

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, I'm DOOMED.

OK so here's the deal. I'm not supposed to exist. I mean, I DO exist (duh), but the neighbors can't know I exist.

Why? Because apparently the government has this GENIUS idea that all kids have to go to their dumb schools where they teach you that Hashem doesn't exist. Which is like teaching kids that candy doesn't exist. WHILE EATING CANDY. It makes no sense!

So basically I'm under house arrest. Except I didn't even do anything wrong! I just exist!

This is SO unfair. On the unfairness scale, this is like a 47 out of 10. It's worse than when Yankel gets the bigger piece of challah. It's worse than having to go to bed early. It's even worse than eating cold cholent.

Monday, August 24th

You know what's the WORST? Watching other kids play outside through the curtains while you're stuck inside like some kind of prisoner.

Today I saw the Goldberg kids (not Jewish) playing with a ball and it bounced RIGHT near our window. I wanted to open it and throw it back SO BAD. But NOOOO. Someone might see me and then boom - government people show up.

I've been thinking though - what if I made a disguise? Like a really big coat and a fake mustache? Then I could pretend to be a short adult! Genius, right? But Mommy said no. She didn't even think about it! Adults have no imagination.

My older brother Yankel thinks he's SO cool because he's 12 and has been hiding longer. He calls himself a "professional hider."

Professional hider. That's not even a real job, Yankel! (Although I'm getting pretty good at it too. Yesterday I hid behind the curtain for 20 minutes and nobody even knew. I'm basically a hiding champion.)

My sister Rivka had to go to school today. I kind of feel bad for her but also she gets to GO OUTSIDE so really who's the winner here?

Tuesday, August 25th

OK so I almost gave us away today and it wasn't even my fault!

We have this special knock so we know it's safe. It goes:

- Knock knock
- Wait (count to 3 in your head)
- Knock knock knock
- Wait (count to 3 again)
- Knock knock

If you mess it up, everyone FREAKS OUT.

So today someone knocked regular and I was right by the door eating an apple and I almost opened it! Mommy DOVE across the room and grabbed my hand. I dropped my apple and it rolled under the couch.

It was just the mailman. But now my apple is gross and fuzzy. Thanks a lot, mailman.

Also Yankel said I almost got us all sent to Siberia. I don't even know where that is but it sounds cold.

Wednesday, August 26th

Mr. Daniel came over today. He DID the special knock right (unlike SOME PEOPLE,

mailman).

He's this old guy who tells the WORST stories. Like, today he told us about how he used to trick parents into sending their kids to the government schools. And then he started getting all emotional about kids who wouldn't eat treif.

He was like "Those children were heroes!" and his eyes got all watery.

Great. Now I feel bad for complaining about being stuck inside. But also... IM STILL STUCK INSIDE. Those kids got to be heroes. I just get to be bored. Unfairness rating: 9 out of 10.

Later I heard Tatty tell Mommy that Daniel said something about "the walls closing in." Are our walls moving?! I checked mine. They seem the same distance apart as yesterday. Adults are so dramatic.

Thursday, August 27th

THIS IS NOT A DRILL. TEACHERS ARE HUNTING FOR KIDS.

I'm not even joking! They're walking around with clipboards asking people "Do you know any kids who should be in school?"

It's like they're the child-catcher from that story, except REAL and OUTSIDE MY HOUSE.

I watched from behind the curtain (I'm getting really good at curtain-watching). One teacher asked Mrs. Goldberg next door and my heart was beating so hard I thought she could probably HEAR it.

But Mrs. Goldberg just shrugged. PHEW.

Yankel says this happens every year. They call it "registration" but I call it "Hunting Season for Hidden Kids."

Friday, August 28th Erev Shabbos

Getting ready for Shabbos when you're in hiding is like trying to play freeze dance but the music NEVER comes back on.

Today Mommy was teaching us the parsha and I wasn't really listening (sorry Mommy) because I was thinking about how badly I wanted to go outside and ride a bike. Do you know how long it's been since I rode a bike? FOREVER.

"HILLEL, ARE YOU PAYING ATTENTION?" MOMMY ASKED.

"YES," I LIED.

"WHAT DID I JUST SAY?"

Uh oh.

"UM... SOMETHING ABOUT... BEING STRONG?"

She sighed. "Yes, Hillel. Yidden have always had to be strong."

Lucky guess!

Motzei Shabbos, August 29th

Tatty has BIG NEWS. We're getting a secret melamed!

