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English 22.1

Out of the Pale, Into the States

Sidney Blumenreich, was born November 11, 1916 at South Second Street, Williamsburg, New York City. His father had only been in America for thirteen years, and had been married for less than a year. Samuel Blumenreich, Sidney's father, had come over from Austria-Hungary, which is modern day Poland (Interview). Samuel came to America during a period that saw massive migration of Eastern European Jews from their homes in the Pale of Settlement (Spiro). The Blumenreich family was from a town called Glenyani, in Austria-Hungary, which was well within the confines of the Pale. The Blumenreich family was poor, and lived off of tzedukah, or charity, from their Jewish community. Due to their poverty, their children were raised with the expectation of coming to America, the land of opportunity, for a better life. In 1903, Samuel and his two brothers arrived in the United States and each found work. Samuel worked in textiles and joined a union, while his brother Izzy opened a fruit market on a street corner in New York City. Sidney Blumenreich's mother came to America in 1914 after three attempts, having previously been rejected due to poor vision. She came to Harlem, and lived on 114th Street and soon met and married Samuel (Interview). This is the story of my great-grandfather, Samuel Blumenreich, who like many Eastern European Jews from the Pale of Settlement, immigrated to America due to persecution and pogroms, and tried to hold on to their values of family, education, and religion while under the pressures of

assimilation in their new American Environment. Although, Eastern European Jews remained loyal to their values, the role of Judaism in their lives was permanently altered.

The Pale of Settlement was formed in 1791, from Russian territory gained from Turkey around the Black Sea. As a way to solve two problems in one move, Czar Catherine II forced Jews to live in this new territory and thus developed an isolated Jewish community. Catherine put many restrictions, such as trading barriers, on the Jews, as the size of the Pale of Settlement increased. This area, whose boundaries were always shifting, came to be known as the Pale of Settlement, a term coined under the rule of Czar Nicolas I (Lipman). The Pale was made up of twenty-five provinces, from areas such as Ukraine, Lithuania, Byelorussia, Crimea, and parts of Poland gained by Russia and Austria (Spiro).

The nearly five million Eastern European Jews living in the Pale of Settlement lived in small closely-knit towns called Shtetls (Howe 7). Communities were set up, and Jewish customs flourished (Spiro). In the Pale, Samuel Blumenreich was trained to come to America with many of his peers. He went to a school which was task oriented, and he received training in textiles so that he could come to America and be ready to contribute to society and make money. Samuel's father died at a young age, thus leaving his family poor and without income to rely on its community (Interview). The Jewish principle of Tzedukah, or performing good deeds such as charity, was given a new meaning as many Jews would take in homeless or poor Jews off the street for Friday night dinners and to give them a place to stay. A Jewish social welfare program was established inside the Pale that performed such tasks as raising clothing for students, cooking kosher meals for soldiers, and providing medical treatment for the poor. The system worked so well that

the Rabbis had to stop conversion because many poor Christian Slavs wanted to convert (Spiro).

Education was highly honored by the Jews. In fact many women had to go to work in order to earn enough money so that their husbands could study more often. Every male child was educated and parents celebrated the day their child entered school. The anti-Semitic feelings in and around Russia made Jewish education especially important. Jewish education was what kept Jews Jewish. Without Torah, the bible, or the stories, the children would easily submit to the mounting anti-Semitic pressures to rid themselves of their religion. Education was the force that connected the Jews to their history, one that became an obsession for Jews to the point that it went hand in hand with faith in God. The teachings united a religious people to social action movements like Zionism and socialism (Howe 8-11).

Eventually some Jews were allowed to leave the Pale, although the poorer majority had to stay and was forced into the army. Alexander II was noted for making such provisions as allowing Jews with a college education, or Jews that were doctors to leave the Pale beginning in 1865. However, most Jews remained in the Pale of Settlement, living poor lives as merchants and craftsmen. By 1897, there were approximately five million Jews living within the Pale of Settlements. Under the rule of Nicolas I, the Jews suffered greatly. Nicholas decided that he wanted to eliminate the Jews either through death or conversion. In 1827, Nicholas began a program that sent every Jewish male, aged twelve through twenty-five, into the army for twenty-five years. This program encouraged Jews to renounce their religion, and took a heavy toll on the Jewish communities. Jewish leaders in the Pale communities had heavy quotas to fill for

the army, so they sent children of poorer families first. This led to many lies and deceptions in the communities (Lipman). Some families would kidnap children or even cut off their children's index fingers as a way to fill or avoid the quotas for the army set by Nicholas (Spiro).

If forced entrance into the army was not bad enough, pogroms also hampered Jewish life. Jews were subjected to countless pogroms, which were mob attacks against the Jews organized by the Russian Czars. The Jews were many the countries' scapegoats for economic woe. The masses of Russia concentrated on the Jews as a poison to their country rather than blaming their own corrupt leaders and government. Czar Alexander III, organized many pogroms against the Jews, as well as initiated the May Laws, which limited Jewish life in areas such as ownership of property, trading, and settling. The pogroms lasted for years, and between 1903 and 1907 there were 284 pogroms with over 50,000 casualties. The tension and violence were too much for the Jews, which was evident by the fact that each year from 1881 to 1914 about 50,000 Jews left the Pale emigrating to other parts of the world, especially America (Spiro).

