

other winter. I don't know, maybe He won't take me any further. I haven't been in Fashtef since Passover, but soon, God willing, I'll go there on Rosh Hashanah.

And now I want to wish you all good fortune in seeing through my daughter Hannah's engagement. May the Living One have compassion and provide you all you need to help her out. Your sister Hannah, poor thing, is an orphan and has no one to look after her. If not you, there would be no one to take an interest. May the Living One give you a hundred dollars for every dollar you spend - He is the Father of orphans - He will provide you with much more.

I haven't sent you a letter until now because your address got lost here. I sent a card to my son Simcha asking how to send your address so that, God forbid, you don't think I've forgotten my children. A father can't just forget his children. When I lie down and when I get up, always, my heart weeps for the great distance that separates us at the four corners of the world. I still regret how when your mother died we weren't all of us able to be together, though I didn't have enough to pay for everyone's travel. All of you though, little by little have come together over there. Perhaps its destined that we should be spread apart like this. I only hope that the Almighty will provide a good marriage for Yehudeske and that He'll allow me a few more years.

Nothing more to write. Be healthy, live happily, may you carry off the engagement with happiness, in a fortuitous moment.

From your father who wishes you a long life full of happiness, Y.A.

To my dear daughter Hannah, may you live with great happiness for many years. I give my blessing to your engagement. My dear daughter, you've delighted me - its known here that I've wept with great joy, wept that I can't see it all with my own eyes - but its all in the Almighty's plan. May He give you what your father wishes for you. Don't worry my dear daughter, the Almighty will provide for the wedding with much happiness. Auntie just sent me the letter here at Faletz, and now send me your address right away.

From your father, Y.A.

To Simcha, your wife and child Itke, long life to them:

No news to write about from here. As I've written in my letter to Shprintze, you should help my dear daughter Hannah to carry out her engagement. The Almighty will help you with this many times over. Be healthy and happy. Y.A.

[And in a postscript to Julia, who is not yet betrothed, Yankev adds...]

A greeting to my dear daughter, may she live, Yehudeske:

Don't worry, the Living One will have compassion for you. We must hope for something better.

From your father who wishes you much happiness, Y.A.

(Also) My daughter Shayne is thank God, healthy, but very poor and Elioahu is barely making a living...

[circa 1911]

My dear daughter Hannah, may you have long life:

The groom's grandfather, Joseph Nateh, is a man I knew, a respected person in the world. He maintained quite a bit of property. May the Almighty only provide His blessing...

Write back immediately, tell me how he is... Is he running the business by himself, does he have family? Give him my most friendly greetings. The Living One will give you all happiness. Write and tell me what you call the groom.

Write and tell me how Chaim Epstein is, how his business is going; the same about my brother Simcha's and my nephew Moshe Shimson and Mendel - my whole family, tell me how they live. Don't send more than one letter to me at Faletz, since I'm going to travel with everybody to Fashtef on Rosh Hashanah.

Vilna [circa 1912]

I greet all of my dear children, my beloved daughter Shprintze, your husband Yankev, your dear children, may they live long years with the greatest fortune; the same as well for my daughter Hannahle, with your dear husband Zalman, may you both live long lives with much luck. Whatever you do, may it be happy, and the same as well for my daughter Yehudeske, may you live long years, with fortune; may the Living One provide you with your destined partner:

My dear children, I write you, thanks to the Living One, in a time of good health and good fortune from Vilna. Auntie is as usual - her health a little better sometimes, at other times, a little weaker. My children are in Dveletz. Elioahu's alone with his wife and children. The same for Shayne and her children, they're all in the best of health, though her life is a hard one with that wretch of a husband. As for my business, I don't know how it's going to turn out, since until two weeks ago we had no real winter, which means just dry cold spells and snow. Now there are great snowstorms and deep freezes so that the ovens and the wagons proceed very slowly and since labor is very expensive there's only a little bit of living to be made. Who knows what the

Living One has in store for us down the road, how He'll help me make a living...

Right now I keep a horse and two hauling wagons. I don't go on foot, not a single step. I need the horse with me in the forest, and with my health I wouldn't be able to work a regular job and especially not at Fargament's. We have to place our hope in the Living One. He'll certainly provide the means of making a living.

Don't hold such a short letter against me. I have to travel into the forest and if I don't take off I'll be late. I've forgotten to write you since I received your letter with great joy. I thank the Almighty every day that you all continue to be in good health and to make a living. May His mercy not turn away from you in the future.

We miss our son Reuven a great deal. It seems to us all the time that he'll come but what can you do? Whenever anyone comes from Shluzdveh they express regret at all the trouble he had in Shluzdveh, and that he must now travel to America to make a living; there's nothing to be done here.

My dear children, be happy and healthy all of you, thus your father blesses you from deep in his heart. Write us letters often, that will be our bit of *naches*.

From me, your father, Y.A.

July 18 [circa 1912]

To my dear daughter Shprintze, her husband Yankev and your children, may you all live many years with good fortune; the same as well for my daughter Hannah and her husband Zalman and for my daughter Yehudeske, may you all my dear children, live with much happiness.

I write you all hardly knowing what to say. We're here at least, if not happy. Sunday I was in Hidutzshek with Chaim Oser when a fierce storm came on with thunder and lightening. With a thunderclap a blaze started in Malka's house, which is next to mine. Hers burned and the fire spread to mine - both houses burned to the ground. Thank God I wasn't hurt. Poor Auntie was alone and she only managed to pull out two comforters, three pillows and my fur coat. In twenty minutes the rest of our furniture and possessions became ash. Both of us stood there like sleepwalkers. Auntie's gone to her son in Dvinsk and she'll stay at Fayge's. They're quite wealthy. At present, I'm in Dunilowicze. It seems like it's all a dream; never before have we had so short and terrifying a dream.

