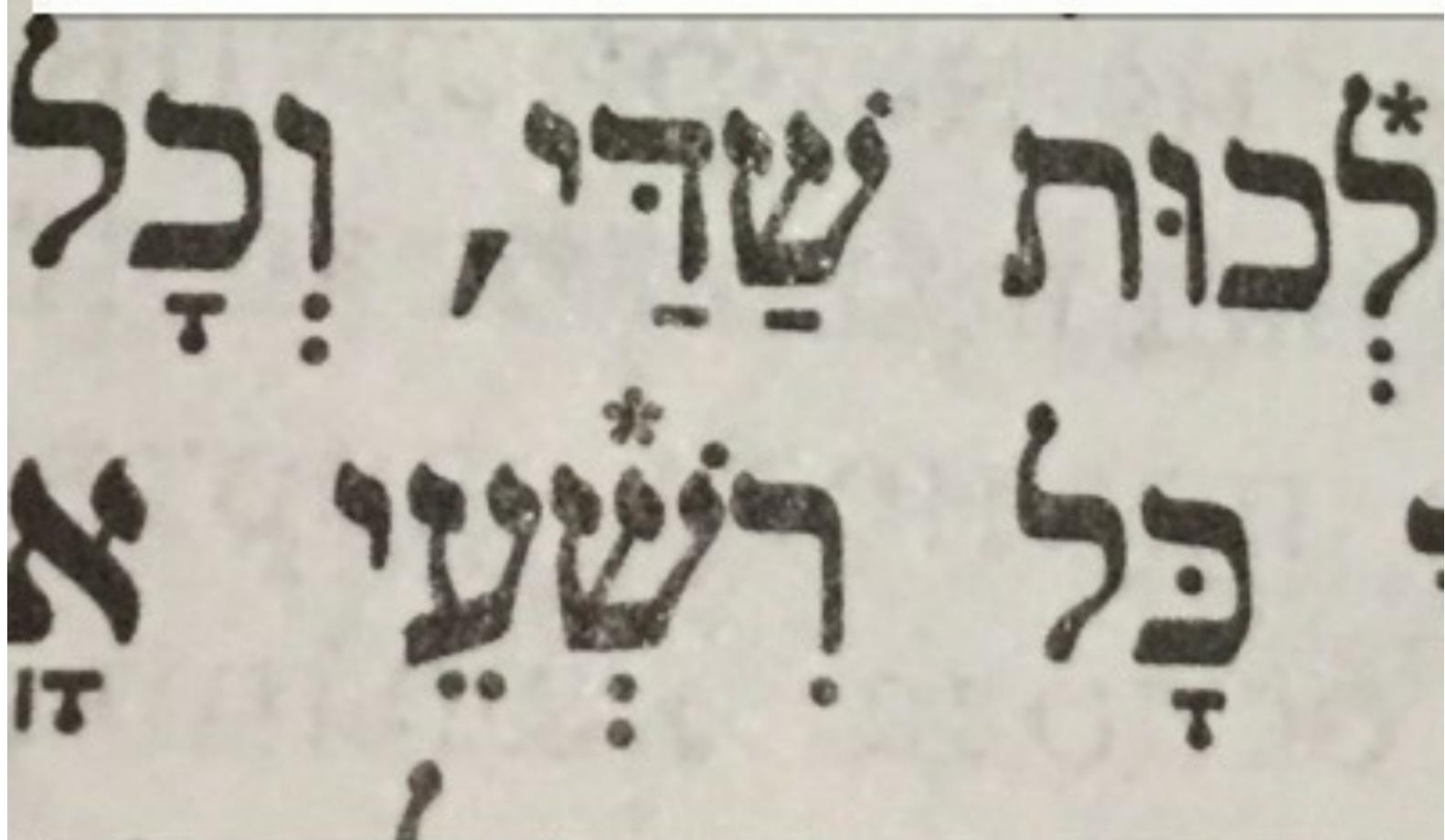


Shin Dalet Id.
Prose of the Jewish life



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«ЛитРес: Самиздат»

2021

Abarbanel A.