Fed up with persecution and poverty, the Jewish masses fled Eastern Europe for a new life in America. Although, this decision was not fully endorsed by the Jewish intellectual leaders of the day, the masses had had enough. The move was not easy; besides traveling far by boat, the Jews had to leave behind all they had ever known including their wooden synagogues, burial sites, wives, families, houses and values (Howe 25). From 1881, the year Alexander II was killed, to 1914, about two million European Jewish immigrants arrived in New York encountering adversity and a new way of life. Most of the Jews that came over had no vocational training and no money. They

were looked down upon my many, including German Jews who had already been in America. The Germans did not like to be compared with the poor uneducated Eastern European immigrants, and some tried to limit the immigration standards to keep these Jews out. However, others felt the need to help their fellow Jews and did so my creating soup kitchens, vocational training schools, and philanthropic centers (Lipman).

The Jews lived in the Lower East side of New York working menial jobs in order to make a living. At that time, the Lower East Side was very densely populated, even greater than the worst sections of Bombay. The emphasis on education and tradition that defined the lives of Jews in the Shtetls took a backseat to working and trying to make a living. To be Jewish became a task, something that took great effort (Howe 70). Many Jews like Samuel Blumenreich, found work in sweatshops, having to work long shifts in poor conditions. Others like Izzy Blumenreich were peddlers, selling fruits or meats in small shops, markets, or stands on the city corner. A few Jews, like other desperate immigrants got involved in illegal activities. Activities such as gambling, liquor distribution, and prostitution, were controlled by Jewish mobsters in the lower East side of New York for many years (Lipman).

The Jews in America met new pressures that they did not experience in Europe. For the first time, work, not education, became the center of every family's life. Just as the first lesson of Hebrew was celebrated in the Shtetls, the first job taken was as momentous of an occasion. Compared to the successful German Jews who had previously arrived in New York, the Eastern European Jews were very different in most respects. The German Jews, because they had been exposed to the Haskalah, or Jewish enlightenment, had learned to live with a balance between worldly and secular activities.

They had no misgivings about putting their Judaism behind their work ethic and drive to be successful. These feelings were reflected in German dominated Reform Judaism movement (Howe 19). However, the Eastern European Jews while living in the Pale, were shut off from outside influences and therefore were not prepared for a life separated from traditional values such as family and religion. The Eastern European Jews had to attend American assimilation schools that taught skills needed to become a positive member of the American labor force and American society (Berman 344). Dependence of parents on their children to make money and to learn English weakened the bond of family. The pull of American culture altered the Jewish community, even though immigrants attempted to stick to their traditions, history, and values (Berman 350-4).

About the same time that the earliest Eastern European Jews arrived in America, Conservative Judaism was created with the intent of combining both Judaism and the secular world in a more traditionally acceptable way. Conservative Judaism was founded by German Rabbi Zechariah Frankel in 1845, and in 1887 the Jewish Theological Seminary was created (Gillman 4). The Jewish Theological Seminary was a movement that started as an opposition to Reform Judaism, which was the leading form of American Judaism at the time. Reform Judaism was highly secular oriented to the point that it turned-off many of the immigrated Eastern European Jews. The seminary was the center for Jewish Conservative thought, and was committed to a distinctive approach to living as a religious Jew in a new and historical cultural setting. Its ultimate goal was to establish a community of religious Jews in America (Gillman 36-40).

. As Eastern European Jews adjusted to life in America, they made a strong effort to retain their religious practices in a secular world. New York was a city that differed

greatly economically, culturally, and religiously from the towns the Jews lived in Europe. In the Lower East Side, the Jews had to learn a new language, and new tasks for the workforce. These factors made it difficult to practice Judaism as they had in the Pale of Settlement and their traditions seemed to slow their progress. As a way to retain the traditional religious life of worship and torah study, many Jews organized themselves into small synagogues in the Lower East Side. These congregations did not reflect those of the Reform movement, rather they worshiped more religiously and traditionally. The Jewish Theological Seminary saw synagogues and other Eastern European Jews as a knowing they would be open to Conservative Judaism (Gillman36-40). By the turn of the century, Eastern European Jews began to take notice of Conservative Judaism movement, and in short time they were the backbone and leaders of the movement (Elazar 17).

. Conservative Judaism was the balance of Judaism and Americanism for which the Eastern European immigrants were looking. Some of the ideals of the movement were in agreement with the Reform movement, such as their beliefs that America is different, and Judaism does have the resources to be different (Gillman 49-54). This meant that it was acceptable for Judaism to change and adapt. The ideals that separated Conservative thought from the Reform movement were Conservative Judaism's emphasis on the authority of the community, the importance of Hebrew as the language of worship, and the obedience to Jewish law, called Halakhah. Obedience to Halakhah meant retaining the rituals of diet, marriage, Sabbath, festivals, and study of Torah. The compromise between the old world and the new was the agreement among Conservative

Jews that Halakhah could evolve and change with time, but gradually and only limited to areas of superficiality (Gillman 55-60).

Thus, the face of Judaism varied greatly since the days of the Pale of Settlement. In the Pale, education was the center of every Jew's life. History and tradition were strong family values. As Most of the Jews living in the Pale immigrated to America around the turn of the century these values were altered. In America, Jewish life focused on wealth, due to its importance for survival, leaving Jews to work long hours at menial poor-paying jobs. With these constraints of survival little time was left to observe Judaism like they had in Europe. Eastern European Jews became aware of Conservative Judaism and embraced it as it balanced the tensions of both past and present influences, which pulled on the conscious of Eastern European Jews living in America. Thus, Judaism had gone through great change but it learned that it could survive through great transition turmoil and transition, and it would need this new-founded thick skin to survive the events of the Twentieth Century.