

The Eternal Light

Chapter Eighty-four

"THE SCROLL ON THE DOORPOST"

broadcast

June 16, 1946

Presented by

THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY

as a public service and prepared under the auspices of

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

3080 Broadway, New York

"THE SCROLL ON THE DOORPOST"

- (Music: CHORD . . .)
(Cantor: REGISTER 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 WITH MUSIC AND OUT)
Announcer: The Eternal Light!
(Music: THEME AND DOWN)
Announcer: The National Broadcasting Company and its affiliated independent stations present The Eternal Light, a program which comes to you under the auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Our drama today, adapted for radio by Morton Wishengrad is entitled, "The Scroll on the Doorpost." It is based upon a true story, "The Mezuzah", written by Rabbi Leo Trepp, which appeared in the magazine, **Liberal Judaism**. Featured as the Narrator is Berry Kroeger.
- (Music: THEME UP AND OUT)
(Music: REGISTER "SIM SHALOM" . . .)
(Cantor: SLOWLY, HOLD IN THE CLEAR, AND FADE BEHIND)
Narrator: I do not know what songs you sing for those whom you have loved. But I shall sing, "Sim shalom tova, u-v'racha chen va-chesed, v'racha-mim. Grant peace, blessing, and mercy to us and all Israel, bless us, O our Father, with the light of Thy countenance."
- (Cantor: UP AND DOWN)
Narrator: There is a symbol on the doorpost of my house. It is only a little wooden case containing a scroll of parchment inscribed with a Biblical verse, and it is called a mezuzah. Now it is a little dirty, and scratched, and somewhat weatherbeaten, but for me it has a large significance; for it is a remembrance of familiar friends and departed parents and it is a token of my heritage. It is not an ordinary mezuzah. It has a story. A story which began happily in the city of Mainz in Germany. It was seventeen years ago, and the year was 1929. (MUSIC OUT) And I saw this mezuzah for the first time in the shop of Herr Goldmann. I was a boy then, and I think my father was rather proud of me.
- Father: Leo, pick whatever mezuzah you want. The choice is up to you, isn't it, Herr Goldmann.
- Goldmann: Naturally. Your father has just bought a fine new house and his son will select a fine new mezuzah.
- Leo: Herr Goldmann, I like this one.

Goldmann: Not a bad choice. The case is Palestinian wood.

Leo: I want it, Father.

Father: You heard him, Herr Goldmann. Take it out of the showcase.

Goldmann: Not just yet, Leo, how do I know you will treat it properly?

Leo: I shall take some small nails and nail it to the doorpost of my father's house. Now may I have it?

Goldmann: (LAUGHING) The test isn't over. Where do you nail it?

Leo: Father, he's teasing me. I'm not a baby. I know about such things. I'll nail it to the upper part of the right-hand doorpost.

Goldmann: Why?

Leo: Because that is the custom.

Goldmann: Why?

Leo: I'm not in school, Herr Goldmann.

Goldmann: (LAUGHING) Why Leo, why the custom?

Leo: Because it is written in the Bible . . . "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And . . . and . . . Father, I forget the next part.

Father: "And these words thou shalt teach diligently unto thy children and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house,

Leo: (COMING IN HASTILY) And when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up . . . And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house, and upon thy gates." Now will you give it to me, Herr Goldmann?

Goldmann: Only if you promise.

Leo: Promise what?

Goldmann: That whenever you touch the mezuzah, your hands will be clean.

Leo: I promise.

Goldmann: Not just soap-and-water clean. Cleaner than that. The cleanliness of goodness.

Leo: I promise, Herr Goldmann. Here's the money.

Goldmann: No, let the mezuzah be my gift to you and your father and mother. Affix it to the doorpost of your house and may your coming in be good and your going out be good. Go on, run along before I change my mind.

(Music: NARRATIVE THEME AND DOWN)

Narrator: From the beginning we knew that this was not an ordinary mezuzah. Didn't the case come from Palestine? And weren't the twenty-two lines written on the parchment scroll inside perfect and without a blemish? (SOUND OF HAMMER) I stood on a chair and I nailed it to the doorpost of my father's house, slanting it just the right way. (SOUND OF HAMMER) My father beamed at me and then he told me for the hundredth time of the noble tradition of our people in the city of Mainz.