Shin Dalet Id. Prose of Jewish life / A. Abarbanel — «ЛитРес:
Самиздат», 2021

ISBN 978-5-532-98542-1

There is a cycle of stories about the life of the Jews - a people belonging to Gd the Almighty, whose name consists of three letters: Shin, Dalet, Id.

ISBN 978-5-532-98542-1

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To be or not to be

The car raced at high speed through familiar countries, passed more than once, taking me to France, to a large city in Alsace, to Strasbourg.

Not that there were any important things or business meetings waiting for me there. Not. The son of my St. Petersburg friend, after completing his postgraduate studies in St. Petersburg, went to improve his education in Strasbourg. Since he was a smart boy, the French state gave him such a scholarship that he could easily live and study. For some six years, Arthur studied French and English almost perfectly, and began to successfully communicate in German. Arthur was a gifted and diligent boy. It was he who invited me to visit him in his new city for a couple of days. Since there was nothing to do with the general crisis, after long delays, I nevertheless took advantage of his invitation.

Quite quickly, having overcome these 500 kilometers with a small tail, separating his home from mine, I drove into the midnight city filled with lights, to the station square. I don't think the city itself amazed me that much. He was solemn, a little pompous, elegant. Maybe because I had already looked enough of such cities, it seemed to me a little out of place in this embellished stiffness of his. Having dealt with the map and address of my friend, I parked the car with some difficulty and rang his doorbell. Arthur had taste and ambition, he rented his apartment in one of the most expensive areas, in a villa where representatives of embassies and even an English baron lived. Quiet respectable area adjacent to a large park and police station for a calm sense of security. Even if the apartment was in the basement of the mansion, with a tiny kitchenette and a shower stall right in it, with two tiny single beds, but here there was such a necessary isolation and remoteness from all these representatives of the former colonies-"republics" like Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia that Arthur was really happy with this "basement" at the mansion.

We sat at the table and talked excitedly about our life, tried to finish a bottle of red wine that I bought in Luxembourg, and this evening first turned into night, and then into morning. We went to bed at five, and at eight, having already prayed and took a cold shower, I stood and waited for Arthur to wake up. How he felt my arrival and just before my arrival he bought a large pack of green tea. I already brewed and drank a couple of cups, went to wake my friend. After a lean but healthy breakfast, we left the house, passing into the power of this monumental and solid Strasbourg. We walked in the middle of the Victory Alley, it was a mild and a little gray October day, the trams of the future were moving left and right – absolutely futuristic, which the city residents were so proud of.

Before my arrival, Arthur insistently asked me to bring him a kippah, and now he proudly and without hesitation walked in this little black velvet cap, the ritual headdress of the Jewish people. In the very center of the city, as it seemed to the boy, there were no manifestations of anti-Semitism, and Arthur could clearly and with pleasure feel like a Jew.

Due to his lack of life experience and his slight euphoria, he did not notice such subtleties as oblique Moroccan-Algerian views.

In addition to the languages listed above, Arthur also knew the holy language – Hebrew, which he learned voluntarily and with great desire. The level was such that he could freely communicate and write in this language. Arthur's family was completely Russian or Ukrainian, nothing religious was imposed or instilled on him. Only, perhaps, the surname somehow connected this young man with the mysterious people to which Arthur was so eager. Translated into Russian, she sounded like

a Camel. One way or another, everyone wants to find their roots and understand themselves and their souls, and I think that Arthur was on the right track and his inner compass did not deceive him.

Arthur, having lived long enough in this city, quickly got enough of the walk. I, having seen many such cities with their abundance of shops and stone idols, also lost interest in fruitless walking. We decided that now we must definitely visit the local synagogue.

