

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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## I Place My Reliance on No man

Exploring themes of faith, Jewish life, community, and  
existential thought, through a short story by Nobel laureate  
Isaac Bashevis Singer

With appreciation to Susan Beberfall—my co-leader for this session on Shavuot 2026



### Background

- Brich Shmei D'marei Alma – Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat and Festivals, Page 170.
- Re-living the Giving of the Torah - Zohar (2:206a), Vayakhel.

### THE STORY

Isaac Bashevis Singer: I place My Reliance on No Man. In: *Short Friday and Other Stories*. 1965.

### Introduction

Isaac Bashevis Singer, the son of a rabbi, was born in Poland and immigrated to America in 1935. This short story was written in Yiddish in the 1950s and translated into English in 1964. Yampol, a shtetl (or small town), was at various times under Polish, Lithuanian, Russian, and Soviet rule; today, it is located in Ukraine. By the late 19th century, roughly 50% of the town's population was Jewish. Similarly, Yavrov is located in western Ukraine near the Polish border; historically, it was part of the Austrian province of Galicia and, later, Poland. By 1900, over 25% of its population was Jewish.

The story depicts a Yiddish-speaking community, likely in the late 19th or early 20th century. Rather than evoking a nostalgic past, it presents a realistic view of everyday life, highlighting small-town personalities, local mentalities, and the physical rural landscape.

## Questions

By Susan Beberfall

Rabbi Danziger is a man facing conflicts, both external and internal. He might have imagined that as a rabbi, he would spend his days studying scripture, engaging in learned debates, and providing advice and counsel to his community, respected for his learning and recognized as the local authority on Jewish law. Instead, his pronouncements and teachings are met with disfavor and contempt. He becomes the target of much of the townspeople's mistrust and anger.

1. What could Rabbi Danziger have done differently to prevent burnout as a rabbi? What advice would you give to Rabbi Danziger? What advice would you give to the townspeople so that they could have had a more positive relationship with Rabbi Danziger?
2. Rabbi Danziger thinks that unlike nature, human beings are incapable of daily renewal, though he himself finds a path to spiritual renewal. In what ways have you found a path to spiritual and emotional renewal?
3. Rabbi Danziger has undoubtedly recited the same prayers every morning for a long time. But suddenly, he becomes aware of a deeper meaning in the prayers he recites. At what times in your life have you looked deeper into the words of the prayers we recite each week? How has prayer motivated you to engage in introspection or new ways of thinking?
4. Rabbi Danziger decides that he will free himself from relying on others by becoming a simple laborer, picking apples for Shlomie Meyer. In what ways does simplifying our lives free us from reliance on others? Under what circumstances does it become necessary to rely on others in order to fully interact with our families, friends, or community?

PRAISED BE YOUR NAME  
ברוך שמה. The mystic Isaac Luria (1534–1574, Safed) recommended that this prayer be recited before the open ark. It appears in printed editions of the Zohar (II:206a), where the passage that appears in the left-hand column of the facing page serves as an introduction, but it is not found in earlier manuscripts. One manuscript attributes it to the writings of Moses Nahmanides (1194–1270, Spain). Although its provenance is disputed, it has been cherished by many rites.

ברוך שמה דמרא עלמא,  
ברוך בתרך ואתרך.  
יהא רעותך עם עמך ישראל לעלם,  
ופרקון ימינך אחזי לעמך בבית מקדשה,  
ולאמטויי לגא מטוב נהורה,  
ולקבל צלותנא ברחמין.  
יהא רעוא קדמך דתוריק לן חזין בטיבותא,  
וליהוי אנא פקידא בגו צדיקיא,  
למרחם עלי ולמנטר יתי וית פלדי לי ודי לעמך ישראל.  
אנת הוא זן לכלא, ומפרנס לכלא.  
אנת הוא שליט על פלא,  
אנת הוא דשליט על מלכיא, ומלכותא דילך היא.

אנא עבדא דקדשא בריך הוא,  
דסגידנא קמה, ומקמי דיקר אורייתא בכל-עדן ועדן.  
לא על אנש רחיצנא, ולא על בר אלהין סמיכנא,  
אלא באלהא דשמיא, דהוא אלהא קשוט,  
ואורייתא קשוט, ונביאוהי קשוט,  
ומסגא למעבד טבון וקשוט.

