

Yankev-Nosn

By Micha Josef Berdyczewski

TRANSLATED BY JAMES ADAM REDFIELD

Yankev-Nosn was a clever fellow: one of those brainy, traditionally learned Jews who also dabble in other areas. He seemed to know it all; he had an angle on pretty much everything: a page of Talmud or an interpretation by the Tosafists, a verse with Ibn-Ezra's commentary, a tricky math problem, even a discourse on astronomy. He was never so concerned with any one subject in and of itself—what he loved was knowledge as such; he loved being a connoisseur, a scion of our intelligentsia. Nor was he especially pious: he knew there was a God, but that sort of knowledge never moved him, never really took root. He never transgressed a commandment: he was simply too lazy to resist praying or doing whatever you're supposed to. Jewishness was just something he did, like pulling on his long coat or his socks and shoes. Desire, now there was a subject he knew nothing about—whether for eating, making money, or other things. What mattered to him, above all, was the intellect—understanding something forward and backward. He didn't wrap up what he started; having a grasp of it was enough.

How was he with everyday affairs, or in dealing with people, you might ask. Hard to say. In a sense, he was an upstanding individual, but cold-blooded, not really good at heart. He'd keep his word, but it wasn't genuine, for when all was said and done, he didn't keep track from one day to the next. He didn't envy the rich, for most of them were unintelligent. It's only bad to be poor when you're out of cash, but when you get some—whether you earn it or borrow it—you burn through it right away and end up with nothing again, so to him, it was obvious that a poor man is simply a man who feels poor. He'd never once had that feeling, though he'd never had any money. And when he did get hold of a hundred rubles through some major arbitration—once, maybe twice

in his life—all that mattered to him was how to explain such a feat, how one could discuss such profound conflicts with people for two days and come to an understanding.

You might ask him if he's ever been happy in his life: at sunrise, perhaps, or when he gave away one of his children. Did he love any of his children at all, you might ask. When you see him (his round, grayish beard, his twinkling eyes), he doesn't look like a cold person. Not at all: he loves to sing, loves to hum to himself. He has quite a voice: he speaks well, but what he says, as such, isn't highly relevant to him. He's already over fifty, but he's never kept track of his age. He's a man who never gets sick, never catches cold, never coughs. He doesn't smoke, doesn't get a craving for a cigar. He has lovely handwriting, but he's too lazy to write. In the prayer house he never stays in his seat. When he prays, he uses someone else's book. He excels in political matters: seems to rub shoulders in every town in the world, but he's never gone a mile from his own. He understands the science of the railway and telegraph, but he's never seen either. One time he and a partner opened up a little factory for making malt through a chemical process. The whole enterprise lasted a total of three months, and the malt never worked; nevertheless, he's quite an expert on the subject.

In fact, he knows about every kind of business: he knows about auctions, he knows about contracts, and he'll tell you he's confident of all the sums, though he himself couldn't scrape together three rubles a week in cash. At his place, they live in the lap of luxury: there's a table and a stool and a fork and a spoon, and nothing to eat. But so what?—nobody calls it what it is. In the morning you get whatever you get and that's what you've got; then you spend it all in one go. As soon as you have a couple more coals and a lump of sugar and the samovar's bubbling and there's a story to tell, lo and behold, you're on top of the world.

God doesn't much bother with people like that: they don't cause him any headaches, they don't ask him whether or not he's really in charge of it all. Yankev-Nosn had certainly glanced at *Guide for the*

Perplexed and the first chapter of *Duties of the Heart*, and he understood a bit of philosophy, but that wasn't relevant to him, not in a fundamental sense. The debate over whether the world is primordial or was created in the time of Adam is basically that Aristotle says one and Maimonides says the other, but in a fundamental sense, any way you look at it, there's only one world, so it's inconsequential, whomever you hold by. All you need to know are the different opinions, just out of curiosity.