In the middle of the old district, surrounded by luxurious mansions, pressed sides to each other, among the brown greenery of late autumn, she stood. Although, if you give free rein to fantasy and present the events allegorically, I would write that this huge building, which served as a cult and cultural institution, did not stand, but squatted down, with its head sucked into its shoulders from uncertainty. On the head rested an old dilapidated kippah, which was a bronze dome of this building, green with time and worries.

There were numerous fences around the synagogue, and by their labyrinth we were led to the central entrance. We were not allowed inside. "For members only" was the short answer in French. I, brought up in the spirit of Soviet Jewry, according to the slogan "the synagogue is the home of every Jew", kept up with Arthur so that he would continue to translate my questions until some clarity was obtained. Arthur, a shy boy, did not contradict me, and in the end we achieved the fact that in about an hour and a little more we could come to Mincha – the afternoon prayer. We left the synagogue, which was entered and exited by various people and schoolchildren in multi-colored kippah caps. I knew this type of synagogue, which in my eyes was nothing more than a Jewish club, rather than a House of Prayer. From my experience, in such places everyone is more busy with themselves and one cannot count on special warmth and hospitality.

We again wandered towards the center, thinking how to occupy the unoccupied time before the beginning of the prayer. I didn't really want to go back. Is that out of interest and desire for impressions. Having made another flaccid circle in the center, Arthur and I again slowly approached this gnarled stone giant with a green bale. At the last intersection in front of our target, waiting for the green signal of the traffic light,

on the other side of the street, a white-bearded man in a black frock coat was approaching. I asked him in Yiddish:

– Is there another synagogue besides this one?

"Follow me," this man, who turned out to be a rabbi, dropped in response.

Another synagogue found itself on the same square, almost opposite the central building, standing inconspicuous in a row with its neighbors. Arthur did not know about her. And no matter how I tried to prove to him that there should still be a community, he just shrugged his shoulders.

On the way, the Rav asked us who we were and what our names were. The name of that rabbi is Schlesinger. When I saw him crossing the intersection, I already then felt that I was "on the same wavelength" with him. May Gd grant health and peace to this person and his family.

Mincha (afternoon prayer) is over. Arthur was the first time at such an event and he liked everything. He even tried to sway to the beat of prayer, like others, and read from the prayer book. He read the text easily, but it was necessary to get used to understanding, since he still studied the modern language, which was different from the language of the prayer book. But Arthur liked everything very much, he was so carried away that even when we returned to his apartment, he could not part with his thoughts either with this house, or with such a spiritual and permeated action in it. I decided that if I don't talk to Arthur, then the sin, as the Torah teaches us, will lie on me. I postponed the conversation until the evening, which followed the stream of events of the day so quickly that the moment of the conversation with my friend stood in front of me.

"Arthur," I said, "it's great that you are so drawn to this faith. You know the language and you have a strong desire, but do you know that in order to truly become a Jew, you lack a small but vital detail? Do you know the importance of circumcision? Do you know that this commandment

is a commandment to all commandments? That even a born Jew cannot pray with other Jews if he is uncircumcised?

All this I said as friendly and sympathetic as possible. Contrary to my expectation, Arthur did not welcome my speech with enthusiasm. He even wilted all over. I understood other reasons for such a reaction and said: don't worry, I will help you with everything. We will do both conversion and everything else that is necessary – I have familiar rabbis. But the reason, to my surprise, was not that.

– No, – Arthur said seriously and firmly, – I'm afraid.

– What do you mean, they will make anesthesia, everything is styryl.

– No, – said Arthur, – I'm afraid of another. If persecution suddenly starts again, then will it end for me too? During the war, the Germans also checked on this basis!

