

Introduction

In Psalm 15, King David inquires: “O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy mountain?” He then provides a three-point response: “He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart.” There can be no better summation of my brother’s life than these three precepts.

Yes, I refer to Rabbi Dr. Dov Berish ben Dovid Lander as my brother even though we were not related by blood. I am blessed with a blood brother, Naftali Hertz Hasten, with whom I enjoyed a business partnership for more than forty years. But Dr. Lander was also my brother—a brother of the heart. It was a relationship forged from our shared commitment to the value of education and its role in the survival and sustenance of the Jewish people.

It was Dr. Lander who invited me to serve on the Touro Board of Directors. After several months of deliberation I responded to his request with these words: *אעשה ואתה תשע* “I will do and I will take to heart”.

I am pleased to say that I have, with G-d’s help, been able to fulfill this promise, just as Dr. Lander fulfilled all his promises to me. I left home for my first board meeting bearing the following message from my wife, Anna Ruth: “Tell them, the Kahal, (those assembled) that the Ribbono shel Olam (the almighty) loves Dr. Lander.” She was most certainly right about that.

It is from that promise to my brother, Dr. Lander, that the inception of this book was created. The idea was to provide a literary chronicle of this man’s extraordinary life. But over the years of research and authorship, something more emerged. What you will find in these pages is the saga of a single-minded, tenacious, passionate, and devout Jew. A man who regarded insurmountable obstacles as insignificant diversions.

A man whose mission was at times delayed, but never deterred. I am confident

that by reading this book you will be transformed and will come away with a deeper understanding of the book’s title, the Lander Legacy.

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That legacy may be summed up in a single word: triumph. Triumph over ignorance, triumph over evil, and triumph over those who sought to destroy the Jewish people. I witnessed this with my own eyes when my parents, my brother, and I were forced to flee in the face of the turmoil,

brutality, and destruction of the Holocaust. It is no exaggeration to say that it is thanks to righteous individuals like my brother, Bernard Berish Lander, that we are surviving as a thriving people today.

My late mother, Hannah Hasten, ע"ה who understood much about Jewish life during her 102 years on this earth, would often comment: "You have to remember to be Jewish." This point was also made by Dr. Lander time and again in various contexts. You must consciously remember that you are a Jew. You must remember from where you came. As Jews we submit to the will of the Almighty and embrace his Torah and its way of life. As Jews we are also commanded to care for the society around us. Dr. Lander taught us well to strengthen and perpetuate the Jewish heritage and to take responsibility for humanity.

This book is designed to help the reader recall the events of Dr. Lander's life. It is also intended to sharpen one's focus on the values and traditions that motivated and inspired him. If you knew Dr. Lander personally, I hope you find the accounts in this book to be accurate, enlightening, and edifying. If this book is your first introduction to Dr. Lander, then prepare to meet someone whose story can truly change your life. In either case, you are invited to forward your comments and feedback via email to: landerbook@peterweisz.com.

This book is filled with an abundance of compelling accounts drawn from the life of this singular and unparalleled individual. A man who was my friend, my teacher, my colleague, and my brother. It is my hope that you will be touched by his story in the same profound manner that his life inspired mine and the lives of so many others. In this way my promise to Dr. Lander will indeed be fulfilled. ע"ה א"ע משנר ה'שענ"א "We will do and we will take to heart." I am confident that upon reading this incredible saga each of us will be better prepared to contribute to and expand upon the great gift that has been bestowed upon our generation and generations to come. The gift known as the Lander Legacy.

Dr. Mark Hasten, Chairman
Touro College and University System Board of Trustees

Preface

It was through Dr. Bernard Lander's vision and idealism that Touro

College was founded. It will be through the achievements of countless students that his legacy will endure. With dedication to Dr. Lander's noble mission, I am privileged to lead this unique college and university system, and I am honored to reflect on the meaning of his legacy.

Dr. Lander was a man of action and of high achievement even before he founded Touro College. At the pinnacle of a distinguished academic, rabbinic, and government service career, Dr. Lander decided to pursue a grand dream: the founding of a new college. His brilliance, creativity, and energy enabled him to successfully surmount obstacles along the path to the eventual realization of a dream that many considered to be unattainable.

