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Chapter One Hundred Fourteen

"THE DOORWAY TO THE WORLD"

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THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA
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"THE DOORWAY TO THE WORLD"

(Music: CHORD)
(Cantor: SIGNATURE AND DOWN)
Voice: (ECHO) And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying Command the children of Israel that they bring unto thee pure oil olive, beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually in the tabernacle of the congregation, and it shall be a statute forever in your generations.

(Cantor: UP AND OUT)
Announcer: The Eternal Light!
(Music: THEME AND DOWN)
Announcer: The National Broadcasting Company and its affiliated independent stations present The Eternal Light. This program is brought to you under the auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Our story today, "The Doorway To The World," by Arnold Perl, is based on the life of Abraham Joseph Stybel. Featured in the title role is Leon Janney, and the Narrator is Roger de Koven.

(Music: UP AND OUT)
(Music: A LIGHT THEME: REGISTERS, THEN DOWN TO BACK:)
Narrator: Suppose, dear listener, you had the heart of a lion, bursting with courage and daring and everything in the world, absolutely everything, made your soul leap—what would you do, dear listener, if at the age of 7 you heard your father say (WHISPER) Remember, you are the oldest son with 6 younger than you—(NORMAL) you heard your father say . . .

Father: What should he be? What else—a rabbi!
Narrator: What would you do? Because although a rabbi is somebody too, a rabbi is not a lion.

(Music: THEME UP QUICKLY AND UNDER:)
Narrator: This was the problem of our hero, Abraham Joseph Stybel. Now, why should the soul of a boy of 7 not leap at such a chance (especially the soul of a boy in a tiny village of Russia who never even knew there were people in the world who were not Jews, like himself?) Well, maybe it was the fault of George Eliot, the famous author; or maybe of Mendel with the Flour in his Hair—or both—anyway . . .

Mendel: (NINE) Read it, Abraham, read it again. The part about the mill.
Abraham: (SEVEN) Your hair's all white again. Brush it out.
Mendel: It's only flour. If my father was a watchmaker I wouldn't have flour in my hair. My father is a baker. Read. George Eliot. Read it.
Abraham: No. I'll read it and I'll get excited about how life is in England and I'll cry again because I'll never see it.

Mendel: So cry, only read it. If I could read Russian, I'd read it myself.
Abraham: (TRAGEDY) Today he said it. I must become a rabbi.
Mendel: Who?
Abraham: My papa. (SADLY) A rabbi.
Mendel: Good. You're lucky.
Abraham: Lucky?
Mendel: What does a rabbi do? He studies. What does he study?
Abraham: I don't know—everything.
Mendel: Certainly, everything: the Bible, the Talmud, the Commentaries AND he studies languages.
Abraham: Not only Hebrew?
Mendel: Only Hebrew? No! Hebrew, Russian, Polish, even maybe English.
Abraham: (MUSING) So, if I studied to be a rabbi I could learn, really learn Russian?
Mendel: Why not?
Abraham: (RIDING WITH RISING INTEREST) I could learn Polish. I could read, who knows, even Shakespeare? (PAUSE) I'll be a rabbi. (FAST) I mean I'll study to be a rabbi.

(Music: UP SWEET AND INNOCENT. THEN UNDER:)
Narrator: If you think he was merely interested in fooling his papa, you're wrong. No. He was interested in that, but in other things, too. Mainly in the world. For after he read George Eliot and Tolstoi a little (he was 8 or 9), he wanted the world. The whole world—not just the little world of his village of 300 Jews but the world of 2 billion people. Of course, he didn't know there were 2 billion of anything or that Shakespeare had written his sonnets or about Walt Whitman, not yet—but he had a taste for it and he wanted more. So he started to become a rabbi. (But let me say before our story is much older, though he never became a rabbi, the way his papa dreamed it, he did not disappoint his papa. For you remember the ancient adjuration is not only "Be learned, Be a scholar", but rather "Study the Book of God; meditate on it day and night", be a worthy son of the Torah. And this, as you will see, he was.)

(Music: BRIEF RISE AND UNDER:)
Narrator: He studied; he read everything. To be more accurate, every book, every newspaper, even old letters in attics—he devoured them, he ate them. (PAUSE) And at the same time, he developed another side: a practical side. He worked, at this time, for a local import merchant,—a man who bought from Japan and Abraham's job was to open the crates. He opened one, one day, and found a sheet of paper.

Abraham: (II NOW) What's this?
Man: A bill of lading: the list of the merchandise.
Abraham: But it comes from Warsaw.