But here's like 47 rules about it:

- He'll use the special knock
- We can NEVER tell ANYONE
- Not even other Jewish kids
- Not even if they're our best friends
- Not even if they bribe us with candy

I don't even HAVE any best friends because I CAN'T LEAVE THE HOUSE.

This whole situation is getting ridiculous. I need a chart just to remember all the things I'm not supposed to do.

Sunday, August 30th

Remember the Friedman kids? They got CAUGHT not being in school.

You know what happened? Their parents had to send them to live with relatives IN ANOTHER CITY. Like, their parents were just like "Bye kids, go live somewhere else now!"

That's terrifying! What if that happens to us? What if I have to go live with Tante Miriam? She smells like pickles and pinches cheeks!

Mommy hugged me extra long tonight. I think she's worried too. But at least her hugs don't smell like pickles.

Monday, August 31st

Our melamed came today! His name is Reb Mendel and his beard is so long I bet he could trip on it. (I didn't say that out loud though.)

He whispered THE ENTIRE TIME. Like, we're inside our own house! I whispered back "Why are we whispering?"

He said "The walls have ears in Samarkand."

WHAT?! I spent the next ten minutes staring at the walls looking for ears. I didn't see any.

Yankel laughed so hard he snorted. "It means people might be listening, dummy!"

Oh. That makes more sense. But also, rude, Yankel.

The cool part though? Learning in whispers makes everything feel like a secret mission. We're like Torah spies or something. That's actually pretty awesome. This might be the ONE good thing about hiding - everything feels way more important when it's secret.

Tuesday, September 1st

First day of school! Not for me though. Obviously.

Rivka had to go and she looked like she was going to her own execution. Tatty gave her a hug and whispered something. Probably "Remember everything they say about

Hashem is total nonsense."

I watched all the kids walking by with their backpacks and lunch boxes. One kid dropped his apple and it rolled into the street. He just picked it up and kept eating it! GROSS! But also... at least he CAN eat his apple in the street. Unlike SOME people who are stuck inside.

I'm not bitter. OK maybe a little bitter.

Wednesday, September 2nd

Mommy told us the story of how we came to Samarkand today. Apparently when I was 3, we had to run away from Nazis.

She said I was SO hungry and this not-Jewish neighbor tried to give me food but it wasn't kosher. And I cried and cried but Mommy didn't let me eat it.

"EVEN AS A BABY, YOU KEPT KOSHER!" SHE SAID ALL PROUD.

Great. So I've been suffering for food my WHOLE LIFE. This explains so much.

Thursday, September 3rd

TODAY WAS INSANE.

A teacher came to our door! And she did NOT know the special knock!

Mommy grabbed me and Yankel and basically THREW us into the back room. I crashed into Yankel and we both fell over. My elbow still hurts.

We could hear everything:

Teacher: "Hello, I'm from the school. Do you have any children?"

Mommy: "Just my daughter."

Teacher: "No boys?"

Mommy: "No."

Yankel put his hand over my mouth which was gross because his hands smelled like herring. I couldn't even complain because then the teacher would hear me!

Finally she left. We stayed hidden for another MILLION YEARS (OK, ten minutes) just to be safe.

My heart was beating so fast I thought it might explode. Is this what being a spy feels like? Because I don't like it.

Friday, September 4th Erev Shabbos

Tatty came home early and he looked more tired than that time I made him play horsey for an hour straight.

He said MORE families are having to send their kids away. It's getting worse.

"WILL WE HAVE TO LEAVE?" I ASKED.

"IM YIRTZEH HASHEM, NO," HE SAID.

Then he said we need to be EVEN MORE CAREFUL.

More careful?! What's next, are we going to have to turn invisible? Because that would actually be cool. But also impossible. I checked.

Actually, I have a new plan. What if we dig a tunnel from our house to the shul?

Then we could go places underground like moles! I drew a map and everything. Tatty said "Maybe when you're older." That's adult code for "never."

Later I heard Tatty tell Mommy something about "the net is tightening." Are they fishing for kids now? With actual nets? That's terrifying but also kind of silly.

How big would the net need to be?

This is my life now. Other kids worry about tests and homework. I worry about existing too loudly. Unfairness level: 11 out of 10.

Being a Jewish kid in Samarkand is like playing the world's worst game of hide and seek where:

- You're always hiding
- You can never be found
- There's no winning
- And the seekers work for the government

THE END (of this notebook)

P.S. - Mommy got me a new notebook but I have to hide this one first. I'm thinking under the mattress? No, too obvious. Behind the books? Maybe. Being a professional hider is harder than Yankel makes it look.