◀ ביה אנא רחץ

ולשמה קדישא יקירא אנא אמר תשבחון.  
יהא רעוא קדמך דתפתח לבי באורייתא,  
ותשלים משאלין דלבי, ולבא דכל-עמך ישראל,  
לטב ולחזין ולשלם. אמן.

*The Zohar's  
Introduction to  
B'rikh Sh'meih*

As soon as the Torah scroll is placed on the reading desk, the whole congregation below should assume an attitude of awe and fear, of trembling and quaking, as though they were at the moment of standing at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, and they should pay attention and listen carefully; for it is not permitted then to open one's mouth, even for discussing the Torah, still less other subjects. All must be in awe and fear, as though they were speechless, as it is written: "And when he [Ezra] opened it, all the people stood up," and also "And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Torah scroll" (Nehemiah 8:5 and 8:3). Rabbi Shimon said: "When the Torah scroll is taken out to be read before the congregation, the heavenly gates of mercy are opened, the attribute of love is stirred up, and each one should then recite the following prayer: 'Ruler of the universe, praised be Your name and Your sovereignty . . .'"

*A Mystical Prayer Before the Open Ark*

Ruler of the universe, praised be Your name and Your sovereignty. May You desire Your people Israel forever, and may Your liberating power be revealed to them in Your sanctuary. Extend to us the goodness of Your light and with compassion accept our prayers. May it be Your will to grant us long life and well-being; may I be counted among the righteous, and in Your compassion protect me, my family, and all the people Israel. You are the one who nourishes and sustains all life. You rule over all, You have dominion over rulers, for true sovereignty is Yours.

I am a servant of the Holy One, whom I revere and whose precious Torah I revere in every time and place. Not on mortals, nor on angels do I rely, but rather on the God of heaven, the God of truth, whose Torah is truth and whose prophets are true and who abounds in deeds of goodness and truth.

► It is in God that I put my trust, and it is to Your holy and precious name that I utter praise. May it be Your will that You open my heart to Your Torah, and that You fulfill the desires of my heart and the hearts of all Your people Israel, for goodness, for life, and for peace. *Amen.*

► Beih ana raheitz,  
v'lishmeih kadisha yakira ana eimar tushb'han.  
Y'heih ra-ava kodamakh d'tiftah libi b'oraita,  
v'tashlim mishalin d'libi v'liba d'khol amakh yisrael,  
l'tav u-l'hayin v'lishlam. Amen.

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“With the Torah scroll, one voice and utterance should be heard.”<sup>196</sup>

“The arrangement to be prepared by the Holy People on this day and all other days for the Torah scroll: they must arrange a throne called ‘a reader’s desk,’ and that throne should have six steps to ascend and no more, as is written: *There were six steps to the throne* (2 Chronicles 9:18)—and one step above, on which to place the Torah scroll, displaying it for all.”<sup>197</sup>

“When the Torah scroll is lifted onto there, the whole people should arrange themselves in awe and fear, trembling and quaking, all below, intending in their hearts as if they were now standing at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. They should listen and incline their ears. None of the people, nor anyone else, is permitted to open his mouth with a word of Torah, and certainly not with any other word. Rather, all of them in awe, as if they had no mouth, as has been established, for it is written: *As he opened it, all the people stood up* (Nehemiah 8:5); *and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Torah scroll* (ibid., 3).”<sup>198</sup>

[Rabbi Shim’on said, “When the Torah scroll is taken out to be read in public, heavenly gates of compassion are opened and love is aroused above.”<sup>199</sup> One should then say the following:

Blessed is the name of the Master of the universe, blessed is Your crown and Your place. May Your will accompany Your people Israel forever. Show the redemption of Your right hand to Your people in Your Temple, bring us some of the goodness of Your light, and receive our prayer compassionately. May it be Your will to prolong our life in goodness, and may I be counted among the

Torah (apparently corresponding to *Netsah*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*), on the new moon a fourth is added, corresponding to *Shekhinah* (symbolized by the moon), who is illumined by *Tif’eret* (symbolized by the sun). This additional person and additional illumination are signified by *musaf*, the “additional” offering and prayer for the new moon.