I first met Dr. Lander when I was a child. I recall that he was always planning and dreaming of the future. As Touro expanded, Dr. Lander's dreams came true. Today, the Touro College and University System has more than 19,000 students at 32 locations throughout the New York City metropolitan area, across the country and around the world. They pursue degree programs in a comprehensive and growing spectrum of academic disciplines.

Dr. Lander's founding principles will continue to mold Touro's development. His legacy will inspire Touro's innovation and leadership.

Dr. Lander's legacy not only continues in Touro's myriad successes. It is perpetuated in the lives of his children, in their aspirations, and the remarkable goals they achieve. All of Touro joins them in taking great pride in Dr. Lander's accomplishments.

The second half of the book, focusing on Dr. Lander's establishment of Touro, reveals his invincible determination to actualize his dream. From chapter to chapter, the reader learns how Dr. Lander continued to turn impediments into catalysts for even greater accomplishment. His life is a testament to the power of perseverance and how it can ultimately change the world.

What is to be the legacy of Dr. Bernard Lander? The significance of his life transcends the many schools he founded, including those that bear his name. Perhaps the essence of Dr. Lander's legacy is in his untiring leadership,

his character, and his remarkable capacity for turning challenges into opportunities.

As Dr. Lander's achievements continue to be honored, may others find in the multifaceted richness of his life and legacy the inspiration to accomplish their life goals.

Dr. Alan Kadish
President and CEO
Touro College and University System

Chapter One

David and Goldie

There are three partners in man: The Holy One, blessed be He, his father, and his mother.

—Talmud, Kiddushin 30b

The great Hasidic sage known as the Kotzker Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem

Mendel Morgensztern) once cleverly noted that “All that is thought should not be said, all that is said should not be written, all that is written should not be published, and all that is published should not be read.” While this argument on the virtues of discretion certainly carries weight, it also implies its own converse. There do, in fact, exist thoughts that should be articulated, words that indeed ought to be written, and stories that deserve to be told. The saga of Bernard Lander’s parents is unquestionably such a story.

As immigrants, David and Goldie Lander were part of a tradition that fundamentally defined the American experience. Social historians have noted that America’s strength is in large part due to something described as the “filter of immigration.” With the exception of Native Americans and most African-Americans, everyone who has ever lived in the United States has either passed through this filter or descended from someone who has. There exists in every American’s family tree at least one person who possessed the initiative to immigrate to America, leaving those with less moxie behind. What force drives one of two brothers to leave his homeland for a better life while the other elects to stay put? What internal impetus prompts some to flee their country’s oppressive conditions while others elect to hang back and endure—or perhaps try to change—those conditions? Whatever the reason, or so the theory goes, the result is that throughout its history, the United States has served as a powerful magnet for the striver, the dreamer, the entrepreneur.

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According to this idealized model, it is the complacent and the less ambitious who are filtered out during the immigration process. As their strong-willed and independent brethren pass through the filter and go on to populate the nation, their work ethic and cherished values are internalized

and passed on to each succeeding generation, creating a vast culture of accomplishment. Bernard Lander's parents, along with the many Jews who immigrated to the United States from eastern Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were prime exemplars of this group.

David Lander was raised in the scenic shtetl of Mikulince, situated in the Seret Valley of what is today the Tarnopol district of western Ukraine. Tucked into the crook of the Seret River, Mikulince was typical of the many villages that dotted the main highway between Warsaw and Odessa in the 1880s. The town's 2,500 Jews, along with its roughly 1,500 gentiles, were subjects of the House of Hapsburg, which ruled what became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after Poland was partitioned in 1772. By the time of David's birth in 1888, Galicia was the largest, and the most impoverished, province of the realm. Thanks to the European Enlightenment, initiated by Napoleon and that finally reached Eastern Europe in the 1860s, Jews were afforded religious and individual rights and were able to participate in local political organizations.

Jews had actually been living in Mikulince since at least the early 1600s (according to gravestone dates) under alternating periods of repression and tolerance. By the 1880s, all Jewish families, including the Landers, lived in the town's central commercial area while the Christian peasantry worked the fertile black-dirt fields in the surrounding countryside.

Political and economic forces that swept across Eastern Europe shortly after David Lander's birth would soon lead to the family's uprooting and to its being set awash amidst the historic wave of immigration that came crashing upon American shores.

