to Kishinev, but I wrote her three-four letters per day. We parted in August, and in October Marina visited me in Kishinev. I went to visit her on New Year's Eve and stayed for three months. Marina was a solfeggio and music literature teacher at a music school. She also studied at the extramural Department of Choir Conductors at the Cheliabinsk College of Culture. We got married in June 1969. I was happy. The only thing that saddened our joy was that it was hard for Edward to accept Marina. He loved his mother so much.

From the first minute of our acquaintance Marina asked me to spell her name in Yiddish. This was the start of her acquaintance with the culture of my people. This was the first time she met a Jew. She studied Yiddish to be able to read my works and now she knows it better than many Jews. We speak Yiddish at home and she is my first reader now, like Olga was in the past. She tells me that when I work and when I read my works to her she lives the happiest moments of her life. I value her opinion more than that of many critics. I think I'm very lucky: I met two wonderful women: Olga and Marina.

Edward married Zhanna Kucheruk, a Jewish girl, much younger than him, in 1970. Their marriage didn't last: they belonged to a different social class and our families were incompatible: hers belonged to business people. Edward and Zhanna got divorced. He remarried 13 years later. His second wife, Inna Shoichet, was Jewish. She was a student of the Polytechnic College, when they got married. She obtained an engineer's diploma, but she never worked in her field of specialization. They lived with us for a year, but then we exchanged our apartment for two. Edward was working in the Opera Theater Orchestra and later he worked on the radio and TV. The Opera Theater toured all over Europe. In 1984 his daughter Olga was born. She was named after Edward's

mother. In 2000 Edward and his family moved to America. They settled in Miami Beach. My brother Buzia had moved to the USA in 1992. My sisters Hana and Zina also live in Florida, USA. Edward is a violinist and the director of a chamber orchestra. He also gives solo concerts. He thinks he has a more successful career in America than he would have had here. My granddaughter Olga finished school in America very successfully and entered the University in Palm Beach where she has a scholarship.

My mother died at the age of 89, in 1980. My father had died eleven years before her. The summer three years before she died something happened that we all remembered. I described this in a miniature. Mama was seriously ill and bedridden for a few weeks. My sisters attended to her. One day she turned very bad. She was lying with her eyes closed, her face grew very pale and she turned yellow. Ida screamed, 'Mama!' Zina and Hana joined her, 'Mama!' and then Mama opened her eyes and asked, 'What happened?' She lived three more years after this. We buried her at the Jewish cemetery beside my father's grave and I recited the Kaddish.

When Perestroika [37](#) began, I had positive feelings about it, but then the situation changed and the results were not quite as expected... The Jewish life has revived and improved since the start of Perestroika. The society of Jewish culture was established in 1989 and I was a part of it. My students, the Kishinev writers Boris Sandler, Mikhail Lemster and I were among its organizers. There are other writers, who think I am their teacher: Mikhail Felzenbaum, a very good poet, Zicia Veitzman, Jean Krivoy. The Jewish newspaper 'Nash golos' [Our Voice in Russian] was established in Kishinev then. It was published in Russian, but there was one page in Yiddish and I had Yiddish publications in this newspaper.

Thirteen years ago the Yiddish center at the Kishinev Jewish Library [1991] was established. I was elected its chairman. We gather every month. I read lectures about Jewish literature and writers. Besides, I was acquainted with many writers I lecture about. I never write essays about the writers I don't know in person. I only write about those, with whom I was friends. We conduct our meetings in Yiddish and only those whose Yiddish is not sufficiently good make speeches in Russian. Hesed [38](#) Jehudah provides assistance to me like it does to many other Jews. My wife and I receive food packages. I often make speeches, when Hesed invites me to its events.

In 1997 I published the 'Schtendik' [Always] book in Yiddish in Israel. I was invited to visit Israel on this occasion. This was my first trip to Israel. It's hard to describe my first impression. It's still vivid in my memory. Is it possible to find words to describe the excitement any Jew feels standing by the Wailing Wall? Marina and I left little notes there like everybody else did. We met with my brother Isrul's family in Ashdod, who came to Israel in 1995. My brother died shortly after their arrival. We spent three weeks in Israel. We had meetings with writers in Israel, but my meetings with my readers were the most significant ones for me. Presentations of my book took place in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Ashkelon, Rehovot, Richon LeZiyon, Ashdod... I was given a warm welcome at those meetings. What I read was received with great attention. I remember a woman in Ashkelon. She and her husband drove us to the station from where we were to leave for Jerusalem. She said with tears in her eyes, 'We've never had such writers before.' My books were read by former residents of the USSR and nationals of Israel. Hebrew is the state language, of course, but Yiddish is also our national language. There are wonderful books in Yiddish and it shouldn't disappear from the life of Jewish people.