196. **With the Torah scroll...** When the Torah is chanted in the synagogue, only one person (either the person called up to the Torah or the congregational Torah reader) should chant it aloud, while the person standing next to him (the other of the two people) should remain silent. The single “voice and utterance” of the Torah reader ensures that the sefirotic couple, *Tif’eret* and *Shekhinah* (known respectively as Voice and Utterance), will unite. See above, note 124.

197. **The arrangement to be prepared...**

The Torah should be chanted from a special reader’s desk on a raised platform or pulpit. The six steps leading to the pulpit correspond to those leading to the throne built by King Solomon. The phrase “one step above” refers to the reader’s desk itself. See *Zohar* 3:164b.

198. **When the Torah scroll is lifted...** The people should listen in awe as the Torah is chanted.

The context in Nehemiah describes Ezra’s public reading of the Torah. Verse 5 reads in full: *Ezra opened the scroll in the eyes of all the people, for he was above all the people; as he opened it, all the people stood up*. See BT *Sotah* 39a, where *all the people stood* is interpreted to mean that they were silent.

199. **love is aroused above** The love between the divine couple is stimulated by Israel’s worship.

righteous, so that You may have mercy upon me and protect me and all that is mine and that of Your people Israel.

You are the one who nourishes all and sustains all; You are ruler of all, You rule over kings, and kingdom is Yours. I am a servant of the blessed Holy One, before whom I bow. Not in a human do I put my trust, nor in a son of God, but only in the God of heaven, who is God of truth and acts abundantly in goodness and truth. In Him do I trust, and to His holy and glorious name I utter praises. May it be Your will to fulfill the desires of my heart—and the heart of all Your people Israel—for good, for life, and for peace.”<sup>200</sup>

“Only one person is allowed to chant the Torah, and all should be silent and hear from his mouth, as if they were receiving it at that moment from Mount Sinai. Another should stand next to the one reading and be silent, so that only one utterance exists, not two. The holy tongue is one—one and not two; if there are two with the Torah scroll, the mystery of faith is diminished, along with the glory of Torah.”<sup>201</sup>

200. One should then say the following... This prayer—the only one innovated in the *Zohar*—was incorporated into the Torah service for Sabbath morning under the influence of Isaac Luria, though opinions differ as to whether Luria intended it to be recited only on Sabbath or also on weekdays, or perhaps only on weekdays.

The prayer is known by its opening words *Berikh shemeih* (Blessed is His name). Due to its prominent place in the liturgy, it has become the *Zohar*'s most famous passage. Remarkably, the prayer (together with the preceding paragraph: “Rabbi Shim'on said...”) is a later addition to the *Zohar*, as indicated already by Cordovero (*Or Yaqar*) and as evidenced by the fact that it appears in none of the following manuscripts: C9, M5, M9, Ms24, N10, N41, O17, P2, R1, T1, V5, V7, V18, nor in the text accompanying *Or Yaqar*. In O2 a bit of it is inserted by a later copyist, while in the Cremona edition it appears in a smaller, different font. The passage appears in full in the Mantua edition and in nearly all subsequent editions (those that are based on Mantua). In a fifteenth-century kabbalistic manuscript containing various compositions (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, heb. MS 835, 114b), this prayer is attributed to Nah-

manides. Nevertheless, because of the prayer's historical, cultural, and religious significance—and because it is so widely known—I have included it here, placing the entire passage in brackets.

“A son of God” renders literally בר אלהין (*bar elahin*), which can convey the idiomatic meaning “angel.” See Daniel 3:25, 28. Here, though, this wording probably represents a polemic against Christian belief. The Paris manuscript (referred to in the preceding paragraph) reads instead בר נש (*bar nash*), “a human being.”

The clause “and acts abundantly in goodness and truth” derives from *Targum Onqelos*, Exodus 34:6, where it renders the biblical ורב חסד ואמת (*ve-rav ḥesed ve-emet*), and *abounding in kindness and truth* [or: *faithfulness*].

