

Hillel's Top Secret (and Totally Unfair) Diary

A Samarkand Hide-and-Learn Adventure

SUNDAY, AUGUST 10th

Okay, so here's the deal. I'm Hillel, I'm eight, and I'm starting this diary because my parents say I have to remember these crazy times forever. Also, it'll be handy when I'm rich someday - people will pay BIG money for spy stories. Spoiler: I'm not a spy. I just have to learn Torah in total secret.

Unfairness Rating: 100 out of 10

(That's worse than having to eat cold kugel for breakfast.)

Why am I a secret? Because the government in Samarkand decided they don't want kids knowing about Judaism. They'd rather us believe there's no Hashem - like telling kids that candy is a myth while eating a whole jar of gummy bears. Makes zero sense!

So I live under house arrest. I can't play in the courtyard during school hours, I can't wave at neighbors, can't even do a cartwheel without risking being reported to the dre#i osiyos (that's three letters, the secret police: GPU, NKVD, KGB like they're collecting badges). They're also called knepl-buttons because of the shiny buttons on their coats. I counted once: they have exactly eight shiny buttons. Eight!

MONDAY, AUGUST 11th

Discovery Mission: Dre#i-Osiyos Button Count

Today I practiced counting the knepl-buttons on the policeman's coat. I peered out the window and counted: one, two all the way to eight. Then he turned around and I got caught staring. He gave me the creepiest look ever, like I know you're counting my buttons. I ducked behind the curtain, but now I'm sure he's on to me. Unfairness Rating: 92/10.

Meanwhile, Mommy and Tatty whispered about enemies of the state and poison of the

masses. I think they meant my homework, but I'm not totally sure. I tried to listen closer, but they said the walls have ears so I poked my ear next to the wall and heard nothing. Adults are so dramatic.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 12th

Secret Tea Conference

Daniel Borisovitch came today (we just call him Mr. D). He's the guy who used to work for the drezi-osiyos to trick parents into sending us to those government schools. Tatty made him tea Mommy says strong tea is perfect for sad grown-ups.

Mr. D told us how they first said, Parents pick your own teachers. Then, once everybody relaxed, they swapped all our teachers with their own secret teachers. One day you loved your teacher; the next day she's gone, replaced with someone who teaches in Yiddish that there's no Hashem. Like magic, but evil. Unfairness Rating: 11/10.

I asked Mr. D if kids ever noticed. He got quiet and said, "Some children refused the non-kosher food they forced on us. They'd clamp their mouths shut like locked treasure chests." I think those kids were real-life superheroes. Meanwhile, I'm a champion mouth-opener. I gulp down my kugel every time.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13th

Mission "Hide the Children"

Tonight's assignment: hide all kids so neighbors don't snitch. The government has principals who send teachers door to door asking, "Any unregistered kids here?"

That's the worst knock ever. If someone answers and says, "No idea," you're safe. If they say, "Yes," the little kid who bakes challah, you're toast.

So we practiced our secret knock:

1) Knock-knock

2) Pause (count to three in your head)

3) Knockñknockñknock

4) Pause (count to three)

5) Knockñknock

Mommy drilled us like an army drill sergeant. I missed step 3 once and Mommy glared

at me so hard I think I glowed. My heart pounded like a drum solo. Unfairness

Rating: 17/10.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 14th

Factory of Schemes

If I can't go outside, I'll build a tunnel! I drew a map connecting our living room,

kitchen, and the shul. Then Tatty said, 'When you're older.' I guess 'older' means

'never' in parent language. Unfairness Rating: 19/10.

Better plan: disguise myself as a broom. I stuffed old towels into my shirt, grabbed

Mommy's feather duster, and tried to sneak past the window. Yankel saw me and laughed so hard he blew a crumb out of his mouth. The plan was ruined. Unfairness

Rating: 23/10.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 15th ñ EREV SHABBOS

First Shabbos prep in lockdownósuper awkward. We have to bring candles from the secret shtibl (small shul) because you're not allowed to bring kids there. Zeidy whispered, 'Only the committee members can bring in candles.' Committee = KGB pals.

Brr.

Mommy said, 'We light under blankets.' I tried to light the candles under my bedsheet. It nearly caught on fire. I screamed so loud I scared the cat. Tatty had to rescue me with a pillow. Note to self: sheets are not flameproof. Unfairness

Rating: 28/10.

MOTZEI SHABBOS, AUGUST 15th

Secret Cheder Night #1

Finally, the melamed arrived! Reb Mendel, beard so long I swear it could trip him. He used our secret knock perfectly. We all gathered in the dark corner of the living room. He whispered the alef-beis like it was a spy code: 'Alef bet' I whispered back 'Why's it so hush-hush in our own house?'