Father: Hundreds of years ago, the great Rashi lived here. And here he studied and taught. Here thousands sealed their faith with their blood. But, Leo, those times are over. Bless God that we live in a civilized age, and men are no longer harmed because of their religion.

Narrator: The words are not without irony, are they? It was only a few years later that we discovered the irony. (MUSIC FADING) My father's friend, Heinz, had come to our house. And he was disturbed.

(SOUND OF MARCHING OFF MIKE)

Heinz: You hear that?

Father: I hear it, Heinz.

Heinz: It's a rotten sound.

Father: It will pass, Heinz.

Heinz: I can't stand it. Shut the window.

(PAUSE)

(WINDOW SHUTS)

(SOUND IS CUT)

Father: (SLIGHTLY OFF) That better?

Heinz: I must tell you something. My son is out there with them. He's marching.

(PAUSE)

Father: Some tobacco, Heinz? Stop fretting, it will pass.

Heinz: How do you know?

Father: It always has.

Heinz: This time it's different. They mean business.

Father: Because a few adolescents like your son are taught foolish things?

Heinz: You don't understand. They've got the young people. They're getting men like me. In the last month three men called at my shop with an application blank for the party.

(PAUSE)

Father: Did you sign?

(PAUSE)

Heinz: Where's that tobacco you were talking about?

Father: It's here . . . under your nose. (PAUSE) You did sign, didn't you?

Heinz: I have some advice for you.

Father: All right, Heinz.

Heinz: That thing you've got on the door. Take it down.

Father: Why?

Heinz: It's a dead give-away. It's a proclamation that this is a Jewish house. Remove it.

Father: No, Heinz. The mezuzah will stay where it is.

Heinz: What's this idiotic attachment to an amulet?

Father: It's not a good luck charm, Heinz. It's a sign that people in this house try to remember that nothing human is foreign to God.

Heinz: You won't take it down, then?

Father: No, Heinz.

Heinz: Anything you say, my friend. It isn't my funeral.

(Music: BRIDGE TO NARRATIVE THEME AND DOWN)

Narrator: Many times after that I saw my father staring at the mezuzah. The sound of marching was louder in the street now and continual. But my father raised his hand to the mezuzah only to touch it, and to utter the blessing.

Father: May God keep my going out and my coming in from now and ever more.

Narrator: My father was answering Heinz, who had been his friend. There are some men who are less stubborn to save their lives than their convicts. They are not heroes. They are undistinguished men whom you would never notice. They are men like my father and many of them have died upon a symbol. (MUSIC OUT) In the autumn of 1938, after the Czechoslovakian crisis, the concentration camps began to fill.

(TINKLE OF SHOP BELL)

I went with my father to the shop of Herr Goldmann.

Father: How are things?

Goldmann: How do you expect?

Father: I don't know any more, Herr Goldmann.

Goldmann: Do you remember Mendelssohn? He was a good customer. He used to buy a book every week. Probably read it, too. He's dead.

Father: That's too bad.

Goldmann: Is it? They came to take him to the concentration camp. He killed himself. Do you know what my wife said, when I told her? She said, "Well, why should he try to better himself?"

(Music: NARRATIVE THEME AND DOWN)

Narrator: It was a melancholy jest and a bad one but it spread. And people laughed at it with the laughter of men on the gallows. My father didn't laugh. He came home and studied the mezuzah on our doorpost. (MUSIC FADING) And I remember what my mother said.

Mother: You're becoming sentimental about it.

Father: What if I am?

Mother: It's just a wooden case with a few lines of Scripture in it. Stop staring at it.

Father: It's . . . it's staring back.

Mother: You ought to take it down then.

Father: No. I'm afraid to take it down. If it comes down, in a way I come down.

Mother: Then make up your mind.
Father: I never changed it. My mind is the same. (LAUGHS) It's only that my knees shake a little now and then.