On this prayer, see Frankel, “Tefillat u-Vaqqashat ‘Berikh Shemeih’”; Hallamish, *Ha-Qabbalah*, 122, 289.

201. Only one person... Rabbi Yitshaq is the speaker (as before the bracketed passage). He explains that only the congregational Torah reader (or the person called up to the Torah) should chant from the scroll, while the other of the two people should stand silently next to him. The unique status

2262

PROPERTY OF  
MOSES...  
MILWAUKEE...

# short friday

*and other stories by*

**I S A A C B A S H E V I S S I N G E R**

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**I place  
my reliance on  
no man**

**F**rom the day people began to talk about his becoming the rabbi at Yavrov, Rabbi Jonathan Danziger of Yampol didn't have a minute's peace. His Yampol enemies begrudged his going to the bigger city, though they couldn't wait for him to leave Yampol because they already had someone to take his place. The Yampol elders

wanted the rabbi to leave Yampol without being able to go to Yavrov. They tried to ruin his chances for the Yavrov appointment by spreading rumors about him. They intended to treat him the way they had treated the previous rabbi: he was to leave town in disgrace riding in an ox-drawn cart. But why? What evil had he done? He had hurt no one's honor; he was invariably friendly to everyone. Yet they all had private grudges against him. One claimed that the rabbi gave a wrong interpretation of the Talmud; another had a son-in-law who wanted to take over the rabbi's position; a third thought Rabbi Jonathan should follow a Hasidic leader. The butchers whined that the rabbi found too many cows unkosher, the ritual slaughterer that the rabbi asked to check his knife twice a week. The bathhouse attendant complained because once, on the eve of a holy day, the rabbi had declared the ritual bath impure, and thus the women could not copulate with their husbands.

On Bridge Street the mob insisted that the rabbi spent too much time at his books, that he didn't pay attention to the common people. In taverns ruffians made fun of the way the rabbi shouted when reciting "Hear, O Israel," and how he spat when he mentioned the idols. The enlightened proved that the rabbi made mistakes in Hebrew grammar. The rabbi's wife was mocked by the ladies because she spoke in the accent of Great Poland and because she drank her chicory and coffee without sugar. There was nothing they didn't make fun of. They didn't like it when the rabbi's wife baked bread every Thursday rather than once every three weeks. They looked askance at the rabbi's daughter, Yentl the widow, who, they said, spent too much time knitting and embroidering. Before each Passover there was a row because of the Passover matzo's, and the rabbi's enemies ran to his house to break his windows. After Succoth, when many children fell ill, the pious matrons screamed that the rabbi hadn't cleansed

the town of sins, that he had allowed the young women to go about with uncovered hair, and that the Angel of Death was thus punishing innocent infants with his sword. One way or another, every faction carped and found fault. With all this, the rabbi received the lowly salary of five gulden a week; he lived in the direst need.

As if he wasn't burdened enough with enemies, even his friends behaved like enemies. They relayed every petty accusation to him. The rabbi told them that this was a sin, quoting from the Talmud that gossip hurts all three parties: the gossiper, the one who receives the gossip, and the one gossiped about. It breeds anger, hatred, desecration of the Holy Name. The rabbi begged his followers not to trouble him with slander; but every word his enemies uttered was reported to him. If the rabbi expressed disapproval of the messenger of evil, then that person would immediately defect to the hostile camp. The rabbi could no longer pray and study in peace. He would plead with God: How long can I endure this Gehenna? Even condemned men don't suffer more than twelve months. . . .

Now that Rabbi Jonathan was about to take over the office in Yavrov, he could see that it was very much like Yampol. There was already an opposition in Yavrov, too. There, as well, was a rich man whose son-in-law coveted the rabbi's post. Besides, though the Yavrov rabbi made his living by selling candles and yeast, a few merchants had taken the forbidden merchandise into their stores, even after being threatened with excommunication.