Before this exodus, however, the Lander's hometown was a microcosm of the greater Jewish world it inhabited. Like all similar shtetls, Mikulince was buffeted by religious forces from both the east and the west. The rise of grassroots populist Judaism, known as Hasidism, spread by disciples of the Baal Shem Tov, from Lithuania throughout Galicia, resulted in a network of learning and prayer centers throughout the region. Despite the David and Goldie 3

Austrian regime's efforts to suppress it, Hasidic dynasties that challenged the established rabbinic authority arose and were met by resistance by the more educated adherents of traditional Judaism. This cultural conflict between

the Hasidim and Mitnagdim raged in nearby Tarnopol, occasionally erupting into violence and bloodshed. The Jews of the satellite community of Mikulince were forced to align themselves with one faction or the other. But a strong wind from the west was also blowing. The Jewish response

to modernity known as Haskalah was having an impact on the shtetl and upon families such as the Landers. Haskalah urged Jews to set aside their traditional trappings and assimilate into the mainstream, mostly Germanspeaking,

popular culture. This ongoing three-way dynamic among the rabbinic traditional school, the populist Hasidic strain, and the Haskalah modernists, led to an endless series of reactions and counter-reactions that characterized the era. In terms of sheer numbers, it was Hasidism that dominated Galicia, with six out of every seven Jews claiming to be an adherent

of one Rebbe or another—hundreds of whom held court in nearby towns and villages where they enjoyed the support of the majority of the local Jewish population. Such was the case in Mikulince at the time David Lander was born. But the internecine squabbling among these prevailing streams of Judaism would soon seem petty and trivial when compared to the clouds of conflict that were now amassing on the horizon.

While the Jews of the region supported themselves as small shopkeepers, selling buttons, shoelaces, grain, fabrics, and even carriages and new-fangled sewing machines, the newly enfranchised Christian population remained mostly on the farm, raising their crops and hauling them to market each week. There, the non-Jews would observe the increasing disparity between their own lives and those of the town's Jewish populace, who were beginning to prosper commercially. In fact, Jews dominated many industries by the late 1800s. They owned flour mills, saw mills, alcohol distilleries, small oil refineries, tanneries, brickyards, and textile plants. Most such enterprises were small, family-operated businesses.

As public education proliferated, Jews began entering the professions.

Christians soon came into an increasing level of contact with Jewish professionals working as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and civil servants. The dissonance created by this economic disparity was profound, particularly in light of the church's teachings concerning the fate

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of Jews who were supposed to be condemned for their rejection (and, in the view of many, the murder) of the messiah. In order to remedy this perceived inequity, non-Jews began organizing themselves into various credit and agricultural unions in an effort to improve their general economic standing. This striving, coupled with rising nationalistic aspirations on the part of Galicia's Polish and Ukrainian populations, stimulated ferocious economic competition. The newly formed trade associations circumvented Jewish businesses and organized widespread anti-Jewish boycotts. One such boycott, announced in 1893 at a Catholic

convention in Cracow, remained in place until the outbreak of World War One.

These increasingly powerful trade associations exerted pressure on the Galician authorities to enact legislation that served to cripple Jewish commerce.

Political parties arose in the region whose basic platform was an advocacy of anti-Semitic legislation. As it would during the rise of Nazism, such initiatives gathered steam thanks to Europe's centuries-old tradition of anti-Jewish dogma as espoused by the church. Not surprisingly, the fragile economic situation of Galician Jewry worsened rapidly. Life for the Landers soon became unbearable.

Adding to the crushing poverty, brought on by confiscatory taxation and discrimination, Jews also faced increasing exposure to life-long conscription into the Emperor's army as the worldwide military buildup gained momentum. As was the case for many Jews, hopes of a better future were soon vanishing for the Lander family. Along with millions of other Galician Jews, the Landers sought to join their co-religionists fleeing Czarist Russia in their flight across the Atlantic. Between the event that triggered this massive Russian exodus from the "Pale of Settlement"—the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881—until the outbreak of war in 1914, fully one third of Eastern European Jewry, fleeing governmentsanctioned

pogroms and institutionalized poverty, abandoned their homelands and passed through the filter of immigration, landing in America.

Nearly one quarter of a million of these, including the Lander family, came from Galicia.