(Music: BRIDGE)

Heinz: I should like to see your husband.
Mother: Heinz?
Heinz: How are you? It's been a long time.
Mother: He's gone to the synagogue.
Heinz: Where's Leo?
Mother: With his father.
Heinz: I'll sit down if you don't mind.
Mother: I mind.
Heinz: You're not very hospitable.
Mother: No.
Heinz: You blame me for joining the party.
Mother: No. You did it to save your skin.
Heinz: There's nothing wrong with that. Your skin would wear a whole lot longer if you took that mezuzah down from the door.
Mother: Is that why you came?
Heinz: Yes. They wouldn't like it if they knew I came. You see, I'm better than you think. (PAUSE) You might say something.
Mother: Heinz, why did you really come?
(PAUSE)

Heinz: You ought to trust me more.
Mother: Why did you come, Heinz?
Heinz: All right. I hold a note your husband signed when he bought the house. He pays interest regularly, but now I'd like the principal back.
Mother: Why Heinz? Is he a bad risk?
Heinz: That's a rhetorical question.
Mother: You're saying a good deal more than you intend. Something is ready to happen, isn't it, Heinz?
Heinz: There's going to be trouble. A good deal of trouble.
Mother: Thanks for telling me.
Heinz: That's the first civil word you've spoken. Tell your husband what I said about the mezuzah. If it remains, they won't miss this house when the trouble begins.
Mother: Thanks again.
Heinz: You see, I'm not a monster. I'm a man. I've got two eyes, two lungs, a nose, a mouth, two arms, ten fingers. I've got a heart, too.
Mother: I know, Heinz. You've got a heart. Only right now it's a little weak.

(Music: BRIDGE)

Father: Well, do we take it down or don't we? What do you say, Leo?

Narrator: (AS YOUTHFUL AS POSSIBLE) The verse in Scripture reads, "And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house." I wish it said on the doorposts of thy heart.

Father: It means that. Do we take it down? What do you say, Mother?

Mother: In time of danger it's permitted. (PAUSE) I want to live with you a long time.

Father: All right, I'll take the mezuzah down.

Mother: But I want to respect you also.

Father: You can still respect me when it's down.

Mother: Will you respect yourself?

Father: I can't be sure. Heinz joined the party. He changed. I don't think I want to change. I can only stay joined to what I am and what my father was.
(PAUSE)

Mother: Leo, give me a screwdriver.

Father: You're going to take it down?

Mother: Yes.
(PAUSE)

Father: Leo, give your mother the screwdriver.
(SOUND OF DRAWER OPENING)
(PAUSE)

Mother: Thank you, Leo. Will you open the door for me?
(PAUSE)
(DOOR OPENS)
(PAUSE)

Mother: I can't do it.
(DOOR SLAMS)

Mother: (CRYING) I can't. I want to but I can't. It's senseless. I don't even have enough courage to be a coward. It's crazy . . . and what's going to happen now?

(Music: CHORD . . .)

Narrator: It happened on November 9, 1938.

(Music: NARRATIVE THEME AND DOWN)

Narrator: Schools were closed early to permit the children to enjoy the spectacle of Jewish homes broken, Jewish shops looted, and five hundred synagogues throughout Germany and Austria simultaneously bombed and set afire.

(Music: UP AND INTO:)
(SOUND OF FIRE)
(CROWD IN B.G.)

Father: Fireman, why don't you try to stop it? Turn your hose on the synagogue.

Fireman: I've got orders.

Father: You're a fireman, you can't let it burn.

Fireman: I've got orders. We see that nothing else catches fire. The synagogue burns. Now move back. Back of the lines.

Goldmann: (CRAZILY) Bor-chu es Adonoy Ha-mevoruch.

Father: Herr Goldmann, where are you going?

Goldmann: I'm going to pray. Let me through.

Father: Help me with him, somebody. He's lost his mind.

Goldmann: Let me through. It's time for evening prayers. I have to pray. I have to pray in the synagogue.

Father: Herr Goldmann, the synagogue is burning. Somebody help me.

Goldmann: It's time for prayers.

Father: Herr Goldmann, the building is in flames.

Goldmann: A burning synagogue is also a house of God. Let go. Don't hold me back. (MOVING OFF) I'm going to pray. Come everyone, it is time for evening prayers.

Father: (PROJECTING) Herr Goldmann, come back. Come back, Herr Goldmann, come back.

(Music: BRIDGE TO NARRATIVE THEME AND DOWN)

Narrator: He did not come back. He died in the flames, and his words were, "Ein brennende Synagoge ist auch ein Gotteshaus. A burning synagogue is also a house of God." (PAUSE) My father came home.