Man: Where else? It comes from Japan to Warsaw and from Warsaw to me.

Abraham: But why not from Japan to you?

Man: Do I write Japanese?

Abraham: Does the man in Warsaw?

Man: Of course; why else should I deal with him?

Abraham: So don't.

Man: Eleven years old, he says "so don't."

Abraham: I'll write.

Man: He'll write Japanese!

Abraham: You'll save how much if I write direct. Without Warsaw?

Man: 30%. Please, leave me alone. Japanese!

Abraham: What's so hard? Here's the letter—the order—I'll copy it. What can I lose?

Narrator: (AFTER A BEAT) He lost absolutely nothing. After the letter was written, time elapsed naturally—and then, not naturally at all, a package came from Japan—direct. The order was filled. Said the merchant:

Man: Where did you learn Japanese?

Abraham: I learned Japanese?! Never. Any fool can copy. At least I'm a fool.

(Music: UP AND OUT)

Narrator: So it was natural that by the time he had read Goethe and Heine and he was 16 that he would tell his papa the truth—that he was not going to be a rabbi, the way his papa thought, but rather he was going to Warsaw to get a job. His papa sighed and asked . . .

Father: Since when do you talk Polish?

Narrator: A foolish question, since he didn't write Japanese either. So he went to Warsaw and got a job as an accountant though he could speak only one word "Tak", which in Polish means "Yes." This, of course, is altogether remarkable, but he was able to do it, you see, because in this one word "Tak" and in his manner and the way he held himself he said in another language (without words, which even foreigners could understand), he said: "I have a heart also and understanding and I care for the things you care for and I am alive." All that.—So naturally he became an accountant in Warsaw.

(Music: PUNCTUATES AND UNDER:)

Narrator: If in his native village he devoured books, Warsaw, at least gave his appetite full reign. Here were onions which he loved and books which he loved even more and mushrooms and scallions and books. The publishers got to know him for he waited in their anterooms every morning (before work) . . .

Abraham: (16; BREATHLESS) Excuse me. The new book—is it ready yet? It is published today?

Narrator: And then he met Frischman.

(Music: STATES THAT FRISCHMAN IS AN IMPORTANT MAN. UNDER:)

Narrator: Do not ask, as he asked, who is Frischman? For that would reveal ignorance. Ask instead "What is Hebrew literature—what is its future?" For the answer is David Frischman: writer, editor, one of the foremost spirits in the revival of Hebrew culture, one who helped bring the breath of Western literature, into Jewish letters. This was Frischman. And young Stybel came, naturally, with a manuscript he had written for publication . . .

Frischman: (ABOUT 35) You ask me about Hebrew Literature.

Abraham: I also asked about my manuscript, Mr. Frischman, the story.

Frischman: First literature. Today we suffer. We suffer for lack of readers, for lack of writers. There is no broad viewpoint, no understanding of background—there are no historical perspectives. All of which are necessary.

Abraham: You read my manuscript?

Frischman: Literature, my son, is the doorway to the world.

Abraham: (AWED) To the world. (THEN) And what I wrote?

Frischman: (RIDING) It brings people closer. Literature. If we are misunderstood, persecuted—ask why. In part because we have no literature—because the greatness of the past is lost and who thinks of the greatness of today?

Abraham: Is the story bad, Mr. Frischman?

Frischman: What do we need? Understanding. We need patrons. We need, in a word, money. (THEN) What do you do? Besides write?

Abraham: I'm an accountant.

Frischman: A good accountant?

Abraham: A very good business head, they tell me.

Frischman: As to your manuscript, Hebrew literature needs writers, yes, but it could also use a very good business head.

(A PAUSE)

Narrator: It was a direct answer. (MUSIC COMES IN BEHIND NOW). So Abraham took back the manuscript and thought over the words of his friend and teacher. Especially the words "Literature is the doorway to the world." That he remembered best. Now at this time he worked for a leather merchant whose connections were not of the best. So he thought: Where is the best leather? Why, America. And so he wrote to America—but not just to anyone. No. He wrote to the Russian Ambassador in America . . .

Man: A letter to the Ambassador—in Hebrew!

Abraham: This is important: I'm writing about importing leather.

Man: But Hebrew! Does he read Hebrew?

Abraham: What can I lose?
Narrator: (IN CLOSE: EXPLAINING) You must understand about this Hebrew: it would have been enough that the Ambassador was Russian and did not look with favor upon the Jews in any tongue, but Hebrew, this was not even the language the people spoke. It was, some people said, like ancient Greek or Latin, a dead tongue, the language of the Scriptures. Still, as Abraham said . . .