I was silent, not knowing what to say. Before me stood not a young man, but a young adult man, conscious and educated. He knew very well what he was saying. And such his words were neither delusion nor misunderstanding. He thought it over for a long time and decided for himself, overcoming and extinguishing possible doubts and remorse. He stood very firmly and convincingly on this point of view. He liked Judaism in general, only not in whole, but in parts. God forbid blaming people for this. After all, a person is so inherent that he tries to extract the most delicious and best from everything. Therefore, probably there are Jews who are the only one of all peoples who lied to take upon themselves the entire set of laws – the Torah. Perform and listen. Jews and other peoples, I thought, and at the same time, such a scene involuntarily came to my mind. And I did not leave it to myself alone, but, believing that my friend also has a right to it, I shared it with him.

I see Strasbourg before my own eyes, the same square and the synagogue. The time and place are the same, the political situation is different. We, all together, are sitting in this Strasbourg synagogue, praying, when suddenly armored vehicles surround the street and the building, paramilitary thugs rush in and begin to take everyone present out into the street and put them into cars. Subsequently, these cars will go to some camp, or all the participants will be taken immediately to the shot and liquidated somewhere around the corner. When two of the thugs grab Arthur by the arms and drag him out with the others, he desperately breaks free and shouts in all languages at once:

– I'm not a Jew! I'm not a Jew! Let go! I am at a friend's place!

When he sees and understands that they do not react to his words at all, then, pulling free, he rips off his pants, takes his unshaved manhood with both hands and, demonstrating it, heart-rendingly and in disarray yells:

– Well, look, look! Here, here! I am at a friend's place!

Shocked by such a violent demonstration, the Nazis, and seeing that there is clearly no forgery in the presented object, they let it go.

On the street, in funnels, they continue to seat Jews. The overcrowded van can be closed together with pinched and crushed fingers and broken ribs. Finally the funnel starts to move. A joyful Arthur stands on the street and waves to us, everyone in the funnel, with his hands and shouts after us:

– Bye-bye! Don't worry, I'll bring you the parcels! Oh revoir!

Arthur stood at the sound of my words that had just been heard, with a ridiculous smile on his lips. He correctly and politely responded to me with this to my smile.

“Well,” he murmured, “it's probably not so.

– No, Arthur, it's just that, a fantasy, on our common Jewish themes, – I reassured him and patted him on the shoulder, – everything is fine.

We wandered on through this city swelled with solidity and were silent. A stream of their thoughts and reflections went through the head of everyone. I don't know what Arthur thought, but I thought then that, unfortunately, he was definitely not interested in the question of choice.

Brit or not Brit. To be or not to be. Become or remain.

Returning from Strasbourg, I attended a Shabbat service in a synagogue in the Dutch city of Breda. After the service and meal, a conversation with the chairman of the local community and my neighbor Philip Susan was a kind of echo of the Strasbourg episode. He sadly complained that the "halachic" Jews threaten him with their departure from the community if their non-Jewish friends and non-proselytes were not allowed to pray with everyone in a minyan, on common law. So, do we have a hobby club or a house of prayer? And again the same enduring question:

To be or not to be ?! To stay or stay? May, with the help of Gd, everyone who truly wants to join the holy people will have enough strength and fulfill and listen, and be, and remain.

May the Almighty bless all of them and make them strong, strong and even stronger. For life and for the world. Forever and ever.

St. Petersburg mosaic

A distant close friend of mine, Marina Kalinina, a lively Komsomol girl without age, a kind heart, a lifesaver. I met her on a street where a rivulet with the cheerful name Tarakanovka once flowed.

Having gone through various periods of formations and downfalls in our Soviet country, it remained afloat. I got up in the bay of the former design institute, "split" into many different premises, leased for different firms and firms.

She called her firm "Wellness Center" and for years she continued this business, experiencing more adversity than success.

Then, in 1989, she met me at this street Tarakanovka, freed, who had gone through a "small circle" of walking through the agony of different camps and prisons. I stood confused, in slippers, from the colony, in outdated things six years ago, awkward, with a trash can, as if not yet conscious of where I was. Then, in May 1989, she showed genuine kindness and sympathy to me, communicating simply and openly.

This is how she stayed for me. For ten years we have not seen each other, only occasionally calling back. And only in the next century, 13-14 years after the first meeting, it happened to us to meet again.

