

Welcome. I am Joseph Preil, co-director of the Holocaust Resource Center here at Kean College of New Jersey. Today, Thursday, November 19, 1992, we are indeed privileged to have with us a very special guest, Rabbi Jack Ring, who spent his years of the Holocaust began in Poland, and was with that famous yeshiva, the Mirrer Yeshiva in Shanghai. And before we begin the interview, Rabbi Ring, I noticed that you have some of the seforim-- some of the study books.

--the yeshiva printed.

Yeah. The first one that you have is?

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Yeah. I got it.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] This was reprinted because this is a very important sefer that the yeshiva was using daily.

And how did the yeshiva get it in Shanghai?

We had a library. And thank God that we managed to save, together with the yeshiva, the entire library of the yeshiva. And then the seforim, which were very important for the daily use for the yeshiva, we reprinted them and we made them available to each individual student.

And these are some of the classic--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--books, which are studied in yeshiva.

Which are studied in yeshiva.

The city of publication is here.

It's Shanghai, yeah,

And the date of publication in each one seems to be--

It's in April. It's [NON-ENGLISH]. That is the date of the year when it was printed.

Which in our calendar is 1945.

I believe so.

Yes. And this is.

The sefer [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. This is a very famous sefer. And in the great academies, it is used for learning, daily learning.

With the Talmud.

Yes.

And by the same author of the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] which we had just seen.

It's the second sefer And this sefer is called [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] And this is on the-- well, it deals mostly with

the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] which concerned marriage, divorce, and different things-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Again, Shanghai is the city of publication.

And the year is [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Which is 1945.

Right. Then we have here-- oh, this looks like two in one in this thing.

Basically, this is the sefer of Rav Elchonon Wasserman, the rosh yeshiva from Baranovich, which is [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. This is the name of the sefer. But he wanted to bring in also shuvahs from the Rashba, which is concerning to this [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. So they printed-- in the beginning, they chose a Rashba concerning the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. And in the back of it is the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

Rashba was a rishonim that lived in Spain.

Right, lived in Spain.

Something like 1,000 years ago.

No, less than 1,000. He'd lived--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

I'd say 700 years ago, right. But Rav Elchonon Wasserman, whom you mentioned--

He lived during the war time.

And what was his wartime experience?

I mean, he lived in the war time. But finally, he was killed by the Germans. He was perished by the Germans. He was shot.

But it's a famous story, which I don't want to go into it now. But he was killed by German soldiers. And what was interesting, as I recall it, is that he was in the United States when the war broke out.

Oh yeah.

And had been requested by Jewish leaders here to remain during the war, not to go back. And his attitude was he belongs with his yeshiva.

Yeah.

And the final sefer or book that you have here--

It's the sefer [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] on the Seder Kodashim. But this is called Kodashim Seder. And this was written by the famous Ger rebbe, Rebbe Yehuda Aryeh Leib from Ger. And it was printed by the talmidim from yeshivas [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] in Shanghai. And it is [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Two years before.

1943.

Yeah.

All right, and this is only a sampling of what was done in reprinting.

Yeah. I just want to say that the entire Shas was printed in the same form like the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], which I just showed. Also, we had the Rambans, and we had a [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] all was printed. I gave it away before I came to Jersey.

This is 20 years ago. Before I moved to Jersey, I bought a new Shas and everything, which is done in America. And I gave the other thing away to an institution.

So the entire Talmud was reprinted.

Yeah, the entire Talmud, the Rambam, and--

And the Rambam of Maimonides?

Like for instance, the Rashba, the Rambam, and the Ritva, all this was printed.

And all the scholars of the Rambam era, of the Maimonides era were also reprinted.

Right.

And all the books of the Bible, the Torah.

Right.

And also Nach?

No, just the Torah. We didn't print--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah.

All right, now we'll go back to the beginning and see how we proceed.

Yeah.

Could you tell us when and where you were born.

I was born in the year 1916, September the 4th, which I mentioned before. And I was born in the city of Pultusk.

This is a city near Warsaw, the capital of Poland-- to be exact, 52 kilometers from Poland. I was born to a very, very nice family-- a very important family. My father, let him rest in peace, his name was Shmuel. And he was a Ger [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] in a big town, [NON-ENGLISH].

When you say Ger [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] what does that mean?