Abraham: This is important . . .
Narrator: (SAME) And the Ambassador, a man associated closely with the Czar, but also with important things, like business—answered the letter—in HEBREW! So, if Abraham was interested in making of Hebrew a living language, he was well on the road. For as the Ambassador said (in Hebrew, mind you) arrangements can be made. The best dealers, he wrote, were so and so in Philadelphia and such and such in Detroit. And of course Abraham, who knew two words of English (Yes and No), came to America to find the firm of so and so.

(Music: UP AND UNDER:)
Narrator: With his "Yes" he got to New York and with his "No" to Philadelphia. He found the address of the biggest leather merchant and then he found a friendly barber. He realized that even his Yes and No would not do for complicated negotiations around the subject of importing leather into Russia, so he found a barber who spoke his brand of German and the merchant's brand of English and there ensued a historic conversation. Said Abraham (in his foreign tongue):

Abraham: I represent the largest dealers and distributors (FADING) of leather goods in Warsaw. My firm is backed by references.
Narrator: (ON TOP) The merchant understood not a word. And after Abraham had finished his forty-minute discourse, the translating barber said:

Barber: He wants to buy leather.
Narrator: So the merchant smiled and answered in his foreign tongue.
Merchant: There are fifteen grades of leather available (FADING). If you are interested in the first six grades of cowhide, kid . . .
Narrator: (ON TOP) And Abraham listened and didn't understand a word of the forty-five minute answer. Finally the barber stepped in and translated . . .
Barber: He says he'll sell.
Narrator: And thus a great business was born. The merchant sold and Stybel bought and within five years, in Warsaw and Moscow, he became the great leather merchant of Russia. They called him, when he was thirty, the Leather King.

(Music: UP AND THEN UNDER:
Narrator: Now for some this might be the end of the story, but to Abraham Joseph Stybel it was the beginning—for, you see,

(you remember that conversation with Frischman) he remembered literature.
Abraham: (THIRTY NOW) You said it, Mr. Frischman, the doorway to the world—literature.
Frischman: Precisely—to the world.
Abraham: So tell me, how much does Hebrew literature need?
Frischman: Need? Everything: writers, readers, background—
Abraham: (CUTTING) No, no—you said Money. How much money?
Frischman: Money? Oh. (PAUSE) Give me a million and I'll give you a literature.
Narrator: (REPORTING THE WORLD-SHAKING EVENT) There was no historian present, but we are told Abraham paused, took a deep breath and said . . .

Abraham: Mr. Frischman, here is your million.
(Music: RISES IN TRIUMPH AND UNDER:)
Narrator: So it began. The Leather King founded a publishing house with Frischman its head, devoted to bringing what was best in world literature to the Jews in the living language of Hebrew. He said: We will publish the poems, the plays, and serious writings and the folk-tales of Hebrew literature—the greats, the knowns and also the unknowns. He pushed open the doorway to the world.

(Music: RISES BRIEFLY, THEN UNDER)
Narrator: There was Shakespeare, Balzac, Ibsen, Virgil, Homer—in Hebrew for the first time. And also he published the Hatekufah, his beloved collections of living Hebrew writing; the poet Bialik, the romantic Burla, the quaint Hazaz—all the greats and the unknowns of Hebrew literature he published. And what a multitude of things is covered by that word "published"! For instance, writers are funny—some lazy, some lacking "inspiration" and some—well, take Taveyev. Given the job of translating Shakespeare, and nowhere to be found. Said Stybel . . .

Abraham: I know where to find him.
Narrator: He walked straight to the bourse, the stock market in Moscow and there, of course . . .

Abraham: Taveyev!
Taveyev: Oh, it's bad.
Abraham: You haven't done any work on it.
Taveyev: It's terrible! Dropped three points in an hour.
Abraham: Shakespeare!
Taveyev: Latvian Railroads Limited. What Shakespeare?
Abraham: It's me, Taveyev—Stybel. Not your broker.
Taveyev: Look—they're putting up a new quotation. Down a half! Oh!
Abraham: Taveyev. Will you listen to me? Look at me too.
Taveyev: I'm listening.

Abraham: How much will you make this year—if everything goes fine?

Tavayev: You mean—?

Abraham: (CUTTING IN) If Latvian Railroads goes up. Also Russian Electrics?

Tavayev: Don't talk nonsense.

Abraham: Figures. Give me figures.

Tavayev: Who knows? Five thousand roubles.

Abraham: Say six thousand.

Tavayev: Six thousand—sure.

Abraham: So. Now. The Shakespeare stock is better.