He said, 'Walls have ears.' I checked again. Nada. Then Yankel cracked up and said it means grown-ups think people are listening outside walls. Rude that they treat us like we're not grown-up enough to know that.

Lesson #1: Meshugas culture vs. Yiddishe culture. The melamed gave us pieces of bread that actually tasted like challah! secret homemade challah! For a second I forgot I was in lockdown. Best cheder moment ever. Unfairness Rating (of having to hide): 5/10. (Tiny silver lining.)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 17th

Operation 'Zero Evidence'

Mrs. Petrovna from next door nearly gave us away. A drezi-osiyos spy knocked at her door, asked 'Any kids here?' She almost pointed to our window! I held my breath while Mrs. Petrovna blinked. Finally she said, 'I think the kids are at school.'

Crisis averted.

Yankel says she's 'a friendly neighbor.' I say she's a secret hero. Unfairness

Rating: 8/10 (better than before).

MONDAY, AUGUST 18th

Daniell's 2.0 Visit

Mr. D came back to teach us 'how not to get caught.' He told a story about Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who got arrested in 1927 because of the Yevsektzia. I tried not to yawn, but then he described how the Rebbe prayed in a jail cell so powerfully that the guards got goosebumps. I forgot about boredom and wanted to be there. Unfairness Rating (not being a Rebbe): 999/10.

Then Mr. D whispered, 'They tried feeding us non-kosher food at Pesachó bread that sticks to the roof of your mouth.' I almost gagged. I've never had Pesach bread except my mom's matzah. I guess real matzah never sticks around long enough.'

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19th

Shadow Play at the Shul

We snuck into the 'official' shuló only one left in town. Big bad Chaim Tchernovitzer was there, wearing a grin like a shark. He saw us tiptoeing in and hissed, 'Children are not allowed.' Then he stuck out his little KGB badge and said, 'Without me you'd have nothing.'

He crowed so loud I thought the chandeliers would shake. I tried to hide behind my tallis bag but ended up tripping over Yankel. My elbow bledó ouch! Someone yelled, 'Stop that noise.' So we had to hush up. Unfairness Rating: 48/10 (ouch).

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20th

Chinuch Club Chaos

Today Mommy started our daily half-hour chinuch. She said it's like donning tefillin—non-negotiable. I said, "Can I have ten minutes?" She laughed, "Half-hour, plus extra if you dawdle." So I dawdled on purpose, flipping through pages just to hear her say "Hillel!" again.

Then I invented "pop quiz" mode: she asked me a question randomly whenever I least expect it. I hate pop quizzes. Pop quizzes are the worst. Unfairness Rating: 54/10.

I told Mommy, "You should give extra cookies for correct answers." She smirked and gave me one cookie. One cookie is not a whole lot of motivation.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 21st

Secret Yeshiva #2

Tonight, we met another group of kids for "underground yeshiva." The room smelled like old seforim and fresh kugel crumb. We sat on the floor and whispered our

tefillah. The melamed drew pictures of the Avos on the chalkboard by the candlelight. It was so cool I forgot I'm supposed to be hiding. Even Chaim Tchernovitzer can't touch heritage.

But then someone sneezed. BOOM! candle went out. We all yelped. I stubbed my toe on the coffee table. I hummed Mi Chamocha! in the dark until Mommy brought a new candle. Note: coffee tables are dangerous in low-light conditions. Unfairness Rating: 63/10 (but lesson was awesome).

FRIDAY, AUGUST 22nd is EREV SHABBOS

Final Drill: Shabbos in Disguise

Tomorrow is Shabbos, but first I have to practice my Ipeekaboo! routine: how to look up from behind a book when the drezi-osiyos spy passes without giving away that I exist. Daddy calls it Icamouflage chinuch. I call it Ishlumpy ninja.

I dressed in all-black like a ninja but Mommy said I too suspicious. So I

overdressed in white, thinking people will think I'm a ghost and ignore me. Yankel

said I look more like a powdered donut. I looked in the mirror and realized he's

right. Unfairness Rating of outfits: 33/10.

THE END (for now)

I'm super proud of this secret diary. When I grow up, I'll write it all down for

real. For now, I have to hide this notebook under Zeidy's old siddur. If you find

it, you're a secret agent too! Just don't blow the special knock code:

2ñpauseñ3ñpauseñ2.

Keep calm and keep davening because even in lockdown, Yiddishkeit wins.