Yankev-Nosn never lets himself be fooled, nor has he ever really followed through. He doesn't mean anyone any harm, nor has he ever done anyone much good. He has no appreciation for the special quality of things like beneficence, compassion, loving-kindness; nevertheless, he expounds on the virtues and he knows about Maimonides's *Eight Chapters*. He's never held himself accountable for anything, but he adores keeping tabs on other people. You can't call him a gossip, but when he talks about someone else, it isn't to their credit. He speaks informally to everyone and talks a great deal with boys. When a book peddler comes along, Yankev-Nosn's the first to spread the word and thumb through all his booklets, though he's never bought a book in his life. He's never had any methods whatsoever, yet he's persuaded himself that he has his own approach.

It's impossible to argue with him about anything, though he isn't so hard-headed. The next day he's perfectly capable of saying the very opposite, as if it just occurred to him. Of course he wants to understand more than everyone else, and he'd never admit that there's anyone who understands more than him or knows more than him, but that isn't pure arrogance, it's not just to puff himself up. To him, it's perfectly clear that in every town there must be one person who understands more than everyone else, who's more intelligent than everyone else—and if so, then, in the town where he resides, it's none other than him, Yankev-Nosn.

Does a person like that believe in death, you might ask; does he reflect on the moment when one ceases to exist? Far from it! He can't picture his town without him. If someone is dying, it must be someone else,

not him. He speaks of Israel's travails too, but they trouble him less than the subject of naturalism. Everyone knows things are bad for Jews (even a Jewish woman can talk about that), but not just anyone can talk about naturalism—and nature itself pales in comparison to natural science.

One phrase was always on his lips: that phrase was “innate conception,”¹ and when he let slip that phrase, he knew he was right—he and nobody else—and if it so happened that he were to say what someone else had said and someone else were to say what he had said, he would have been right anyway, for it was on his lips that the subject had been conceived and formulated. He was a great believer in the proper formulation, which they also call inquiry. To him, however, the term didn't mean immersing himself in a subject but purely what flashed through his mind whenever the subject came up. For every bit of nonsensical pseudo-Talmud that a yeshiva boy told him, he'd fire right back with the Maharsha's interpretation.² By nature, he was always telling lies, but in the moment, he could have sworn they were the truth.

Behind his back, nobody in town believed him; on the other hand, when he was there, they treated him with respect. Nobody would trust him with a loan; nevertheless, whenever he asked for three rubles, they lent them to him. There wasn't a soul in town who didn't know that Yankev-Nosn hadn't earned a penny, but nevertheless, he wasn't considered a pauper. Nobody missed Yankev-Nosn when he wasn't around, as his philosophical investigations got on their nerves, but nevertheless they were glad when he showed up. He would go so far as to arrange a whole engagement and then—if you told him that he was, in fact, engaged—he'd laugh in your face. He had two sons and two sons-in-law and always kept each firmly in his place. But he did like one of his granddaughters, Breyne, who studied the Torah. She was the only one he truly loved.

I need hardly tell you that he did not think much of rabbis, but he did think highly of one rabbi who understood the science of milling and who used to draw sketches of mills for his devotees. When he heard that the same rabbi had discovered the gastropod on the seashore (whose blood, the Sages say, is the source of the blue dye prescribed in the Torah

for a thread in the prayer shawl's fringes),³ he was ecstatic: he talked about it for a year straight, although he paid no attention to fringes and could have stopped wearing them altogether if they weren't something that Jews wore.

When Yankev-Nosn realized that, in the closing service for the Day of Atonement, there are four prayers in a row beginning "YAH . . . who is called . . . the God of Nature," he was only so enraptured because he knew about it and could assess it with the scales of reason. In his heart, God left him just as cold as nature. One can understand that God created the world just as, philosophically speaking, one can understand that it all comes from nature. Certainly, one should give King David his due, but how can you compare him to Maimonides? Of what consequence is Rashi, with his womanly spirit, versus Gersonides? And yet, you might ask, was he enraptured by Maimonides and Gersonides and the like? No. If there were no philosophers, then Yankev-Nosn wouldn't have anything to philosophize about: the miller needs his wheat, a grain dealer needs his rye, just as sure as Jews like Yankev-Nosn need philosophers. When the sun goes down and night falls, you can put on a light—but if not for the light of reason, Yankev-Nosn would probably sit there in the dark.