Tavayev: What?

Abraham: Invest in my stock. "Romeo and Juliet". "Hamlet". At the end of the year, I'll guarantee 12,000—

Tavayev: What?

Abraham: Finish "Lear", I'll make it 15,000—

Narrator: So the house brought out "Romeo and Juliet", "Hamlet" and "Lear". Thus "publishing". One other example: even Frischman, the soul of the revival, even Frischman sometimes got tired.

Abraham: You're sitting where I left you last Tuesday, Frischman.

Frischman: My hand. Can't you see it's bandaged. Can I write with a broken hand?

Abraham: Take off the bandage. It's on over a week. At least put on a clean one. (PAUSE) It isn't your hand.

Frischman: No.

Abraham: It can't be the candy. You said you couldn't work without rock candy and in all Moscow you couldn't get rock candy. Did I stand for 7 hours in a queue to get rock candy?

Frischman: Yes.

Abraham: So it isn't the candy?

Frischman: No. To tell the truth, I haven't got a reason.

Abraham: Look. I went to buy a coat for myself—a good warm coat. So I bought one for you too. Take it. Wear it.

Frischman: Thank you.

Abraham: Good. Now, not only haven't you got a reason for not writing, but you've even got a reason for doing so.

(Music: PLEASANTLY UP AND UNDER)

Narrator: The books came out, but in the end, after the Revolution Stybel had to move. And though he left Moscow, he published Karl Marx for the first time in Hebrew and also Gorky and Pushkin. From Moscow to Copenhagen and from Copenhagen to Berlin. With each move he started anew—but Copenhagen brought out Dante and Dickens and Spinoza and Copenhagen saw new volumes of the Hatekufah. And when he had to start life for the fourth time (Warsaw, Moscow, Copen-

hagen, then Berlin) he brought out Wilde and Zola and Ovid—also Heine, Hugo, de Maupassant and Walt Whitman. And then . . .

(Music: AN OMINOUS SNEAK)

Narrator: The scourge of Mankind struck at him too and he left the land of the Nazis. He made a fifth start—this time, again in Warsaw, Virgil, Homer, Dostoevski. Hitler roared and Stybel translated Emerson and Thoreau. And it was natural that some would ask.

Asker: So tell me one thing—when Hitler comes what then?

Abraham: If I have to, I'll move. I moved before. I'm an optimist.

Asker: A Jew an optimist. What's an optimist?

Abraham: You see this glass. Tell me what do you see?

Asker: A glass—half empty. A half empty glass. What else?

Abraham: I'm funny. To me it's half full.

Asker: Please. You call yourself a businessman?

Abraham: Not I. Maybe it doesn't pay in money—but in its own way it pays. Look: Lincoln in Hebrew—never before published. Is this nothing—or is this—maybe a new child, a birth actually, a real shining morning?

Asker: Who can talk to a lunatic?

Abraham: Why talk? You're busy, I'm sure. Hitler I know is busy. I also have things to do.

(Music: UP AND UNDER)

Narrator: So he picked up the pieces of his life, when Hitler moved, and for a sixth time started anew. This time America. In this life, a lion's share of misery fell to Stybel, but there is a saying in the Book of Proverbs. Perhaps, you remember it . . .

Voice: The righteous man stumbleth seven times and seven times he riseth.

Narrator: By the Book, and by any other standard, he was a righteous man. (MUSIC COMES IN UNDER) He began again: leather and books—Hemingway, Pearl Buck, Mark Twain, Dreiser, but by now he was 60 and his heart beat frighteningly once in a while. As always, he stayed close to the truth, close to God. On a hot morning, in his 62nd year, he set out from Magnolia, Massachusetts and traveled to Maine, to see his rabbi, his seat of wisdom, Professor Louis Ginzberg.

Abraham: (OLD BUT VIGOROUS) I brought you a present—a nothing.

Prof.: (SMILING) Thank you. Sit down. You rode all the way without a stop?

Abraham: (DEPRECATING) A day's ride.

Prof.: From so far you came to see me?

Abraham: My father used to travel a week—in a horse and wagon—to see his rabbi. On those roads—a week. Shall I not travel a day?

(Music: COMES QUIETLY UNDER)

Narrator: They talked—together they meditated, for he was a worthy son of the Torah as has been said, although he never was a rabbi in the sense, his father dreamed it.

(Music: BRIEF BRIDGE AND THEN UNDER)

There was Prof. Louis Ginzberg, there was Dr. Klatzkin, the philosopher, and there was also a taxi driver, on the corner, near his house. They used to talk. Of Socrates and Palestine and the atom bomb. And they talked also of life, Stybel and the taxi driver . . .