A Ger [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] that means that he was-- we had [NON-ENGLISH] a lot of Hasidim [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. And we had in our city-- I'll name a few. We had Ger Hasidim. We had Amshinova Hasidim.

We had Radziner Hasidim. We had Vurka Hasidim. And I'm not going to name all of them. We had maybe 15 different names of Hasidim.

But in that wonderful world of Polish Hasidic life, Ger was--

Ger was outstanding.

Was number one.

Yeah, was number one. In fact--

And certainly, the number of Hasidim Ger.

Members.

--all over Poland.

Yeah, it was also the number one in membership from the Hasidim. My father, let him rest in peace, he was a businessman. He had a big mill.

I remember the story, the building, at six stories high. And he had a lot of workers in the place. Most of them, the people that worked, the ones which ran in the physical part, were Polish.

But in the office, there were Jewish people. And the mill wasn't only owned by my father alone. He had two partners.

My mother, let her rest in peace, she was his second wife. He was married before. And then he had a number of children with the first wife.

And then at the last birth, she got pneumonia. And in those days, pneumonia was a fatal thing, and she passed away. And my father, plus the family, they didn't want him to remarry to a strange woman to get into the house-- like they used to say in Poland, a stiefmama. So they figured they'd look around and see if he's it's going to be possible to get for him somebody from the family itself.

And sure enough, my mother, who was younger than my father, 15 years, she was willing to marry my father. She was from Lomza-- from the city of Lomza, a very famous city, a very big business city. They had different industries.

So she married, and I am from the second wife. My name, I mentioned, is Jack. And I had a younger sister by the name of Malka.

So you and your younger sister were from your father's second marriage.

Yes.

From the second.

And there were children from the first marriage. How many from the first marriage?

There were-- the ones which survived up till the war, because many of them passed away of different diseases. But the ones who had survived were four brothers and three sisters from the first wife-- seven children. But this was before the war. And--

In 1939 how many were living.

In 1939, besides me were three brothers-- Chaim, Yuda Elizer, and Moshe. And then I had my sister Malka. And I had two sisters who lived in America, in the United States. One was Lily, Leah, and the second one was Evelyn, Hava.

All right. So in 1939, when the war broke out, of your father's children in Poland, there were five. You, your sister, and three brothers were in Poland.

Were in Poland.

Now, can we talk about the members of your family at a time. Your father and mother-- your father, when did he pass away?

My father passed away in 1933.

That was well before the war.

Yeah.

Your mother?

My mother lived during the war. I mean, she lived during the war. She was with me together.

And what happened during the war?

What happened during the war, we went-- when the war broke out, I was in my hometown in Pultusk. It was just me, my younger sister, and my mother. The war broke out on a Friday.

So at the beginning, the Sunday after that, I said to my mother, I don't want to stay in the city because the German front was closing in on the city. And we heard terrible stories, what the Germans were doing to Jewish boys, or males in general. So I said to my mother, I want to go further into the country. I figured that maybe I can be saved myself. I didn't know that Poland is going to fall so soon.

So that Sunday, I decided I'm going to go away from Pultusk further into the country. So my mother, let her rest in peace, she said, if you're going, I'm not going to leave you to go by yourself. We'll go together with you. And my mother and sister and myself, we went from Pultusk to the next town, which is called Wyszkow.

In Pultusk lived my oldest brother, Chaim. He was a businessman. He had a big store, and he was very philanthropic in the city of Wyszkow. And when we arrived there, he set us up and we slept over there that night. Unfortunately, or fortunately, the next day, 6:00, the German Air Force came and they started to bomb that little city of Wyszkow.

How do you spell Wyszkow? All right, Wyszkow-- V-I-S-H-K-O-V-A. All right, thank you.

And they bombed us steady for hours. I said to myself, what am I doing here? I mean, now it's a question of saving my life. And I really am not tied on to the city at all.

So I said to my mother, we have to get out of this city. We talked to my brother. My brother said, I have my business, and I have my life here.

I'm not going. But you, if you feel like going, you can go. So we continued until we came to a little town of the name Dobra.

All right, you'll spell that, too? Thank you. D-O-B-R-A. Dobra.

Yeah. This was like a village-- a bigger type village. So we stayed there for a day and a night. The next morning, when I woke up and I went outside, I had somebody giving me-- I heard first hoofs, like hooves from a horse running.