(Music: OUT ON:)

Father: Leo, you will remember this. "Only take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw." Now pack your things.

Mother: What for?

Father: He leaves Germany today . . . tonight. As soon as I make the arrangements.

Narrator: Don't ask me to do that.

Father: I am not asking. I am ordering you. I've spoken to Heinz. He'll help. He's not a murderer, he's only a weakling who assists the murderers by remaining silent. He's ashamed. He'll help. Now pack your things.

Narrator: You come, too. You and mother.

Father: We can't. One can escape. Three will be caught. Leo, do as I say. This is the jungle. Even the beasts save their young. Collect your things.

(Music: BRIDGE)
(SOUND OF CAR ENGINE IDLING)

Heinz: Is he ready?

Father: He's coming, Heinz.

Mother: You'll write as soon as you reach America?

Narrator: Mother, what gives me the right to leave without you?

Mother: You're young; we're old. There's your right.

Heinz: Leo, you'll have to be quick. It's dangerous to wait.

Father: Leo, don't worry about us. We'll manage.

Mother: Goodbye.

Father: I touch the mezuzah for you, Leo. "May God keep your going out and your coming in from now and ever more."
(PAUSE)

Heinz: There it is. One mezuzah still remains. But one is going. Come on, Leo, you're going.

(Music: NARRATIVE THEME AND DOWN)

Narrator: In the darkness of the night, I touched the mezuzah in my father's house one final time. (SOUND OF CAR STARTING AND SHIFTING GEAR UNDERNEATH) And then I left for America.
(CAR IN HIGH AND RACE)

(Music: UP AND DOWN)

Narrator: And now the only thread to my youth and to my heritage were the letters which came from them. In 1939 and in 1940 they would each write separately to me. And then in 1941, I received only one letter.
(MUSIC FADE OUT UNDER FOLLOWING)

Mother: Leo, you will go to the synagogue and say the mourner's Kaddish for your father. He is buried in the old cemetery of Mainz. They permitted that. They let me see him before he died. I'm glad for him. We found a Sefer Torah that had not been burned. We placed it in his coffin. May it give him comfort. You must not worry about me. I am safe and well . . . but living in another house. I wanted to take down the mezuzah, but things haven't changed. I still can't do it. He wanted it there, and so I leave it there. It will not come down just as your father never came down. Don't worry about me, Leo. My greatest consolation is the knowledge of your safety.

Narrator: In 1942 the Red Cross forwarded a few more letters. Then there were no more letters from my mother. Only silence . . . and emptiness.

(Music: BRIDGE TO MONTAGE THEME AND DOWN)

One: I'm awfully sorry. But the Red Cross reports no word yet of your mother.

(Music: UP AND DOWN)

Two: Don't lose hope. It's a matter of weeks before an Allied Army reaches Mainz. Something may turn up.

(Music: UP AND DOWN)

One: We've cabled the Army Chaplain who reached Mainz yesterday. You can expect word this week.

(Music: UP AND DOWN)

Two: It looks bad. But why don't you write to the Chaplain himself? I'm sure he'll do whatever he can.

(Music: UP AND INTO NARRATIVE THEME AND DOWN)
Narrator: I wrote to the Chaplain asking him to do three things. To find out what had happened to my mother; to see if my father's grave was still there and to say a little prayer on my behalf. I did not know the Chaplain. He had more important things. But the answers came.

(Music: UP AND OUT ON;)
(PHONE RINGING) (PHONE OFF)

Narrator: Hello.
Voice: (FILTERED) Hello. This is the Jewish Welfare Board. We've just received a message from Chaplain Saperstein stationed in Mainz. Shall I read it?
Narrator: Yes, please.
Voice: "After several days of inquiry, I have been able only to ascertain that your mother was deported in 1942. None of those deported with her has been heard from. I can't tell you how sorry I am. (PAUSE) I have seen your father's grave. It is well cared for now. Your house was completely demolished in the course of the bombing of Mainz. Only a portion of the front wall remains. I will send you further details.