I was invited to foreign countries several times, but the most memorable was the Yiddish festival in Berlin in 2003. Four other writers: Boris Sandler, Mordhe Zanin, Gennadiy Eistrach and Lev Berinskiy and I were invited. Before going there I was asked to inform the organizers which works of mine I was bringing there. I sent them about 30 short stories for them to select at their discretion the ones they wished me to present at the festival, but they selected all of them. Marina and I were met by director of the festival. The evening in Berlin was brightly lighted and he took us around the town and showed us the most beautiful places. The next evening I read my short stories to the public. Lev Berinskiy read his poem before it was my turn. I read my short stories in Yiddish and then the director of the festival read their German translation. It took us a while to read 30 short stories and then 30 another time, but the public wasn't tired. They were a success, a great success.

## Glossary

### **1 Markish, Peretz (1895-1952)**

Yiddish writer and poet, arrested and shot dead together with several other Yiddish writers, rehabilitated posthumously.

### **2 Bessarabia**

Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

### **3 Annexation of Bessarabia to Romania**

During the chaotic days of the Soviet Revolution the national assembly of Moldavians convoked to Kishinev decided on 4th December 1917 the proclamation of an independent Moldavian state. In order to impede autonomous aspirations, Russia occupied the Moldavian capital in January 1918. Upon Moldavia's desperate request, the army of neighboring Romania entered Kishinev in the same month recapturing the city from the Bolsheviks. This was the decisive step toward the union with Romania: the Moldavians accepted the annexation without any preliminary condition.

### **4 Russian stove**

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

### **5 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without



declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **6 Civil War (1918-1920)**

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14 percent and agriculture to 50 percent as compared to 1913.

## **7 Petliura, Simon (1879-1926)**

Ukrainian politician, member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Working Party, one of the leaders of Centralnaya Rada (Central Council), the national government of Ukraine (1917-1918). Military units under his command killed Jews during the Civil War in Ukraine. In the Soviet-Polish war he was on the side of Poland; in 1920 he emigrated. He was killed in Paris by the Jewish nationalist Schwarzbard in revenge for the pogroms against Jews in Ukraine.

## **8 Russian Revolution of 1917**

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

## **9 Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union**

At the end of June 1940 the Soviet Union demanded Romania to withdraw its troops from Bessarabia and to abandon the territory. Romania withdrew its troops and administration in the same month and between 28th June and 3rd July, the Soviets occupied the region. At the same time Romania was obliged to give up Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Southern-Dobrudja to Bulgaria. These territorial losses influenced Romanian politics during World War II to a great extent.

## **10 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))**

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and

poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called *Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek* (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of *Tevye the Dairyman* became an international hit as a musical (*Fiddler on the Roof*) in the 1960s.

## **11 Tarbut schools**

Elementary, secondary and technical schools maintained by the Hebrew educational and cultural organization called Tarbut. Most Eastern European countries had such schools between the two world wars but there were especially many in Poland. The language of instruction was Hebrew and the education was Zionist oriented.

**12** Perez, Itshack Leibush (1851-1915): outstanding Jewish writer and essayist. He was brought up in a traditional Jewish family in Poland. Perez first wrote in Hebrew and since 1888 in Yiddish. Among his best-known works are the poem 'Monish' (1888), and the volumes of short stories 'Familiar pictures' (1890) and 'Travel notes' (1891). Other collections of short stories include 'Silent Bontsy', 'The messenger', 'In the basement', 'Weaver's love' (1890s), 'Hasidic Stories' and 'Folk legends' (1904-1909). Perez died in Warsaw in 1915.

**13** Komsomol: Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **14 Bukovina**

Historical region, located East of the Carpathian Mountain range, bordering with Transylvania, Galicia and Moldova. In 1775 it became a Habsburg territory as a consequence of the Kuchuk-Kainarji Treaty (1774) between the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire. After the fall of Austria-Hungary Bukovina was annexed to Romania (1920). In 1939 a non-aggression pact was signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), which also meant dividing Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of interest. Taking advantage of the pact, the Soviet Union claimed in an ultimatum from 1940 some of the Romanian territories. Romania was forced to renounce Bessarabia and Northern-Bukovina, including Czernowitz (Cernauti, Chernovtsy). Bukovina was characterized by ethnic and religious pluralism; the ethnic communities included Germans, Poles, Jews, Hungarians, Ukrainians and Romanians, the most dominant religious persuasions were Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. In 1930 some 93,000 Jews lived in Bukovina, which was 10,9% of the entire population.