Then I saw a soldier on the horse that is approaching. I didn't know if it was a German or if it was a Polish. And then the man had a drawn gun and he called out to me to stop in Polish.

And then he called me over. And I came over to him, and it was a German soldier. He was running from the very first,

from the avant garde that came into that little town. So he told me that I should wake up the people and they should all come out. And that was--

From what guard was that?

Avant garde, from the army-- from the-- usually, before an army goes into a city, there's like--

The advanced guard.

The advanced-- but they call it avant garde. I don't know. Maybe it's in English different. So he was the one who talked to me.

And I called out the people. The people got up. And they gave us an order to go into the market-- the market of that little village.

We got to the market. So by that time, more soldiers came in. And one of the offices of the German army made a speech to us.

And he warned us-- that's what they warned to all the people. Not just the Jewish people, but the goyim, too. And he said, if a German soldier will be hurt, they're going for each soldier take 20 or 25-- I don't remember exactly the number of citizens of the city, and kill them.

When he finished with his speech, we went back home. It didn't take long, and then came into the city the Gestapo, the SS soldiers. And when they came in, they made all the Jewish people leave.

They already beforehand, outside of the town in the fields, prepared a wired section, which was all wired around. And they placed us all over there, all the Jewish people, outside. It wasn't a ghetto. It was just temporarily that they placed us over there. I must tell this story, because I think the story is very important.

By all means.

So all the Jewish people were staying there. And that night, we slept in the field in this place. It was very cold, because in Poland this time of the year, this was already after Sukkos. So it's very cold. So we--

That would be about October, November?

Yes, something-- The war started September 1. This is a few weeks after?

Yeah, this was a few weeks after.

About six weeks or so? No, not six weeks. I was-- no, I'm sorry. It was earlier.

OK, it was not before Sukkos. I made a mistake. I'm sorry. It was close, yet when it happened, after the war. So--

So it's probably September, yeah.

Yeah. So anyway, we stayed that night. And the next day, the German army came in with trucks. And they loaded up the people in the trucks, and they moved out from that place, going back to East Prussia.

On the way to East Prussia, they passed by my hometown. And over there, they made a stop in Pultusk. And they unloaded all the people in a high school, which was very big, a lot of place over there. They placed us in this high school, and we stayed there overnight in this high school.

But how many people do you think we're talking about?

There were hundreds of people-- hundreds of people, because they got not just the people from that little town, from Dobra. They brought in different people, too. The following day, they told us to line up on the yard from that high school. It was a very large yard. We should stay in line.

And they told us they're going to give us soup and bread. That's what they told us. We stood there for hours and nothing happened.

Then when I was standing in the line, in front of me, there was a large table. And a group of officers came, and they stood in front of this. They stopped by this table to place their papers, or whatever it was, on this table.

Then the top officer, a young man-- he was only, like, 27 years of age, called out, and he said, whoever is from the city of Pultusk should step forward. I just happened to be standing across, so I stepped forward. He asked me that I show him documents that I am from the city of Pultusk. And I showed him my [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] which was like an ID, because I needed it.

When I was in Mirrer Yeshiva, we needed to have this [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. And I had it with me. He read it and he gave it to me back. And then he said to me, "raus, Jude," which means "get out of here, Jude." "Jew." And I left.

And I was in my own town. I went back home. My mother was in that little town with my sister-- Dobra

And then when she saw that I was taken by the German army, she figured she'll go back home. She didn't acknowledge that I was already home. And then when she came back, we united again.

Fascinating

And this is what happened, the story after Sukkos, what I mentioned before. After Sukkos, the Germans decided that they got all the people from Pultusk in one place, and they made us leave the city. We should go across to go to the cross over to the part of Poland which was occupied by the Soviet army.

In other words, the river Bug, B- U- G-, was the line that divided the parts of Poland. One side was taken by the Germans and the other side was occupied by the Russians. So they made us leave this spot to go to the Russian side.

This was from Pultusk.

Yeah. So it took us days till we got to that river Bug, and we crossed over the river Bug. And we came on the side where the Russians were. On the other side were already Jewish people, which were a small group of Jewish people, which tried to help the refugees.

And they gave us food, and they gave different things. They gave us instructions, and we can go to different places. I myself, with my mother and sister, we walked to a little town which is called Czyzew.