I hope these conversations were as enjoyable for her as they were for me. One thing clearly worried her, though. She could not in any way process the thought that I, in every next meeting, strikingly, in her opinion, change. She could not believe in sincerity and see the pattern. Being very good about this man, I wrote the following parable for her.

Grown in the slums

The old gardener could no longer work on his garden and went to live in the city.

He settled in one of the slums of a huge gray city. Once cleaning his old coat, he reached into his pocket and found there old dried grains. Yes, ordinary seeds. Only those seeds were all different, from different plants, and from which – the old man could no longer know.

– Well, I'll plant them in our yard, we'll see what grows.

The old man took these seeds and, on a piece of earth, exposed from the swollen and cracked asphalt, planted them in the soil.

The old man lived in a house that stood face to face to another house. Houses were also crowded on the sides. "Well" – that was the name of these courtyards in that huge, damp city.

The sun barely broke through the walls – in this country sunny days were rare – only in the evening hours before sunset did it manage to touch the ground and warm the sprouts that were making their way.

As time passed, the plants grew, and at first they hardly differed from each other. All were gray and faded.

Then, after some time, one could already distinguish the emerging thistle, a bush that took the shape of a nettle, a frail aspen. One tree remained unrecognized.

From the very beginning, they tried to push this plant incomprehensible to others, to block it from the life-giving light.

The thistle pricked with thorns, other plants burned, cast a shadow, strangled the young shoot with their roots. But the tree continued to live.

Thin and dusty, it reached for the light, greedily grabbing the rare rays of the sun.

It was unsightly: some branches were broken off by passers-by and the wind, some leaves, not having time to straighten out, wilted, the bark cracked from lack of moisture.

But here's a miracle: that incomprehensible force that sat in the seed, pushed and pushed the growth of the tree up to the sun.

It was changing all the time: it seemed like an unnecessary shrub, then, releasing fresh green leaves again, pleased the eye.

The gardener has already lost interest in all of his plantings. I forgot about them and even stopped watering.

But all the same force forced the tree to stretch upward, it swallowed drops of rain, exposing the leaves to the wind. Stretched towards the longed-for sun.

Almost nothing remained around from the former neighbors: dried stalks and scraps of yellow-brown grass.

One day an old man walked past the courtyard and was stunned: a thin and flexible tall tree stood alone and proudly. It grew so that the upper leaves shimmered like an emerald in the sun; birds sat on the branches and sang the hymn of life. Its branches became so strong that the wind no longer broke them, but only played with them as equals.

The old man wiped away a tear and thought that, perhaps, this is a good gift for both his labors and his old age.

He thought about a seed the size of a speck of dust, and about what power of life can grow that will break out of the darkness of stones and, despite the gray, grave environment, will live for the sake of the sun and light for the sake of warm life-giving rays.

Live for the light, wherever you were, the gardener thought, live for the light.

Doves

Once upon a time there were two doves. Mother and daughter. Beila and Rosette. They lived alone. Rosette's father, a beautiful, dove, once got on a huge ocean liner, which transported him to another country, to the other end of the globe, and he never managed to return from there. He found himself another dove and lived with her in peace and happiness. From this love they had a cute little bird girl. So they lived in a huge new city called New Amsterdam.

And Rosette stayed with her mother in her two years. Mom loved her Rose very much. In tides of love, she hugged her with her wings and kissed her with her beak. She kissed so passionately that these manifestations of maternal love left scratches, abrasions, bruises, torn feathers. Rosette loved her mother very much, but she suffered without a father. After passing the chick period and becoming a teenager, her longing for her father became so unbearable that she went to him across the ocean.

She lived with her father for many years. She learned the language of that country well, but did not receive the desired and such longed-for warmth. Most of her dear father's love went to her little sister. Rosette's heart was drawn more and more back to her mother, and she began to gather back on the long journey across the ocean.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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