The rabbi was barely fifty, but he was already gray. His tall figure was bent. The beard which once had been the color of straw had become white and sparse like that of an old man. His eyebrows were bushy, and below his eyes hung mossy, brownish-blue bags. He suffered from all sorts of ailments. He coughed, winter and summer. His body was mere skin and bone; he was so light that when he walked in the wind, his coattails almost lifted him into

the air. His wife lamented that he didn't eat enough, drink enough, sleep enough. Racked by nightmares he would wake from sleep with a start. He dreamed of persecutions and pogroms, and because of these he often had to fast. The rabbi believed that he was being punished for his sins. Sometimes he would say harsh words against his tormentors; he would question the ways of God and even doubt His mercy. He would put on his prayer shawl and phylacteries and the thought would suddenly flash through his mind: Suppose there is no Creator? After such blasphemy, the rabbi would not allow himself to taste food all day, until the stars came out. "Woe is me, where shall I run?" the rabbi sighed, "I'm a lost man."

In the kitchen sat mother and daughter and each one kept her own counsel. Ziporah, the rabbi's wife, came from a wealthy family. As a girl she had been considered beautiful, but the years of poverty had ruined her looks. In her unbecoming old-fashioned bonnet and dress from the time of King Sobieski, she seemed stooped and emaciated; her face was wrinkled and had taken on the rustiness of an unripe pear. Her hands had grown large and full of veins like those of a man. But Ziporah found one consolation in all her misery: work. She washed, chopped wood, carried water from the well, scoured the floors. People in Yampol joked that she scrubbed the dishes so hard that she made holes in them. She darned the table cloths and sheets so thickly that not a thread remained of the original weave. She even repaired the rabbi's slippers. Of the six children to which she had given birth, only Yentl had survived.

Yentl took after her father: her hair was yellowish, she was tall, fair-skinned, freckled, flat-chested. Yentl was no less diligent than her mother, but her mother would not allow her to touch any housework. Yentl's husband Ozer, a yeshiva student, had died of consumption. Yentl now sewed, knitted, read books which she borrowed from

peddlers. At first she had received many marriage offers, but she managed to discourage the matchmakers. She never stopped mourning her husband. As soon as someone began arranging a match for her, she suddenly began to suffer from cramps. People in Yampol spread the rumor that she had given Ozer an oath on his deathbed that she would never marry again. She didn't have a single girl friend in Yampol. Summers she would take a basket, a rope, and go off into the woods to pick berries and mushrooms. Such behavior was considered highly improper for a rabbi's daughter.

The move to Yavrov seemed a good prospect, but the rabbi's wife and Yentl worried more than they rejoiced. Neither mother nor daughter had a decent stitch of clothing or piece of jewelry. During the years at Yampol, they had become so destitute that the rabbi's wife wailed to her husband that she had forgotten to speak to people. She prayed at home, avoided escorting brides to the synagogue or taking part in a circumcision ceremony. But Yavrov was a different matter. There, ladies decked themselves out in fashionable dresses, costly furs, silken wigs, shoes with high heels and pointed toes. The young married women went to the synagogue in feathered hats. Each had a golden chain or brooch. How could one come to such a place in rags, with broken-down furniture and patched linen? Yentl simply refused to move. What would she do in Yavrov? She was neither a girl nor a married woman; at least in Yampol she had a mound of earth and a gravestone.

Rabbi Jonathan listened and shook his head. He had been sent a contract from Yavrov, but had not as yet received any advance. Was that the custom, or were they treating him this way because they considered him naive? He was ashamed to ask for money. It went against his nature to use the Torah for profit. The rabbi paced back

and forth in his study; "Father in heaven, save me. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me!"

## 2

It was the rabbi's custom to pray in the synagogue rather than in the study house, for among the poor Jews he had fewer enemies. He prayed at sunrise with the first quorum. It was after Pentecost. At three-thirty the morning star rose. At four the sun was already shining. The rabbi loved the stillness of the morning when most of the townfolk were still sleeping behind closed shutters. He never tired of watching the sun come up: purple, golden, washed in the waters of the Great Sea. The rising sun always brought the same thought to his mind: unlike the sun, the son of man never renews himself; that is why he is doomed to death. Man has memories, regrets, resentments. They collect like dust, they block him up so he can't receive the light and life that descends from heaven. But God's creation is constantly renewing itself. If the sky becomes cloudy, it clears up again. The sun sets, but is reborn every morning. There is no blemish of the past on the moon or stars. The ceaselessness of nature's creation is never so obvious as at dawn. Dew is falling, the birds twitter, the river catches fire, the grass is moist and fresh. Happy is the man who can renew himself together with creation "when all the stars of the morning sing together."