Now Yankev-Nosn was in his sixties; his grayish hair went grayer. He started heading into his seventies just the same as he always was. He ought to reflect on this, the twilight of his years . . . but no, the sun itself, the moon and stars, exist only for the sake of astronomy. What he missed in the diaspora—and this was the only respect in which he acknowledged a difference between now and back then, when Jews had their own country—was that now, Jews bless the new month according to the calendar, rather than sanctifying the new moon. It troubled him his whole life, until the day he died, when they buried the deceased, with all of his conceptions, in the earth.

The Liar

By Micha Josef Berdyczewski

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Sholem-Leyzer: a Jew from the new town in Haisyn with a grayish, slightly unkempt beard. As for clothes, he wears a well-ironed collar and a neat overcoat. His boots are shined daily. He wants no part of their piety, but he doesn't hold by those modern Jews either (he can persuade you of that, if he likes, by smearing them all in the same breath). Yet at the Day of Atonement, or even his usual morning prayers, he'll let out a faint sob. He may have a wealthy background, but he himself hasn't been well off for quite some time. For most of his life, he lived off the inheritance that his mother had left him. In other words, he frittered away the principal, then sold off one store after another, then the silver and the wife's jewelry, then even the good fur coat with the waterproof lining. All that he's left with are a nice house and furniture, leveraged ten times over. In sum, he doesn't have a hair on his head to call his own.

But just ask Sholem-Leyzer: he won't believe that anyone else does either. There isn't a wealthy man who's not up to his eyeballs in debt, and if they haven't gone broke yet, they will. Truth? No such thing, not in our world.

Back in the day it was completely different. They were raking it in. He himself earned as much in a day as Lieberman in Kiev earns in a year, back when he got married and started in business. Back then, the noblemen were completely different; business was completely different. Was there anything he didn't have or anyone who wouldn't lend it to him? Listen to this: once he went on a trip to Kiev and stayed at a prime location on Khreshchatyk. There was a knock on the door, and guess who came in? That's right, Pototski himself. And he says: *Sholem-Leyzer, I'm giving you exclusive rights to my sugar, from all my facilities.* Once he got a thirty-thousand-ruble commission on the spot. He used to make so much

he got tired of keeping track, and he did his biggest deals without pen and paper, all in his head. Even thirty years ago, he could speak Polish: all the noblemen were astonished. And how he dressed! The cloth for his overcoat alone was worth over twenty rubles a foot—he swears on his life—and his wife wore a dress of the same silk that Brodsky’s and Ephrati’s daughters used to wear. You have no idea what he was capable of. If his heart desired, say, chestnuts, he’d pay twelve hundred rubles each. Of what consequence was a thousand note to him? Who would have said, as they do today, that eighty rubles was turning a real profit, let alone twenty-five! Back then, honestly, he could’ve rolled his cigars with fifties. And guess what he once paid for a little bottle of Hungarian wine for the four cups at his Passover seder? Thirty rubles—he swears on his life.

Nor did Sholem-Leyzer mind a bit of liquor—good liquor, when he could afford it . . . or even, these days, bad . . . when no one was looking, he snuck into the cellar and guzzled bottles worth twenty-five smackers. And the farther he fell, the bigger the lies he told. Who had his appreciation for jewelry, gems, pearls? His wife had worn pearls as big as hazelnuts. He’d paid five thousand rubles cash for a pair of earrings, and a lot of the experts said he’d still gotten a deal. These days, everyone wears flashy Warsaw silver and gilded chains—this world’s a world of lies. Look deeply into anyone, anything, anywhere. You’ll see.

Back then, when he was really hot, when they’d heard of him in Prussia and beyond, he took a trip to a city in Hungary like you can’t imagine: people strolling around with rosy cheeks and fat wallets, clattering over smooth white cobblestones. It’s like comparing even, let’s say, Kiev to Czernowitz! What he saw, what he brought back, you can’t imagine: a clock that started playing music when it struck and two birds flew out and chirped like they were alive.

But did it all go perfectly smoothly for him? One time he was in trouble, make no mistake; once he was about to lose it all. He’d sunk a whole lot into sugar, and back then, sugar was falling at frightening speed . . . if it hadn’t been him, Sholem-Leyzer, if someone else had been in his shoes, he would’ve been bashing his head against the wall. But what did

he do? He went over to Henekh's and said: *Henekh, lend me fifty thousand rubles for three months so I can cover everything, and believe me, you won't regret it.* So Henekh got the fifty thousand rubles and gave it to him without so much as his initials, just on his word. He paid everyone off and then, when he could afford to hold it, sugar went back up, and old Sholem-Leyzer had the upper hand again.