David Lander was not the first member of his family to make the Atlantic crossing. In fact, as David explained to friends at the time, he was going to America to pray at the grave of his father, Nissan. David had a strong appreciation for his family roots. His father had often stressed that David and Goldie 5

David was descended from the Noda B'Yehuda, the respected eighteenth century chief rabbi of Prague, who was among the greatest Jewish spiritual leaders of the age. The great sage, whose real name was Yechezkel ben Yehuda Landau, came from a distinguished family who traced its lineage back to Rashi, the eleventh century French exegete considered among the most learned Torah and Talmud scholars in history. The name Landau was later altered to Lander, presumably to avoid military conscription.

David was only ten years old when his forty-three-year-old father (Bernard's grandfather) left Mikulince for New York City. Like many immigrants,

Nissan planned to earn some money and then arrange to transport the rest of his family to America. Sadly, he was in the country for less than a year before falling ill and succumbing to food poisoning, just as the nineteenth century was coming to a close. Seven years later, Nissan's son, David, embarked on a mission to the new world to complete his fallen father's dream of delivering the family to America's shores. David set sail from Rotterdam, arriving at Ellis Island on August 13, 1907, one day after his nineteenth birthday. He was greeted by his sister, Nechama, who had arrived to New York one year earlier.

Like many immigrants, David Lander dreamed of making it rich in the "Goldene Medinah." David initially resided with his uncle, Wolf Wasser, an observant Jew, who lived amidst the crowded immigrant tenements that were emerging across New York City. Other transplanted relatives were not so intent on maintaining the strict lifestyle of Orthodox Judaism. These family members had established new, successful businesses in their adopted homeland and taunted David, labeling him a "green onion" for his refusal to work on Shabbos. Despite this obstacle, David found work in the textile trade and soon had accumulated enough cash to pay for his sister Rosie's passage to America in 1910. Rosie at first moved in with David, who was living in a small cold-water apartment. Eventually he was able to secure the immigration of his mother and two remaining sisters who arrived in 1912, completing the family's transplantation and the fulfillment of his father's dream.

It was not long after, that David Lander met Goldie Teitelbaum.

Bernard Lander's mother, Goldie, was born in 1892 and grew up in Sieniawa. She was the eldest of three daughters born to Dov Berish and Hannah Teitelbaum. The community of Sieniawa was amazingly similar to David Lander's hometown, some 200 miles to the northeast, as it

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was to the thousands of other shtetls that dotted the Galician heartland.

Today Sieniawa sits in southeast Poland, about 120 miles due east of Krakow.

Like David Lander's shtetl of Mikulince, Sieniawa at the time Goldie left, contained about 2,500 Jews living in the central district with another 1,500 non-Jews living in the surrounding countryside.

Goldie's stone house was one of the few that boasted electricity. The Teitelbaums were among the town's leading families and claimed descent from one of Hasidism's towering figures: Reb Moshe Teitelbaum, the founder of the Satmar and Sighet Hasidic dynasties. Known as "Yismach Moshe," Teitelbaum served as the Rav of Sieniawa until his 1841 death in Sighet. He was succeeded by Yechezkel Halberstam, dubbed

the Shineveh Rebbe, who held that title until his death in 1898. Halberstam's dedication to fighting the forces of Haskalah, in Tarnopol and throughout the region, became the hallmark of his tenure. The Shineveh Rebbe was also a widely respected scholar and sage who attracted a following

of thousands of Hasidic disciples. Goldie's parents were evidently among them since the Shineveh Rebbe officiated at their wedding. It was the Shineveh Rebbe who was responsible for sending the first emissary of this Jewish community to America and thereby set the wheels in motion that would eventually account for Bernard Lander's presence in New York City. Goldie's mother, Hannah, had an older half-brother, Israel Koenigsberg, who set out for New York City in 1888 at the behest of the Shineveh Rebbe. His mission was to solicit financial support for the Galicianer Kollel, the organization that raised money to support Torah scholars from Galicia who were studying in Palestine. Possessing an indomitable

spirit and an abiding inner passion, Israel Koenigsberg passed through the filter of immigration and soon found success in America. He served for more than forty years as the chairman of Kollel Chibas Yerushalayim,

a charity that channeled needed funds to Galician scholars in the Holy Land.

Koenigsberg found commercial success as well, emerging as a prosperous meat merchant. He was one of the founders of a yeshiva and a respected Talmud Torah school. Koenigsberg, early on, helped to create the Shineveh Shtiebel, which soon became one of the three most important Hasidic synagogues in New York's Orthodox community. It was at this Shineveh Shtiebel, established by her Uncle Israel, that Goldie Teitelbaum would meet her future husband, David Lander.