### **15 King Carol II (1893-1953)**

King of Romania from 1930 to 1940. During his reign he tried to influence the course of Romanian political life, first through the manipulation of the rival Peasants' Party, the National Liberal Party and anti-Semitic factions. In 1938 King Carol established a royal dictatorship. He suspended the Constitution of 1923 and introduced a new constitution that concentrated all legislative and executive powers in his hands, gave him total control over the judicial system and the press, and introduced a one-party system. A contest between the king and the fascist Iron Guard ensued, with assassinations and massacres on both sides. Under Soviet and Hungarian pressure, Carol had to surrender parts of Romania to foreign rule in 1940 (Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR, the Cadrilater to Bulgaria and Northern Transylvania to Hungary). He was abdicated in favor of his son, Michael, and he fled abroad. He died in Portugal.

### **16 Mendele Moykher Sforim (1835-1917)**

Hebrew and Yiddish writer. He was born in Belarus and studied at various yeshivot in Lithuania. Mendele wrote literary and social criticism, works of popular science in Hebrew, and Hebrew and Yiddish fiction. In his writings on social and literary problems Mendele showed lively interest in the education and public life of Jews in Russia. He was preoccupied by the question of the role of Hebrew literature in molding the Jewish community. This explains why he tried to teach the sciences to the mass of Jews and to aid the people in obtaining secular education in the spirit of the Haskalah (Hebrew enlightenment). He was instrumental in the founding of modern literary Yiddish and the new realism in Hebrew style, and left his mark on the two literatures thematically as well as stylistically.

### **17 Bialik, Chaim Nachman**

(1873-1934): One of the greatest Hebrew poets. He was also an essayist, writer, translator and editor. Born in Rady, Volhynia, Ukraine, he received a traditional education in cheder and yeshivah. His first collection of poetry appeared in 1901 in Warsaw. He established a Hebrew publishing house in Odessa, where he lived but after the Revolution of 1917 Bialik's activity for Hebrew culture was viewed by the Communist authorities with suspicion and the publishing house was closed. In 1921 Bialik emigrated to Germany and in 1924 to Palestine where he became a celebrated literary figure. Bialik's poems occupy an important place in modern Israeli culture and education.

### **18 Cuzist**

Member of the Romanian Fascist organization named after Alexandru C. Cuza, one of the most fervent Fascist leaders in Romania, who was known for his ruthless chauvinism and anti-Semitism. In 1919 Cuza founded the LANC, which became the National Christian Party in 1935 with an anti-Semitic program.

### **19 Iron Guard**

Extreme right wing political organization in Romania between 1930-1941, led by C. Z. Codreanu.

The Iron Guard propagated nationalist, Christian-mystical and anti-Semitic views. It was banned for its terrorist activities (e.g. the murder of Romanian prime minister I. Gh. Duca) in 1933. In 1935 it was re-established as a party named 'Everything for the Fatherland', but it was banned again in 1938. It was part of the government in the first period of the Antonescu regime, but it was then banned and dissolved as a result of the unsuccessful coup d'état of January 1941. Its leaders escaped abroad to the Third Reich.

## **20 Kolkhoz**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4 percent of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

## **21 Jewish collective farms**

Such farms were established in the Ukraine in the 1930s during the period of collectivization.

## **22 October Revolution Day**

25th October (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on 7th November.

## **23 Residence permit**

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

## **24 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)**

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

## **25 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. A wave of

anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

## **26 Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC)**

formed in Kuibyshev in April 1942, the organization was meant to serve the interests of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet military through media propaganda, as well as through personal contacts with Jews abroad, especially in Britain and the United States. The chairman of the JAC was Solomon Mikhoels, a famous actor and director of the Moscow Yiddish State Theater. A year after its establishment, the JAC was moved to Moscow and became one of the most important centers of Jewish culture and Yiddish literature until the German occupation. The JAC broadcast pro-Soviet propaganda to foreign audiences several times a week, telling them of the absence of anti-Semitism and of the great anti-Nazi efforts being made by the Soviet military. In 1948, Mikhoels was assassinated by Stalin's secret agents, and, as part of a newly-launched official anti-Semitic campaign, the JAC was disbanded in November and most of its members arrested.

## **27 Bergelson, Dovid (1884-1952)**

Yiddish writer, arrested and shot dead together with several other Yiddish writers, rehabilitated posthumously.

## **28 Kvitko, Lev (1890-1952)**

Jewish writer, arrested and shot dead together with several other Yiddish writers, rehabilitated posthumously.

## **29 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

## **30 Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the

middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

### **31 Gulag**

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

### **32 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

### **33 Twentieth Party Congress**

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

### **32 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

### **34 Six-Day-War**



The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

### **35 Yom Kippur War**

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

### **36 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

### **37 Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the Former Soviet Union countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.