All he'd been through! One time he was on a sled going through the woods and he ran into two wolves. The goy coachman panicked, couldn't budge, but Sholem-Leyzer took out a pack of matches, struck one tip, and they vanished. How many times had he been wasting away until the doctors gave him up for dead? One time he lay there for three days, speechless; they were already starting the elegies when, on the fourth day, he rose up, fresh and strong, and they were all shocked. It's like he had a body of iron. Go ahead, put a glowing coal in his palm: see if he'd make a peep or even bat an eyelash. Once a dentist yanked out thirteen of his teeth by the roots—as if he made so much as a twitch! When the big synagogue in Haisyn was burning, he leaped into the flames and rescued the whole ark with all the Torah scrolls. Once he made a bet with Yokhanan Ettinger that he could pick up a millstone and spin around three times, and who won? Well, he did.

And so he fooled everyone into believing what he said, fooling himself all the while, believing that he spoke the honest truth. He found it such a pleasure to speak about himself—he felt strongly that one should show the current generation how one really lived back then, show everyone what they'd been capable of . . .

He didn't love a soul—not even his own wife and kids. There was another ideal, however, that he did want everyone to embrace: in essence, you shouldn't go around in a straitjacket getting your knuckles rapped by everyone and being afraid and groveling. *Carpe diem!*—that was his motto, whether it meant traversing the widest river or hunting down bandits who'd robbed someone by night. He wasn't even afraid of the authorities: didn't he once slap the deputy police superintendent clean across the face? And not only didn't they press charges, but now that guy's out of a job!

And so he went on, blustering more all the while as things got worse and worse. They had already taken his house; he stayed on as a tenant, no more. His long hooded cloak was worn so thin its threads poked through. A broken man, how the mighty had fallen . . . now, only now, he sensed that he'd been transported into quite another world. Back then, he'd spent summers at a dacha, back when not even distinguished gentlemen could do that. There you are, living in the country on your very own homestead, keeping to yourself in perfect peace and quiet, while back at home, business is booming, thousands in receipts are flying out the window . . .

Why should he care about income? Of what consequence was a little business to him? People used to live off him, not the other way around. Go ahead, ask anyone: didn't he always let it slide, if someone owed him? He never took anyone to court, on principle, because he didn't hold by that sort of thing. Once, however, when he was completely fed up, he brought a lawsuit as far as Petersburg, as far as the Senate, and he won—even though the greatest lawyers were all saying he'd lose. That's why they all knew he, Sholem-Leyzer, had a head on his shoulders.

And so Sholem-Leyzer fell further and further. Several times he was thrown out of his rooms for failing to pay rent. His sons turned into dreadful libertines, and if he tried to say anything to them, they'd heap all kinds of abuse on him, their own father. He started looking withered. When he did get hold of an acquaintance and squeeze half a ruble out of him, he'd take home thirty kopecks, spend twenty in a tavern, and put a cork in it for a little while. His anger grew at this world full of loafers where no one had any direction like he did. His pain grew. When he used to go around dressed properly, at least he could find someone to talk to. Now people were ashamed to be seen with him in the street. Truth? No such thing. Not in our world.

Tainted

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TRANSLATED BY JAMES ADAM REDFIELD

Yonosn of Drazhne, the old *shoykhet* of Drazhne, had a reputation. He'd made a name for himself, and not only in Drazhne. It's true what they say: there's kosher butchers, and then there's kosher butchers.⁴ They're not all the same. Tankhum Yokl is a kosher butcher too. But what's he got to do with Yonosn? What good is he, compared with him and his skill? This wasn't just a guy who studied a bit of slaughtering and a couple of kosher rules with his own father-in-law and that's all he knows—a few Laws of the Torn Beast, say. No, this was a learned man, a true scholar, an expert in Talmud and ritual jurisprudence, even something of an authority in the Holy Tongue.