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Of all of Israel Koenigsberg's many accomplishments, the one that had the most profound impact upon the life of Bernard Lander was Israel's fathering of Benjamin, his first child born in America. Ben would go on to become a nationally known leader, founding the Young Israel movement, and serving as Bernard's influential mentor throughout the course of his life.

Like David Lander, Goldie Teitelbaum also lost her father at an early age. During a particularly cold December in 1898, Goldie's father, Dov Berish, attended the funeral of his spiritual leader, the Shineveh Rebbe, who had died at age eighty-four. As Jewish law commands, Dov Berish visited the unheated Mikvah (ritual bath) prior to the burial. He caught

cold and was soon stricken with pneumonia. He died six weeks later, leaving behind six-year-old Goldie and her two sisters.

Eleven years later, in 1909, Goldie was delighted to open one of the letters she regularly received from her Uncle Israel, now well-established in New York City. Goldie enjoyed corresponding with her wealthy American relative. She would write of life in the shtetl, bringing him up to date on the latest births, deaths, and other community news. His letters back to her were filled with the wonders of the new world. Descriptions of streetcars, subways, and motion pictures were included among Uncle Israel's accounts of Jewish life in the most celebrated city in America. This particular letter held a special announcement. It extended an invitation to Goldie to attend the forthcoming wedding of Israel's son, Ben. Sixteen and quite precocious, Goldie wrote back to her uncle thanking him for the invitation but pointing out that "an invitation without a ticket was meaningless." Israel got the message and sent Goldie a second-class steamer ticket enabling her to attend her cousin Ben's wedding in New York City and thereby making her most cosmopolitan dream come true.

Until his death, Bernard Lander attributed his mother's immigration—not to mention his very own existence—as being the direct result of the blessing that the Shineveh Rebbe bestowed upon Israel Koenigsberg as he was preparing to leave for America more than 120 years ago. In sending him off, the Rebbe instructed the young man: "Dedicate yourself to the needs of the community, and your sojourn in America will be successful. Not just for you, but for those who will follow you."

Not surprisingly, Goldie did not return to Sieniawa after attending cousin Ben's wedding. During the following four years she worked as a

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saleslady in a predominantly Italian neighborhood and regularly attended Shabbos services behind the mechitzah (partition separating the genders) at the Shineveh Shtiebel, founded by her Uncle Israel and located in the back of a tenement building at 122 Ridge Street. It was not long after that she met and fell in love with twenty-five-year-old David Lander, an upand-coming merchant in the shmatteh (clothing) business. Goldie saw in David a European-born Jew who had opted not to shed his heritage upon arriving at New York harbor. She admired his level of observance and his dedication to Judaic traditions and principles. Given the many Amerikanishe Jews she had met since her arrival, David Lander represented a breath of fresh air. Likewise, David was strongly attracted to this pretty young member of a venerated Jewish family.

The couple was married in August 1913 and established a household in David's tiny apartment. Within a few years the Landers had moved up

to 13th Street and, soon thereafter, on June 17, 1915, Goldie gave birth to their first child. They named him Bernard after her father, Dov Berish Teitelbaum.

The couple opened a fabric store on First Avenue, between 13th and 14th Streets, that was well received by the neighborhood's predominantly

Italian residents. David Lander was an introspective man, regarded as decisive with an excellent head for business. Goldie was gregarious and friendly to everyone. Her people skills and her ability to speak some Italian served her well as she carried out her role as the store's sales manager.

The couple had two more children: Hadassah, born in 1917 and Nathan (Nissan), in 1920. By 1925 the family had moved to an elevator building across the street from Stuyvesant High School and a half a block from Stuyvesant Park. Beyond his emergence as a successful businessman, David Lander was active in the Jewish life of his community. He served for many years as the president of the Tifferes Yisrael Synagogue on 13th Street. He also supported the Shineveh Shtiebel as a member of its Chevre group. Sometimes these two worlds would come into conflict. On Shabbos and during Jewish holidays, David would walk with his children to the shtiebel. He made it a point, however, never to walk down First Avenue where the Lander's fabric store was located. A store like Lander's could easily do half a week's business on a Saturday. But because

of his religious convictions, David Lander kept his store closed on Shabbos, and he did not wish for his children to witness this lost revenue. David and Goldie 9

"Shabbos should be filled with joy," was David's position, "and not filled with worry about lost business."