Czyzew is--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--C- Z-. I notice Polish people make a z. And that's in Russia.

No, that was Poland occupied by the Russians.

Yeah, that's right. In the Russian zone of Poland.

In the Russian zone of Poland.

All right.

I had--

And you were in Czyzew now.

Yeah, now I'm in Czyzew. In Czyzew, we had family. So we slept over that night by the people.

But we couldn't stay there, couldn't remain there. This wasn't the practice. This was a very small town. But over there was already a railroad.

So we boarded the railroad. And from Czyzew, we went to Bialystok. That is a very big, big city in Poland.

In Bialystok, I had family, too, from my mother's side. My mother's name was Galczynska, I had a-- my mother had a cousin by the name of Galczynski, who was a well-to-do person. They lived very comfortably-- many rooms. And they gave us-- we stayed with them.

We listened one night to the radio. And on the radio was the announcement that the Russians decided to give away Vilna-- which belonged at that time to Poland, to give it away to the Lithuanians, because the Lithuanians had a claim on the city of Vilna. So they decided to give away the city of Vilna to the Lithuanians. Later, that took away altogether Lithuania, too. But meantime, they gave away Vilna to the Lithuanians.

So when I heard this, I said to my mother, I can't stay anymore here, because here, this is occupied by the Communists. And naturally, as a scholar from the yeshiva, I looked for every way out to get out from being under the rule of the Communists, because they were against learning-- against keeping religion in anything. So I said to my mother, I'm going to go to Vilna.

And she said, I'm coming with you. And they came with me. My mother and my sister came to Vilna.

In Vilna was my yeshiva, the Mirrer Yeshiva, when the war broke out. So at the beginning, naturally, they stayed in the Mir, in the They stayed till after Sukkos. And they realized that they cannot be living under the Communists.

The Communists probably are going either to dissolve the whole thing-- and I don't know what they would have done to it. But they were afraid also maybe they would call them counter-revolutionaries, and they may wind up in Siberia. So in one night, they sneaked out all of them on wagons from Mir. And they boarded in the next town the railroad, and they came to Vilna.

Exactly where is the town of Mir located?

The town of Mir, it was about 30 kilometers away from the old Russian border, which was between Russia and Poland.

So it's very much in the far eastern part of Poland.

Yeah, it is close. In fact, it's 30 kilometers. This I remember.

And that was the reason why I had to carry with me an ID, because it was so close to the Russian border. And they had a rule, the Polish government over there, that you have to have a document with you. They wanted every person to be documented.

Yeah. Whose idea was it to move the yeshiva? How many students were in the yeshiva?

It was, like, 350.

350. To move 350 students with a number of families.



Yeah. Some of them. Not too many. Number of families.

Well, the--

The rosh yeshiva had a family.

The leaders of the yeshiva.

And then there's [YIDDISH] family, Rebbe Haskel. And the second rosh yeshiva, Chaim Shmuelevitz, and his family. And there were a few other people which had families.

So we're talking about something close to 400 people suddenly disappearing one night.

Yeah.

Whose idea was it that they should move?

This is the idea from the rosh yeshiva [YIDDISH].

Oh, it's Rav Finkel.

Rav Finkel. His brother's Yehuda Finkel.

He was the one who said the time has come to go to Vilna.

I mean, it was a joint decision that it's no place no more to stay in Mir. And they have to go. So the only place they figured they can go is to Vilna, because they also knew that Vilna is going to be turned over to the Lithuanian.

Yeah, because when they came actually to Vilna, Lithuania still was under the Communists. But it was all-- but the local government, they didn't show that they're acting like Communists, because they were going to give it away, anyway. So they left it alone.

Now, you were in Bialystok.

I was in Bialystok. And I had this story of Vilna given away to the Lithuanians. I decided to go to Vilna.

But you did not know that your yeshiva--

At the time, I didn't know that the yeshiva was.

It was just accidental.

Accidental. I came to Vilna. And we arranged-- naturally, we were refugees. And we lived the same way like all the refugees.

But when I realized that the Mir Yeshiva was there, I joined with the Mir Yeshiva. But before I joined with the Mir Yeshiva, something happened that I got separated. My mother and my sister got separated from one another, willingly. My sister Malka had, let me call it, an [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. His name was Yankel Rosenberg.