Don't worry, the Living One will pity us, perhaps in our old age. Don't worry, from your father who wishes you much happiness. Y.A.

[This fragment expands on the fire. It was written at the same time but the balance of the letter has been lost.]



Freedom Square, Panevezys in the 1920's. Yankev Alperowitz lived in the village of Komai and then settled in Panevezys after the war. This city, about one hundred miles north of Vilna, proved to be a haven. Of Komai he wrote: "The turmoil has resulted in wrecking commerce. I know of people going under like sand. Any given day they have nothing to live from - the tradespeople, the craftsmen, the professionals - all of them without bread." (Boris Feldblyum Collection)

Auntie and I are, thanks to the Almighty, healthy, no worse, Praise God. She's in Dvinsk; she'll stay there until she can get herself some clothes. They've written from Dvinsk that she needn't worry, she's welcome there.

They grabbed some storage barrels, but the house had already burned. All they could pull out of the closet was my fur coat - and that only at the last minute. No, it was no dream, it was a conflagration. Furniture, silverware, all kinds of possessions. The damage was great. I'm walking around, Praise God, in the jacket I wear every Sabbath, as if nothing had happened. It's hard, though, not to think of it as a dream when one has so little strength to suffer.

Here's a list of what was saved:

Two comforters; three pillows; one silver [candelabra?] - the big one; my tallis and teffilin, since they weren't in the house; one fur coat; two straw barrels with feathers. Otherwise nothing remains from the fire. Chaim Oser and I were in Hidutzshek and so there was no one to pull things out and rescue them.

[Written some time after 1913...]

To my dear daughter Shprintze and her husband Yankev, with all your children, may they live with much happiness throughout their lives:

Dear Shprintze, why, I wonder, don't you write about yourself? Shayne doesn't write either. I've written to her twice and she hasn't replied at all, not even a little greeting. We know, of course, about all the craziness between Shayne and Luba from a long time ago. I'm not just whining...

What greater pleasure could I have than to receive letters from you, to hear that you are all healthy and making a good living - from that I'd live each day in great joy. May the Living One be with you so that you'll be able to support your old father in his elderly years, however many he's fated to live.

Not much more to write about. Be happy and healthy all of you.

From me, your father. Y.A.

April 26, Panevezys [circa 1917]

To my dear daughter Shprintze, her husband and their little daughter Itinke, may you all be healthy and live many years with good fortune:

Auntie and I are in the kind of health you'd expect from elderly folk, yet we're grateful to have survived these five years of danger, death and hunger. Now you can live again here in Lithuania - if you have the means to - as well as you want.

I received your letter the 11th of April. I thank the Almighty that I've lived to see your handwriting again. It's been five years since I've seen it. The same goes for all of my children. They've written to me now, except for Shayne - I have nothing written by her with her own pen. I don't have her address.

As for the money you've sent, I haven't received it yet - not one kopeck, not the \$75 nor the \$115. People seem to think it could still arrive. Some people around here receive letters or photos in the mail with gobs of money stuck inside - sometimes in unsealed letters. Some even receive a letter a week with two or three dollars in it. You take a risk and you help someone stay alive. Now it turns out that instead of dollars arriving inside of letters there are German marks. The dollar is worth 40 marks here, and at your end the dollar is worth more than a hundred marks. If you stick a hundred mark note in a letter, that's a dollar to you, a little bit of risk. Meanwhile, we'll find a way to survive until the Living One sees to it that more money arrives. Others receive thousands of marks in letters. You take a risk and put a few dollars in an envelope.

If my dear children really want to take care of their old father, they'll do as others do and send letters and money often. Go, like others, to the currency exchange office, buy German marks and send them to us. There are people across the courtyard from us...who receive letters from friends every day, and within the letters or photos are German marks. Someone risks a few dollars and in so doing sustains a life, spares it from hunger. It's terrible to suffer the way you see people living here.

As for making a living, there's just no way to do it. We hope that the Living One will give you long years of life, with much satisfaction from your children and see to it that you have much good fortune.

I study with the Rabbi in his house every day. He also wanted to write you, but I told him it wasn't necessary, that my children, with the Almighty's help, won't abandon me to suffering.

Give my letter to the others, read it to my dear son Reuven and to my dear daughter Yehudeske, and then I ask you to put it in an envelope and send it to my dear daughter Hannah, may she and her husband Zalman and children live. I wanted to write them too, but Praise God, I didn't have the money for postage.

I never imagined I would see such terrible times - but what can you do, it's all God's will. We have to hope that things will get better. They are really awful now. May God have compassion and make things better. My dear daughter Shprintze, I can write you that with your letter you saved this awful life of mine. All of these five years my heart's been breaking, thinking of you, wondering if you were still alive, if you'd written to me, if you weren't completely healthy. Your photo came before we were cut off five years ago, and you didn't look well in it to me, and so these years have been spent in dark thoughts. But now, receiving a letter in your own hand, I have a new lease on life. It's God's plan you know. Now I ask you, all my dear children, to send me pictures of you and of your children, except those I received from Hannah of her, her husband Zalman and her child, which they sent me two months ago. Old photos remain in Komai with all the furniture. I ask you again to have compassion, to send us all of your photos.