In the early years the Hasidim were skeptical about him, because they see perfection as a defect . . . but so what? Yonosn was the deeply learned one, the God-fearing one, and above all, he was skilled at his craft. He would remove the worst adhesion from an animal's lungs like plucking off a hair, and never once did he happen to make an ox unkosher or, heaven forbid, not to fully slaughter a cow, large or small. Other butchers in Drazhne would have cut off their own fingers for him, yet he never took a thing from them. Not one of them could say that he ever accepted a pound of free meat or a foot for Shabbat like most kosher butchers do. When he was called upon to slaughter he didn't hesitate; he didn't waste his time or keep anyone else waiting or make a poor lady stand there holding a chicken while he slaughtered a goose that some fancy customer's servant had brought over—to him, rich and poor were no different. He didn't fight with the other butchers or slander them or argue with the cantor about the donation from this or that Torah reading.

On the contrary, he didn't even collect what was due to him, but when the time came to do someone a good turn, you would always find

him at their place. A young relative of the *rov* or some impoverished dignitary, when they came to Drazhne, where did they stay? At Yonosn's, in high style, with supper and a glass of tea and white linens. Yonosn himself would bring water to his guest for the washing of the hands. He would draw up a list of the town's men of means for the visitor or go to intercede on his behalf. Before Passover, he and the town's *rov* would slog through the thickest swamp to harvest the poor's annual "wheat fund" from anyone—living or dead. But Yonosn was only an upstanding citizen when he was supposed to be. If someone ripped off another man's property or did him wrong in any way, then you saw another side of Yonosn: he made such a din in the house of study that the culprit simply had to come and settle accounts with his true judge.

Yonosn would mourn with anyone who called him—a tailor or a shoemaker, the lowest of the low. *Before God, one Jew is no different from the next*, he used to say. He would even bring along a drop, or quite a bit more, to cheer up a poor man. And that ate the Hasidim up inside (who were not at all happy with him for being an authority and a "connoisseur," either): *Sacred vessels must remain sacred vessels, and are not to be debased for the sake of the common multitude!* These were the Savraner Hasidim;⁵ they have their own approach.

Yonosn was no zealot and preferred to go out in fine form; there were no spots on his cloak, as is the custom of a pietistic Jew. He always wore a crisp collar with his shoes shined, and to the Hasidim (who were always searching him for defects) that was defect number three. *A learned man should not be thinking of worldly things*, they'd say, *as the Talmud tells us, "Such is the way of the Evil Inclination!"*⁶

Yet Yonosn's reputation kept on growing: when the Talner rebbe came to Drazhne,⁷ and it was Yonosn's week to slaughter, he did not first submit his knife to the rebbe as is usual, which irritated the Hasidim to no end. *One of flesh and blood should not be raised up too high*, they said. *No good can come of that.*

And so Yonosn spent many years in Drazhne. He had already married off all his children and with God's help, he found the right fit for each of them. One of his brothers-in-law was also a kosher butcher;

another was a cantor. His son-in-law, a master scribe, wrote out petitions at the rebbe of Zinkov's court. His only son was a handsome, successful young man—cut from the same cloth as his father—who married the rebbe of Sudilkov's daughter. In Sudilkov, immersed in study, he took his free room and board. Yonosn's wife was a lovely and sweet-tempered woman: she never deceived a soul. Both of them—Yonosn and his wife, Beyle—were so worked up about their son's match that they kept sending gifts and Beyle kept going to visit, for she missed the children dearly.

All was well, or so it seemed; with his little tot coming along nicely, Yonosn was settling into middle age. Fifty years under his belt without a care in the world, free from anguish, in the good graces of the Almighty and the Torah. He wanted for nothing, or so it seemed. What could the devil do, try as he might, to wreck things now?

Yet as the Sages tell us: *Have no faith in yourself until the day of your death,*⁸ and *abandon not faith in recompense;*⁹ that is to say, when God has blessed you and you are sure of everyone else, do not therefore believe that you've already caught fortune by the ankles. A puff of air can take it all away . . . or perhaps you think, because you're so well-heeled when it comes to all things Jewish and it's never occurred to you to commit a sin, not even in a dream, that you're safe from the Evil Inclination? So they remind you: even when you're at the brink of death, that little rascal can rear his ugly head . . .