Groom or-- and they were affianced to be married.

Yeah. So when the war broke out, he was in Warsaw. Yankel Rosenberg was his name. So when Warsaw fell, he decided, I must go and find-- he had to go to find his kallah, my sister.

His bride.

The bride. So he sneaked out from Warsaw. He managed to sneak out. It wasn't so easy. But he managed to sneak out from of Warsaw, and he finally came to Bialystok.

When he came to Bialystok, this was the center place where most of the refugees from that area, from that part of Poland, came to that city. So he started to investigate and find out what happened to my family. So he was told by people that we left from Bialystok to Vilna. So he left Bialystok himself and he came to Vilna.

When he came to Vilna, he met up with us. It was through the different organizations what's easy to-- that we could get in touch with one another. He met with us. And then he said to my sister that the Russians in Bialystok offered the refugees jobs, and they're going to pay so and so much a day.

Naturally, in Vilna, he was a refugee. He had nothing. And in Bialystok, he had the chance to get a job.

So he says to my sister, I would like to go back to Bialystok and settle over there-- not to be a refugee. He didn't figure that he was going to be a refugee. But this only was a trick from the Russian army, in the intelligence of them, they wanted to get rid of all the refugees from Bialystok. So they told them that they're going to give them jobs. He went back with my sister.

And my mother, let her rest in peace, she said, it's more important for me to be with my daughter. She's a girl, and she needs me more than you as a boy. So I'm going to go with my daughter.

And this is what happened that we got separated. They went back to Bialystok. It was the hope that they're going to get jobs over there.

Unfortunately for them, the Russians pretty soon rounded up all the refugees. It was well over 40,000 at one time. They rounded them all up and took them to Russia.

My mother settled in a city in Russia which is not far from Minsk. Everybody knows the city of Minsk. This is the capital of White Russia.

By the way, in Russian, White Russia is called Belarus. That's what it means. And the time where my mother and sister and her husband settled there, it was called Dzerzhinsk.

Dzerzhinsk. I will look at the spelling on that.

This is an r, and this is a z.

Well, let me see this. Drzerzhinsk is D- R- Z- E- R- G?

G. -- I- N- S- K- I-.

K. That's all.

S- K-.

K is the end. Dzerzhinsk.

Dzerzhinsk.

Yeah.

And just to get the--

By the way, the name of Dzerzhinsk is the name of the first person in Russia that organized the secret service. His name was Dzerzhinsk, and the city was named after his name. He was born in that city.

That's interesting. Let's get our ages straight here. I think that you, at the beginning of the war, were 23, born in '16.

Yes.

And your sister--

Was four years younger than me.

So she would be 19 at this time, and she's engaged.

She's engaged. And later on, when she came to Dzerzhinsk, where the Russians placed them, I received at that time mail from my mother-- I used to get from my mother. We used to correspond. And I received from my mother mail saying that she was married by a rabbi, and it was a regular chuppah, all the traditional way. And that's how it was.

Yeah. You received the mail in Shanghai.

No, I received the mail while I was still in Vilna.

In Vilna. Oh, I see. OK.

This was when I was in Vilna.

Yeah. All right, so you knew right away that she was married.

Yeah.

All right. All right, so now you're in Vilna, and they're in Dzerzhinsk.

Yeah.

All right. Now--

Now we're going to go back. I joined the Mirrer Yeshiva.

Before we do the story, what I want to get straight-- and we'll go back now to the Mirrer Yeshiva in Lithuania and in Vilna soon. I just want to know-- your mother and sister, what happened to them during the war, and brother-in-law?

You mean what happened during the war?

Yeah.

They all were destroyed. They perished.

Where did they perish? They were in Russia.

They were in Russia. Right.

And how did the Germans--

When the Germans attacked Soviet Russia. So they went in-- it didn't take them long. They went in to the city of Minsk and all the small towns which surrounded that Minsk, and they occupied it.

And there, they committed a terrible atrocity on the Jewish population. They killed all the Jewish people from Minsk. All the people, which were in Dzerzhinsk and all the other small towns, were all brought in together. And they killed all the Jewish people. And my mother, my sister, and my brother-in-law were killed together with the Jews.

You learned this how?

This I learned after the war.

From?

From the-- I believe it was the YIVO. I believe the YIVO was working at that time-- the organization, which as much it was possible kept track of what happened to the people. That's where I found out.