Abraham: I'm getting old.

Taxi: You? Old? I'm old. Mr. Stybel, please.

Abraham: Tell me something, we're friends—what does my life seem to you? I mean does it mean something?

Taxi: Must it mean something? A life. (PAUSE) What did you want to say?

Abraham: My relatives tell me (not all, only some) they say I'm a fool to publish books—to lose my money.

Taxi: Relatives!

Abraham: Why books, they ask? Because, I answer, books are the doorway to the world (Frischman said that, not I.) I think if the eyes of people are open to the wonders of the writing of other peoples, in their books I mean, this is something.

Taxi: True, true.

Abraham: So if the people of the world—all people I mean—if they read what is written, the poets and philosophers, the stories—they will understand better. Is a life with this idea worth living?

Taxi: What do you think?

Abraham: I've been happy. Others have been happy. I think so.

Taxi: I'll answer you and what will you do then?

Abraham: I'll go upstairs to my office. I'll go back to work. Why?

Taxi: I'll answer you—a taxi driver—I think so, too.

(Music: SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH NARR. UNDER)

Narrator: He went upstairs and he knew it was close to the end and he sat with his lovely wife writing on a pad in the ancient script. Then he asked:

Abraham: Could you listen to something?

Wife: I'd like to hear it.

Abraham: A sketch. That's all. I call it "Tomorrow". Just that. So. (READS) "Life will flow in its customary grooves. The sea will rage and the Broadway bus will hasten downtown and no one will be astonished and no one will ask about the absence of the poor little being who used to sit at the right hand side of the first row."

(A GOOD PAUSE)

(Music: NOW BACKING)

Narrator: An epitaph for this man who is no longer with us? For him who opened wide the doorway of the world? No—for the wise men say: "It is not necessary to establish monuments after the righteous; their words and deeds are their monuments."

(Music: SWELLS TO A GENTLE END)

Announcer: If you would like a free copy of the script you have just heard, write to The Eternal Light, 3080 Broadway, New York 27, New York. And now we present Rabbi Max Vorspan of the United Synagogue of America.

ADDRESS OF RABBI MAX VORSPAN:

Abraham Joseph Stybel was a man of business with a vision. He dreamed a dream and dedicated his life to its realization.

An ancient and proud tongue was slowly losing its life-giving vitality, doomed to the fate of Greek and Latin and other classical tongues. Stybel dreamed that the language of the Bible might once again become the language of living people, that Hebrew, key to the cultural treasures of the ancient world, might one day become the "doorway to the modern world."

Stybel gathered around him a group of scholars, authors, linguists and translators and entrusted to them the Herculean project of shapping the best of world literature into the forms and syntaxes of the Hebrew language. It was not an easy task, that of rebuilding and rejuvenating a language and literature. Never before had a dead or dying language been revived.

Abraham Stybel passed away a few months ago—suddenly and before his time. But he lived to see his dream realized. The Jews of Palestine, Eretz-Israel, who had transformed parched and barren soil, untilled for centuries, into an oasis of green loveliness, had performed a second miracle.

They had re-created a language capable of expressing accurately and with vigor the far-flung needs of an ultra-modern civilization. The language of the Bible now spoke of vitamins and penicillin, of existentialism and neo-positivism, of tractors and harvesters. A language had sprung to life and was pouring forth a flourishing literature. Scientific volumes, novels, textbooks—3,122 books in the war years alone. A dozen daily newspapers, numerous magazines and periodicals, produced by and for a Jewish population no larger than Madison, Wisconsin, in an area the size of Connecticut.

A language and culture have been re-created, fresh with the vigorous and earthy vocabulary of a young generation, yet magnificent with the classical majesty of an ancient and sacred civilization.

Yes, Abraham Stybel was a man of business who dreamed a dream and lived to see it realized.

V'yi zichro baruch—His memory will indeed be for a blessing.

(Music: THEME AND DOWN)

Announcer: Our drama today was written by Arnold Perl based in part on the biographical essay of Abraham Joseph Stybel by Professor Jochanon Twersky. The music was composed by Morris Mamorsky and conducted by Milton Katims. The liturgical introduction was sung by Cantor David Putterman. Leon Janney was Abraham Joseph Stybel, and Roger de Koven was the Narrator. The entire production was under the direction of Frank Papp.

(Music: UP AND DOWN)

This program is a weekly presentation of the National Broadcasting Company and its affiliated independent stations in cooperation with the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Dr. Moshe Davis is the Editor of the Eternal Light.

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