Narrator: Is that all?
Voice: Yes. That's all.
(Music: BRIDGE)
(SOUND OF DOOR BUZZER)
(DOOR OPENS)

One: Package for you. Will you sign here?
Narrator: Here?
One: The line below. (PAUSE) My pencil.
Narrator: Sorry.
(SOUND OF PAPER UNWRAPPED)

One: What's the matter? (ALARMED) Something wrong?
Narrator: No, nothing's wrong.
One: For a minute I thought . . . war souvenir?
Narrator: Yes. A very long war. It's a mezuzah.
One: It's sort of scratched up, isn't it, whatever it is?
Narrator: Yes, it is.
One: What's it mean?
Narrator: It means, "Only take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw, and lest thou depart from thy heart all the days of thy life.

(Music: "SIM SHALOM" AND DOWN)
(Cantor: SLOWLY AND THEN UNDER)
Narrator: I do not know what songs you sing for those you have loved. But I shall sing, "Sim shalom." Grant peace and mercy to us, bless us, O our Father, with the light of Thy Countenance.
(Cantor: UP AND DOWN)

Narrator: It is only a mezuzah. A scroll on the doorpost, a little wooden case containing a bit of parchment inscribed with twenty-two Scriptural lines. It is a little dirty now, scratched, and beaten by the years. But it is indestructible. European Jewry is decimated, its homes have been harrowed by fire, its synagogues destroyed; but its spirit in the symbol of this mezuzah, survives. An American chaplain has reclaimed it from the ruins and sent it to the New World. He has done so in a spirit of great love. Thus you and I have become the heirs to a great spiritual heritage. Ours is the task of protecting it; but ours also will be the protection which Judaism gives us in times of great crisis.

(Cantor: UP WITH MUSIC TO CODA)

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 Abraham Dubin of Temple Gates of Prayer, Flushing, New York.

ADDRESS OF RABBI ABRAHAM DUBIN:

The Mezuzah **has been sent** to the New World. The Mezuzah, symbol of Jewish faith, symbol of Jewish tradition, the longest that has survived into the modern world, **has been brought to America.** The Mezuzah, emblem of the history of the Jews, the most painful and most heroic history recorded in the annals of man; spiritual ornament of Jewish home-life, that home-life that kept up the **poise** and mental balance of the Jew living in a world woefully unbalanced and tragically discordant, the Mezuzah, symbol of Jewish deathlessness—this Mezuzah **has now been brought to our country.** It **has been cast into the lap of the Jew** in America. The American Jew who only yesterday was the youngest among the brethren in Israel has now become the head of the Jewish family.

Six million of the best sons and daughters of our people have been cruelly done to death. The centuries-old spiritual and intellectual reservoirs of Israel have been destroyed. The synagogues, the schools, the Yeshivas, the academies have been bombed into bits. The student, the scholars, the libraries, the books have been scattered, torn and burned up. These are no more.

That which has fallen is more than that which remains standing.

The body of Israel is being bruised in a thousand places in Europe, in Palestine, everywhere. But the spirit of the Jew is still unbeaten. We have faith in our power of survival. We have faith in the heroic quality of our people's destiny. We have faith in the inherent worth and dignity of Jewish life.

The American Jew must nurture this faith. We must rise to the emergency and need of the hour. We must keep burning this unquenchable will to live. We must take up this

Mezuzah, symbol of Israel's aspiration and spirituality, and make it bless our community, our home, our children, ourselves.

America must now become the sanctuary of Israel's Torah. It must become the home of Jewish scholarship, the academy of Jewish culture and thought and literature. History has taken hold of the youngest son in the family of Israel, history is demanding of the American Jew that he create here, in this blessed land of liberty and opportunity, that Jewish religion and culture and literature; that he build here that Jewish life which has made the Jew invincible and eternal, which has kept the Jew a solid rock amidst the changing and defying waves of time.

History is calling to us to hold high the flaming torch—
"The Lord is my light and my salvation Whom need I fear.
The Lord is the strength of my life of Whom need I be afraid."
And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thine house
and upon thy gates.

Announcer: Thank you, Rabbi Dubin.

(Music: CLOSING THEME AND DOWN)

Announcer: Today's Eternal Light play was adapted for radio by Morton Wishengrad. It was based on a story, "The Mezuzah," by Rabbi Leo Trepp, and appeared in **Liberal Judaism** Magazine, official organ of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. The music was composed by Morris Mamorsky and conducted by Milton Katims. The soloist was Cantor David Putterman and the Narrator was Berry Kroeger. The entire production was under the direction of Frank Papp.

(Music: UP AND DOWN)

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