This morning was like any other morning. The rabbi rose early in order to be first in the synagogue. He knocked on the oak door to warn the spirits who pray there of his arrival. Then he went into the dark antechamber. The synagogue was hundreds of years old, but it remained almost as it was on the day it was built. Everything exuded eternity: the gray walls, the high ceiling, the brass candleabras, the copper wash basin, the lectern with the four

pillars, the carved high Ark with the tables of the Commandments and the two gilded lions. Streams of sun moats passed through the oval, stained-glass windows. Even though the ghosts who pray there usually leave it at cock-crow to make room for the living, there remained behind them a breathlessness and stillness. The rabbi began to pace up and down and to recite the "Lord of the Universe." The rabbi repeated the words, "And after all things shall have had an end, He alone shall reign," several times. The rabbi imagined the family of man perishing, houses crumbling, everything evil melting away and God's light again inhabiting all space. The shrinking of His power, the unholy forces, everything mean and filthy would cease. Time, accidents, passions, struggles would vanish, for these were but illusion and deception. The real truth was sheer goodness.

The rabbi said his prayers, contemplating the inner meaning of the words. Little by little the worshippers began to arrive: the first quorum was of hardworking men who rise at the rooster's crow—Leibush the carter, Chaim Jonah the fish merchant, Avrom the saddlemaker, Shloime Meyer who grows orchards outside Yampol. They greeted the rabbi, then put on their phylacteries and prayer shawls. It occurred to the rabbi that his enemies in the town were either the rich or the lazy idlers. The poor and hardworking, all those who made an honest living, were on his side. "Why didn't it ever occur to me?" the rabbi wondered. "Why didn't I realize it?" He felt a sudden love for these Jews who deceived no one, who knew nothing of swindling and grabbing, but followed God's sentence: "From the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread . . ." Now they thoughtfully wrapped the phylactery thongs around their arms, kissed the fringes of the prayer shawls, and assumed the heavy yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. A morning tranquility rested on their

faces and beards. Their eyes shone with the mildness of those who have been burdened from childhood on.

It was Monday. After confession the scroll was taken from the Ark while the rabbi recited "Blessed be Thy Name." The opening of the Holy Ark always moved him. Here they stood, the pure scrolls, the Torah of Moses, silken-skirted and decorated with chains, crowns, silver plates—all similar, but each with its separate destiny. Some scrolls were read on weekdays, others on the Sabbath, still others were taken out only on the Day of the Rejoicing of the Law. There were also several worn books of the Law with faded letters and mouldering parchment. Every time the rabbi thought about these holy ruins, he felt a pain in his heart. He swayed back and forth, mumbling the Aramaic words, "Thou rulest over all . . . I, the servant of the Holy One, blessed be He, bow down before Him and the splendor of His law . . ." When the rabbi came to the words, "I place my reliance on no man," he stopped. The words stuck in his throat.

For the first time he realized that he was lying. No one relied on people more than he. The whole town gave him orders, he depended on everyone. Anyone could do him harm. Today it happened in Yampol, tomorrow it would happen in Yavrov. He, the rabbi, was a slave to every powerful man in the community. He must hope for gifts, for favors, and must always seek supporters. The rabbi began to examine the other worshippers. Not one of them needed allies. No one else worried about who might be for or against him. No one cared a penny for the tales of rumor-mongers. "Then what's the use of lying?" the rabbi thought. "Whom am I cheating? The Almighty?" The rabbi shuddered and covered his face in shame. His knees buckled. They had already put the scroll on the reading table, but the rabbi had not noticed this. Suddenly something inside the rabbi laughed. He lifted his hand as if swearing an oath. A long forgotten joy came over him,

and he felt an unexpected determination. In one moment everything became clear to him . . .