It was a holiday. Yonosn was in high spirits. He had sent a cart to Sudilkov to bring the children back to Drazhne. They'd laid out a fine spread of sponge cake and spirits, like you'd only see at Yonosn's place . . . men from both houses of study were pouring in for the opening blessing. Many guests had already drained their glasses and eaten their fill—not that they were running low! Strudel, so many other delicacies . . . more than you could shake a stick at. Then they started placing orders to town, showering their guests with all sorts of jellies and drinks. The boys and girls who delivered the bottles and saucers got tips too: Beyle stuffed their pockets with nuts and candies and insisted that they tell

their parents to come on over. Yonosn walked around with his long coat unbuttoned, the picture of comfort . . . they sat down at the table to a meal fit for a king! The fried fish were swimming in oil, the broth sparkled like a bowl full of amber (almost a shame to break it with a spoon), and they washed it down with wine—red, fiery wine.

As the meat was served, the town's businessmen themselves started to arrive; they'd been sending over drinks and now they started ordering drinks. Each had his favorite *sommelier* and vintage and wanted to show off his fine taste in wine. The conversation turned to wine, people, who'd do the honors at the next Torah reading . . . by and by they started to really put it away until nobody could tell the difference between fine and middling wine, they said cheers in every possible way, started singing and clapping . . . the ladies had long since gotten up and left, because it was really getting packed, yet more wealthy men and paunchy businessmen kept coming over, squeezing around the head of the table as the Hasidim from Yonosn's family dragged in benches where they sat one on top of the other. Beyle had made her special stuffed cabbage, boiled in wine, and they nearly went wild with delight . . . all of their concerns were washed away, they grew completely absorbed in the moment. . . the wine flowed freely, the joy in the air rang true.

You cannot say that you have known a Jew until you have seen him relieved of his worldly cares; you cannot imagine what it means for him to be loosed from the yoke of his livelihood. The cantor hit the highest notes: the crowd resounded with one tune after the next. They dumped all the guests' bottles of wine into the same barrel: each guest dipped his glass and drank. Shopkeepers who'd come to blows over a customer just a few days before were suddenly fast friends; refined businessmen rubbed elbows with commoners. They took up a jig, dancing arm in arm, for their Yonosn wasn't to be taken lightly, was he? He had summoned them—one simply had to put one's best foot forward.

One man leaped onto the table and danced. Another did a Vlachs dance in his skullcap. The crowd gushed, rained down applause. The ladies had been holding back but began drawing nearer and nearer. The pretty young mistress of the house was all spruced up. Her face shone

with joy. Only little Itzik—a pale, quiet youth, still no beard—sat alone at the head of the table by his father, no matter how hard they squeezed his shoulders.

Everyone and his cousin was standing on the benches outside, peeking through the windows. *Blessed are you, our God / Who has set us apart from the errant!* thundered from every throat. Now they were slurping the wine from their bare hands. It had been a fat year, and the Jews had earned a pretty penny. Yonosn was on top of the world: it occurred to him that he had never enjoyed himself so much as he was that day. Imagine: his beloved child, his only son, and he could take such comfort in him! But God knows we're only human . . . his daughter-in-law was standing right beside him with her white kerchief in her hand . . . the pearls around her neck glittered; truly, she had a *lovely face and radiant complexion!*¹⁰ Yonosn had forgotten where on earth he was: he took her by the hand and started kissing her . . .

The crowd ground to a halt. Horror. They scattered from the windows. Every tune in the air lodged itself in someone's throat. No one dared say a word; it's like they were frozen. Only after a few more minutes were they able to face each other, and even then with such shame that all they wanted was to hide again.

In town the news spread like a cyclone, sucking out the holiday from every heart. Everywhere you looked, someone was going around white as a sheet. Little knots of people formed here and there chattering and shrieking; from time to time they broke out in fistfights. Woe was them; for thirty years they'd eaten the meat that he'd slaughtered! The Savraner Hasidim didn't waste any time in hurling their pots through the window . . . it's impossible to describe everything that was going on in Drazhne at the time. It's like someone had uprooted a mountain of smut and flung it in the face of Drazhne's Jews.