All right. Now, that's your mother and sister. What happened to your brothers-- you had three brothers, and their families?

I had the three brothers which were mentioned. I had one brother, Chaim, who lived in Wyszkw, which I mentioned before. So I left that town and I kept going. And he stayed there with the family.

He had three sons. He had one son-- their oldest was Josef. He was the lucky one.

He managed to get out of Poland before the war. He got a certificate in those days before the war, and he settled in Eretz Israel. My brother was a rich man.

At that time in English, it was called Palestine.

Palestine. My brother was a wealthy person. And he managed to buy a certificate, because it was very difficult to get one in those days, to save his son. And the other two-- Nachman, and the third one was Avremel.

Avremel-- when the Germans came into the city of Wyszkw, the youngest son was right away killed by the Germans. They killed him for no reason. The second son, Nachman, survived, and he came to Vilna.

In fact, he met with me. In Vilna, we would spent some time. But I managed to get out, and he later was destroyed by the Germans in Poland.

My older brother, nothing was left from his business. And he was separated even from his wife, because his wife somehow wound up in Soviet Russia. And he joined the partisans. He joined the partisans, and he was fighting by the city of Slonim in Poland-- in Slonim in the forest, and he was killed. This I know, because I found out later that he was killed.

But his wife evidently having gone to Russia.

Evidently, she went to Russia. And she came out from Russia, and managed to get later to Israel. She lived there in Israel a number of years later. She remarried, and then she passed away.

So out of your brother's family, of Chaim's family, his wife and his oldest son survived. And he and two sons who perished. Now we come to your second brother.

I had-- the second brother was Yuda Elizer.

Yeah.

He lived in Warsaw for many, many years. He was a businessman. And he was in the ghetto during the war, and he perished there with all the children.

That was himself?

Himself and his wife.

Yes.

And he had two children, Sarah, the girl, and Avremel was the son.

Yeah. So all four.

All four passed away, perished.

Then your third brother was--

My third brother was Moshe. And he married not long before the war. Before the war started, he married over there while I was in the Mir Yeshiva.

And then when the war-- what had happened to him, the same thing, like all the rest of the people. He was in the ghetto. And finally, he was destroyed.

So what comes out is that there were 16 members of your family in Poland in 1939, when the war broke out.

Yeah, yeah.

Of the 16, three survived.

Yeah.

Beside yourself, it was your sister-in-law, Chaim's wife, who was in Russia.

Yeah.

And their oldest son, Josef, who was in--

Israel.

--in Israel before the war. He's still alive in Israel.

Yeah. All right.

He is one year older than me.

All right.

Yeah, he was-- I mean, I was born later, because my brother Chaim was the oldest.

And your from the second marriage.

Yeah, from the second marriage. Yeah.

All right. Now, we had left the story, you are with the yeshiva in Vilna.

Yeah.

And your mother and sister and brother-in-law were in Russia.

Russia.

Deeper Russia, I guess. What happened to you? The yeshiva continued.

OK.

Before we get to the yeshiva here, can we talk about your education from early childhood until you went to the yeshiva.

Oh, till I went to the yeshiva? Yes. I mentioned that I was born in 1916.

Yes.

So when I was about four years, or a little over four years, this was customary to take the boys what they called to a cheder. And this was a private school by a private teacher that you learned in the school. So I joined the cheder. And then I learned till the age of 11 in a cheder.

At the same time, my father, he was a well-to-do person. He didn't want to send me to a public school. So he had private teachers for me. And through these private teachers, I learned everything, the courses for gymnasium privately in my own house.

At the age of 11, I joined a yeshiva, an a [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. That's what they called it. And the rosh yeshiva was Rabbi Itzhak Helfand. And he was the--

Helfand?

Helfand, yeah.

H- E- L- F- A- N- D. Yeah and he was the brother-in-law of the famous rosh yeshiva from the Bialystok Yeshiva, Rabbi Avraham Joffen.

J- O- F- F- E- N.

Yeah. He was married to Rabbi Avraham Joffen's sister.

The family is still here? Yeah.

So I joined this yeshiva, and I learned there a number of years. Then when I graduated this yeshiva--

At what age?

I believe it was, like, 15 or 16, something like this, because I was a very advanced student. So I decided, and I went to the Lomza Yeshiva. This was the city where my mother was born and raised.