They called the rabbi to the reading and he mounted the steps to the lectern. He placed a fringe on the parchment, touched it to his brow and kissed it. He recited the benediction in a loud voice. Then he listened to the reader. It was the chapter, "Send thou men . . ." It told of the spies who went to search the land of Canaan and who returned frightened by the sons of Anak. Cowardice had destroyed the generation of the desert, Rabbi Jonathan said to himself. And if they were not supposed to fear giants, why should I tremble before midgets? It's worse than cowardice; it's nothing but pride. I'm afraid to lose my rabbinical vestments. The co-worshippers gaped at the rabbi. He seemed transformed. A mysterious strength emanated from him. It's probably because he's moving to Yavrov, they explained to themselves.

After praying, the men began to disperse. Shloime Meyer took his prayer shawl, ready to leave. He was a small man, wide-boned, with a yellow beard, yellow eyes, yellow freckles. His canvas cap, his gabardine coat and his coarse boots were parched yellow by the sun. The rabbi made a sign to him. "Shloime Meyer, please wait a minute."  
"Yes, Rabbi."

"How are the orchards?" the rabbi asked. "Is the harvest good?"

"Thank God. If there are no winds, then it will be good."

"Do you have men to do the picking?"

Shloime Meyer thought it over for a moment. "They're hard to get, but we manage."

"Why are they hard to get?"

"The work isn't easy. They have to stand on ladders all day and sleep in the barn at night."

"How much do you pay?"

"Not much."

"Enough to live on?"

Shloime Meyer waited a while longer and then left. Near the door to the antechamber he glanced back. The rabbi stood alone, his hands clasped, his gaze wandering from wall to wall. He would make his departure from the synagogue where he had prayed for so many years. It was all so familiar: the twelve signs of the zodiac, the seven stars, the figures of the lion, the stag, the leopard and the eagle, the unutterable Name of God, painted in red. The gilded lions on the top of the Ark stared at the rabbi with their amber eyes while their curved tongues supported the tables with the Ten Commandments. It seemed to the rabbi that these sacred beasts were asking: Why did you wait so long? Couldn't you see from the start that one cannot serve God and man at the same time? Their open mouths seemed to laugh with benign ferocity. The rabbi clutched at his beard. "Well, it is never too late. Eternity is still before one . . ." He walked backwards until he reached the threshold. There is no mezuzah in a synagogue, but the rabbi touched the jamb with his index finger and then his lips.

In Yampol, in Yavrov, the strange news soon spread. Rabbi Jonathan, his wife, and Yentl his daughter, had gone off to pick fruit in Shloime Meyer's orchards.

*Translated by RUTH WHITMAN*

"I feed them."  
 "Shloime Meyer, take me on. I'll pick fruit for you."  
 Shloime Meyer's yellow eyes filled with laughter. "Why not?"  
 "I'm not joking."  
 Shloime Meyer's eyes saddened. "I don't know what the Rabbi means."  
 "I'm not a rabbi any more."  
 "What? Why is that?"  
 "If you have a minute, I'll tell you."  
 Shloime Meyer listened while the rabbi spoke. The quorum had left and the two men remained alone. They stood near the pulpit. Although the rabbi spoke quietly, each word echoed back as though someone unseen were repeating it after him.  
 "What do you say, Shloime Meyer?" the rabbi finally asked.  
 Shloime Meyer made a face as though he had swallowed something sour. He shook his head from side to side.  
 "What can I say? I'm afraid I'll be excommunicated."  
 "You must not fear anyone. Ye shall not fear the face of man. That's the essence of Jewishness."  
 "What will your wife say?"  
 "She'll help me with my work."  
 "It's not for the likes of you."  
 "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength."  
 "Well, well . . ."  
 "You agree, then?"  
 "If the Rabbi wants . . ."  
 "Don't call me Rabbi anymore. From now on I'm your employee. And I'll be an honest worker."  
 "I'm not worried about that."  
 "When do you leave for the orchards?"  
 "In a couple of hours."  
 "Come by with your cart. I'll be waiting."  
 "Yes, Rabbi."