

## Hillel's Secret Diary

Sunday, August 23rd

My name is Hillel and I'm 8 years old. I live in Samarkand with my family. I'm writing this diary in SECRET because if anyone finds it, we could be in BIG trouble.

Here's the thing - I'm not supposed to exist. Well, I mean, I exist, but the neighbors can't know I exist. It's SUPER weird.

My tatty says the government wants all kids to go to their schools where they teach you that Hashem doesn't exist (can you believe that?!). So we have to hide. Like, actually HIDE. IN OUR OWN HOUSE.

I can't even go outside during the day. Do you know how boring that is?

Monday, August 24th

Today I watched through the curtains as other kids played outside. I wanted to go SO BAD but Mommy said "Not during school hours, Hillel. Someone might see you."

My older brother Yankel is 12 and he's been hiding even longer than me. He's never been to school AT ALL. He's like a professional hider at this point.

My sister Rivka went to school today. I feel bad for her. She has to sit there and listen to them say crazy things about how there's no Hashem. But Tatty says it's the only way to keep the government people from getting suspicious about us boys.

When she comes home, we spend HOURS teaching her real stuff to fix what they put in her head at school.

## **Tuesday, August 25th**

Something scary happened today! There was a knock at the door and it WASN'T our special knock!

Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you about our special knock. It goes like this:

- Knock knock
- Wait
- Knock knock knock
- Wait
- Knock knock

If someone doesn't do it exactly right, we all PANIC. Yankel and I have to run and hide in the back room.

Anyway, today someone just knocked regular and Mommy's face went WHITE. She whispered "Quick! To the hiding spot!"

Turns out it was just the mailman. But for like five minutes I thought we were DONE FOR.

**Wednesday, August 26th**

Mr. Daniel came over again today. He used the special knock (thank goodness).

He told us more stories about the old days. He said he used to help the government trick parents into sending their kids to the bad schools. He looked like he wanted to cry when he talked about the kids who wouldn't eat treif even when the teachers tried to force them.

"THOSE CHILDREN WERE HEROES," HE SAID. "REAL HEROES."

I want to be a hero too. But right now I'm just a kid hiding in my house.

**Thursday, August 27th**

You'll never guess what happened today. The school principal sent TEACHERS to walk around the neighborhood looking for kids!

I saw them through the window. They were knocking on doors and asking people "Do you know if there are any children around here who should be in school?"

Mrs. Goldberg from next door (she's not Jewish) was outside

and one teacher asked her. My heart was beating SO FAST. But she just shrugged and said she didn't know of any.

Phew. That was close.

Mommy says this happens every summer before school starts.

They call it "registration." More like "hunting for hidden kids" if you ask me.

### **Friday, August 28th Erev Shabbos**

Getting ready for Shabbos is tricky when you're hiding. We have to be super careful about everything.

Mommy was teaching me and Yankel the parsha today. She said that Yidden have always had to be strong, even when things were hard. "Just like now," she said.

I asked her how long we have to hide like this. She said, "Until Hashem decides it's time for things to change."

I hope it's soon. I really want to play outside.

## Motzei Shabbos, August 29th

Tonight after havdalah, Tatty told us we're going to have a secret melameid come teach us! But it has to be SUPER secret. Even more secret than this diary.

He said when the melamed comes, he'll use our special knock.

And we can NEVER tell ANYONE about him. Not even other kids.

Even if they're Jewish kids.

This is getting complicated. I need to remember:

- Hide from neighbors during school hours
- Special knock: 2, pause, 3, pause, 2
- Never talk about our melamed
- Pretend I don't exist if anyone asks

Being a Jewish kid in Samarkand is like being a secret agent, except not fun.

## Sunday, August 30th

Bad news. Tatty heard from the other parents that the

principal found out about the Friedman kids who weren't in school. Their parents had to send them to stay with relatives in another city!

Can you imagine? Having to leave your parents just because you don't want to go to a school that teaches lies?

Mommy held me extra tight tonight. I think she's worried.

**Monday, August 31st**

Our melamed came for the first time today! His name is Reb Mendel and he has the longest beard I've ever seen.

He taught us alef-beis with little songs. He whispered the whole time, even though we were inside our own house. When I asked why, he said "The walls have ears in Samarkand."

That's creepy. Do walls really have ears here? I looked but I didn't see any.

Yankel laughed at me. He said it means people might be

listening. Oh.

## Tuesday, September 1st

School started today. Not for me and Yankel - we watched from the window as kids walked by with their backpacks.

Rivka had to go. She looked so sad. Tatty gave her a big hug and whispered something in her ear. Probably reminding her that everything they teach her about no Hashem is sheker (lies).

I'm glad I don't have to go. But also... it would be nice to have friends. Real friends who I could actually play with outside.

## Wednesday, September 2nd

Mommy taught us about how we came to Samarkand today. She said when I was 3, the Nazis came to our city Kharkov and we had to run away.



I don't remember it, but she said I was SO hungry on the trip and our non-Jewish neighbor wanted to give me food but it wasn't kosher. She said I cried and cried but she didn't let me eat it.

"Even when you were tiny, you kept kosher," she said proudly.

I guess I've always been fighting to be Jewish. Even when I was too little to know it.

**Thursday, September 3rd**

**CLOSE CALL TODAY!**

A teacher came to our door! Not our special knock! Mommy pushed me and Yankel into the back room so fast I almost tripped.

We could hear her at the door: "Hello, I'm from the school.

Do you have any children?"

Mommy said, "Just my daughter, she's already enrolled."

"No boys?" the teacher asked.

"No," Mommy lied.

I held my breath. Yankel put his hand over my mouth just in case.

Finally the teacher left. Mommy didn't let us come out for another ten minutes, just to be safe.

My heart is STILL beating fast.

**Friday, September 4th Erev Shabbos**

Tatty came home early to help prepare for Shabbos. He looked tired. More tired than usual.

He said the government is getting stricter about kids in school. More and more families are having to send their boys away to hide with relatives.

"Will we have to leave?" I asked.

"IM YIRTZEH HASHEM, NO," HE SAID. "BUT WE MUST BE EVEN MORE  
CAREFUL."

MORE careful? How is that even possible? I already can't  
leave the house!

Being Jewish here is the hardest thing ever. But Tatty says  
that's what makes us strong.

I hope he's right.

THE END (of this notebook)

(Mommy got me a new notebook to keep writing. She says it's  
important to remember these times. But I have to hide this  
one REALLY well first.!)