I think Lomza is spelled L- O- M- S- H- E.

ZH-A.

When you say "zh," how do you do that?

When you put a dot on the z, then it becomes a J in Polish. That's Lomza.

Now, where is Lomza?

Lomza is not too far from Pultusk. It's a few hours traveling from Pultusk. But it's over-- it's between Pultusk and Bialystok, or something like this. It was the city of Lomza.

So there, this was already a higher yeshiva. It was like an academy. And I learned there till 1936. In 1936, I went to the Mir Yeshiva. I graduated Lomza Yeshiva,

And you went to Mir.

And I went to the Mirrer Yeshiva in 1936. So I learned from 1936 till the outbreak of the war. And then I rejoined again in 1939 in Vilna the yeshiva.

Evidently, your life was meant to be a life of study. Your family seemed to be in business. How did it come about that one out of many took to a life of study?

My father was a businessman, but he was actually learning every day. He used to get up very early in the morning-- like 4:00 in the morning. And he used to learn from 4:00 till about 8:00 every day. He was a [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH].

And then he first went to [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. He came back, he had his breakfast. And then he went to business.

So he was a Talmud [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] a Torah scholar.

He knew Shas. So--

The Talmud.

So-- OK. But the other children didn't have the chance. They learned after a certain time.

But they didn't have a yeshiva. In their days, they didn't have a yeshiva in my hometown. I was the lucky one. That's what I'm saying.

Now, I'm lucky, because it turned out to be that my life was saved. Besides I was learning, my life was saved this way. There was the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] Yeshiva, which I mentioned before.

And I joined this yeshiva. And that's what gave me a love for learning. Actually, it was a discussion in my family between my father and my mother at a certain age what should be the tachles. What should be the tachles with my life?

The goal.

The goal-- should I continue to learn, or should I learn a profession. My mother, let her rest in peace, wanted me to learn to become a dentist. In fact, we had a very close friend who was a dentist in my town. She already talked to him, and he agreed that I should come in and try to learn the dentistry. My father, let him rest in peace, didn't like that his son should be a dentist.

So before the decision was made, my father said, we'll leave it to Yankel. Whatever Yankel will decide, this is what's going to be. And they called on me to tell them what I would like to be. And I decided I wanted to continue learning. And that's what happened.

So because of that, you're now in Vilna.

In Vilna?

The year is probably

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

This is '39.

We're in '39.

It's still the end of '39.

The end of '39.

Yeah.

And the yeshiva has reorganized itself? The Mir yeshiva's reorganized itself in Vilna.

In Vilna.

What happened?

But the rosh yeshiva realized that it's not a place, for a big yeshiva like this, to be in a city like Vilna. It was the unsettled time in general, but it was a big city. And in a big city, he was afraid that this is going to distract the students from learning.

Yeah.

Because up to now, we were in a small town like Mir, and we were totally devoted to learning. We used to learn, like, 14 to 15 hours daily. And here, it was impossible.

So he decided to move the yeshiva out from Vilna. And he was lucky enough to get a good place in Keidan. That was the name of the town in Lithuania. Keidan is a Lithuanian city-- the real Lithuanian.

Keidan-- K- E--- is that a K- E- D-, or is this--

K- E- I---

K- E- I- D- A- N-.

The Christians, however, used to call it Keidanus. But the Jewish people, they called it Keidanus. But the Jewish people called it Keidan.

All right. So we settled in Keidan. This was early 1940, right? We learned there in Keidan. Meantime, the war was going on, and the Germans were attacking in the west. They conquered Poland, and then they attacked--

Belgium, Holland, France.

Yeah, Belgium, Holland-- first, they attacked the Norwegian and the other places they took there. And then they turned against Belgium, Holland, and France. And Europe fell. I mean, all those countries felt that the Germans.

Meantime, in Lithuania, everything was going on all right. We didn't feel like anything is-- I mean, we were scared. But we didn't figure that the Germans are going to attack, or whatever it is.



But the Russians, at that time, they figured that they want to strengthen the border what they have with the Germans, because they probably had information that the Germans will turn on them. There were rumors like this. So the Russian army occupied the entire Baltic. Before, they'll send in soldiers and the armies, and they stood, and they occupied the entire Baltic. They came in also to the city of Keidan.