At the end of the holiday, after a solitary evening prayer that pressed on his heart like a stone, after he'd said the blessing for the new week, Yonosn stole away: he stuffed a few shirts in the bag for his prayer shawl,

put on his long hooded cloak, took a walking stick, and left Drazhne.

Two years passed, and nobody knew where he'd gone. There was a rumor he was somewhere with the Karaites.¹¹ Others said he was repenting, consigning himself to exile . . .

At first, the official who collects the tax on meat paid Beyle a quarter of Yonosn's wages—then the party was over. She had to sell the house to stay afloat. They were all ruined.

Yonosn never saw his wife and children again. For about thirteen years, he wandered the earth, going from one rabbi to the next; then he died.

1 Hebrew: *Muskal rishon*. See translator's note to Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Hebrew translation from the Arabic, annotations, appendices, and indices by Michael Schwartz. Tel Aviv University Press, 2002, 2 vols., vol. 1, p. 115 n. 1 [Hebrew]: "Innate conceptions' are things that everyone of sound mind knows without having to learn them and that are, further, impossible to prove." This term, Schwartz adds, is equivalent to Aristotle's "first principles" [Greek: *archai*]. English translators of the *Guide* have rendered it as "innate idea"/"innate notion" (M. Friedländer), or "primary intelligible"/"primary notion" (S. Pines).

2 Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555–1631), an important commentator on the Talmud.

3 (Translator's gloss). This early rabbinic tradition is preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Menahot, 44a. The Biblical commandment to dye the fringes blue appears in Num. 15:38. For an incisive study of modern and contemporary efforts to (re)discover this gastropod, see David Landes, "Traditional Struggles:

Studying, Deciding, and Performing the Law at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary,” Ph.D. Diss., Princeton, Anthropology, 2010, 214–239.

4 *Shoykhet* (lit. “slaughterer”), an expert in Jewish dietary law who turns live animals into kosher meat. Here, contrasted to *katsev* (“other butcher”), who also trades in kosher meat but lacks such expertise.

5 Followers of Moshe Zvi Giterman of Savran (1775–1837), about whom, as Avner Holtzman notes, Berdyczewski published the 1892 Hebrew story “Death of a Tsaddik” (see note 11 below, vol. 3, pp. 103–106). There, by contrast, he portrayed Rabbi Moshe as more *lenient* than his counterpart, Rabbi Raphael of Bersht, in a case where legal stringency conflicts with philanthropy.

6 “Such is the *craft* (אימנות) of the Evil Inclination,” Babylonian Talmud tractates Shabbat 105b; Niddah 13b. On this tradition’s history and context, see Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires: “Yetzer Hara” and the Problem of Evil in Late Antiquity*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, 30–32.

7 On this figure, see Paul Ira Radensky, “Hasidism in an Age of Reform: A Biography of Rabbi Duvid ben Mordkhe Twersky of Tal’noye,” Ph.D. Diss., Jewish History, Jewish Theological Seminary, 2001, esp. p. 154, note 26, for hagiographies stressing the early and public role of a Hasidic rebbe in supervising kosher butchers. As Holtzman notes (see note 11 below, vol. 9, p. 267), this rebbe is featured in Berdyczewski’s 1904 Yiddish story “The Broken String,” and the author’s own family were connected with him.

8 Mishnah, tractate Avot 2:5.

9 Mishnah, tractate Avot 1:7.

10 Gen. 29:17, following Rashi’s commentary ad loc.

11 A non-rabbinic Jewish tradition. The translator gratefully acknowledges M.Z. Wolfovski’s translations, and the editor’s notes, in *Micha Josef Berdyczewski (Bin-Gorion), Collected Works*, 14 vols. (1996–2017), Ha-kibbutz ha-meuchad, ed. Avner Holtzman, vol. 9, pp. 77–81, 106–109, 117–120 [Hebrew]. “Tainted” was translated into German by the author’s wife, Rahel Ramberg (Rachel bin-Gorion), in M.J. Bin Gorion (Berdyczewski), *Vor dem Sturm: Ostjüdische Geschichten*, Vienna, Löwit, 1919, 77–83.

“Yankev-Nosn,” “The Liar,” and “Tainted,” yiddishbookcenter.org,

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