Naturally, under the Communists, we knew, again, that we cannot stay together, especially about close to 400 people, you had talmidim where they married together, we numbered, like, 400 people. So we couldn't be together. So the rosh yeshiva at that time decided to split the yeshiva in four parts. My city where I went was named Kraka-- Krakes.

That's in Lithuania.

In Lithuania-- Krakes.

K-R-A-K-U-S.

Krakes. This was one part. And the other-- and there were three other little towns where the yeshiva was located. OK, we still continued to learn. It was really amazing that we still could keep on the schedule and learn and really dwell in their learning.

Then we found out that we can get visas to Curacao. The consul from Curacao which was in Kowno, he gave out the visas. It probably was all humanitarian things, because they didn't have any benefit from it.

What's Curacao?

Curacao is a country in South America.

Yeah.

We got visas--

Q- U--- C- U- R- C- A- O- I think.

Yeah, the Curacao.

This was supposed to be the destiny where we will go. In order to go there, we needed to have transits. So it just happened that Japan-- they never had it before in the city of Kowno, which was the capital in those days from Lithuania. They never had a consul there. But for some reasons, which was their own reasons, they sent a consul,

And I have even marked his name. I think it's worthwhile to mention his name because he was really a life saver, this gentleman. His name was Sempo Sugihara. That was his name.

Where do you have it?

Here. Sempo--

S- E-?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

S-U-G-I-H-A-R-A.

-- A-R-A. He was the Japanese Consulate in Kowno. And he gave out-- he worked overtime. And he gave out over 3,500 transit visas for the people, for the yeshiva, and for different refugees, which also received the Curacao visas.

He was the guest of honor at the Mir Yeshiva dinner about a year ago?

Yeah, this was this.

So, I mean, he went down to history for this thing what he did. Once we had those two things-- we had the visa to go to Curacao, and we had the transit visas to go through Japan. We needed an exit visa in order to get out of Russia, because Russia in those days was closed.

You couldn't get out. And this is one of the miraculous things. When we start to think about it, this is really a miracle.

When we applied to the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. This was the secret service, for the exit visas, they approved it to give visas. And not only were they approved to give the visas, they worked overtime in order to rush to make it available for us to get out. And thank God, we already had those three things in our hands.

Did you have--

The question was now money. How do we get the money?

Did you ever learn why they--

We did not learn, no. I read books later about it. I didn't find the reason why it was done. I mean, the way Rav [PERSONAL NAME] Soloveitchik. The way he explained it, and the way the rosh yeshivas and the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] explained it, it was just a miracle-- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] And there was no other explanation.

In that gehinnom-- what it was in Europe over there, from the gehinnom, the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] saved the yeshiva in totality. Because actually, with the exception of a few, everybody was saved. Now we had all those things in our hands. Now we needed the money.

The money for the trip.

For the trip. This was a big problem because we had to go through the Intourist. This is the organization that made for us the arrangements in order to be able to travel through the Trans-Siberian train.

So here comes in Rabbi Kalmanowitz. He was an American in those days. And he was really a terrific man.

I mean, he is really a historical person. He was the one who organized there with other people. At that time was already Rabbi Kotler.

Also in America, they organized the Vaad Hatzalah. They got together with the American rabbis here, and they got money through different sources. They called on families.

I had my sister Lilly living over in America since after the Second World War. They approached her, and they got money from her for me for the cost. And actually, this was cabled to me directly. And I was among the first ones to be able to get out from there, because we didn't go all together in one time.

It was different groups that traveled. And I was fortunate to be among the first groups to get out from Lithuania. And we traveled from Vilna to Moscow, and from Moscow all the way down to Vladivostok. The train used to travel 1,000 miles a day. And it took us 14 days till we reached from Vilna to Vladivostok.

So that's over 14,000 miles.

Yes. And we had a lot of experiences on the way. On the train, naturally, there were other people traveling on this train. And the other people were able to go and eat the food what it was arranged from the train to feed the people. But

because we are not going to eat their food, they gave us only, like, bread and other things which were permissible-- that was kosher. We lived on a very strict diet, eating practically just to sustain our existence.

Right, so you have arrived at Vladivostok, which is at the far east of Russia.

Of Russia, right.

And we have reached practically the end of this tape. So we'll pause here momentarily while it's set up for us to continue the story.

OK.