Although the Lander family prospered in America—by the late 1920s they had a sales staff, could afford to spend summers at a Catskill Mountain resort, and were able to pay for the children's yeshiva tuition—they never lost sight of their obligation to help other family members and to do their part in behalf of the community. When hard times hit, David Lander still found the funds to pay for the private yeshiva education of other children in the family. Coupled with their grace and generosity, the Landers were regarded as dispensers of wisdom and sound advice—both business-related and personal. Bernard recalled many an evening as friends and family would gather around the kitchen table and look to his father and mother for guidance in their personal affairs. Goldie, in particular, was the consummate hostess. Blessed with an infectious sense of humor, Goldie embraced her guests with a "fire in her eyes" and a genuine interest

in their problems. Bernard recalled watching her offer a comforting word to her visitors as she escorted each one to the door.

By 1931 the Great Depression was wreaking economic havoc on the garment industry. David and Goldie were forced to close their store and move both their home and the store back to the old neighborhood. Although David tried his hand at becoming a wholesale supplier of exotic fabrics, most of the family's income during the 1930s arose from the retail store they operated on Orchard Street. The family lived modestly, but comfortably for many years on Second Avenue in the midst of the city's theatre district, moving eventually to a triangular building at 240. E. Houston. The Depression years were stressful, but the family did not really suffer great deprivation.

As World War II erupted, David Lander opened a business on West 36th Street, Manhattan's Fashion Avenue, importing and wholesaling velveteen fabric, a cotton cloth that is often mixed with silk in order to simulate the feel of velvet. The business was generally successful, although

it was continually at the mercy of the ever-shifting winds of the fashion world.

In 1941 the family relocated to a home on Bennett Avenue in Washington Heights. They were the first observant Jewish family in the building, located within walking distance of the well-known Breuer Shul.

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David Lander would go to work by train each day where he would meet Bernard and his brother Nathan. Both young men worked with their father during much of their adult lives. Goldie, by this point, was less active in the business. She missed the one-on-one customer interaction of the retail trade and did not feel that she played as much of a role in the wholesale end of things.

Along with his business and synagogue activities, David had also been a member of Mizrachi since 1913. Mizrachi was the major religious Zionist movement that sought to recreate a Jewish presence in Eretz Yisroel as delineated in the Torah. The American Mizrachi movement had been founded by Goldie's cousin, Ben Koenigsberg. Not surprisingly, Ben had enlisted his cousin's husband, David, to the cause. David soon became an ardent advocate for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, a value he passed on to his son, Bernard and to his siblings.

David and Goldie finally were able to visit Israel in 1968. Later, David commented to Bernard about the great privilege he experienced by "walking in the footsteps of our patriarchs; the very roads that Avraham Avinu had traveled."

Both of Bernard Lander's parents were blessed with a lengthy lifespan. David died on April 6, 1980 at age ninety-two, after having continued working at his profession until his retirement at age eighty-eight. His funeral was attended by many of New York's Hasidic leadership, including Grand Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam, the Bobover Rebbe.

Goldie remained in Washington Heights after David's death and often made visits to Touro College, the institution her son Bernard had founded. Bernard Lander cherished those visits above all else, invariably interrupting his involvement with the business of the day in order to welcome her and provide her with an honored seat by his side. Well into her nineties, Goldie was known to offer lucid comments and dispense sound advice as she sat in on her son's business meetings.

She prayed for, and was granted, a clarity of mind for the length of her days. She prayed that the Divine Presence should not forsake her while she remained alive and her prayer was answered. Goldie Lander died, with both sound mind and unwavering spirit intact, on July 17, 1991, at age ninety-nine. She lived long enough to witness much of her son Bernard's story unfold, a story that begins during the 1920s in that most unique cultural cauldron known as New York's Lower East Side.

Chapter two

The Boy on the Platform

The world exists only by virtue of the breath of
schoolchildren.

—Talmud, Shabbat 119b

The dreaded day had arrived at last. Dreaded by Bernard's mother,

Goldie, that is. This day of trauma and trepidation had, in fact, long been anticipated by Bernard himself. For the Orthodox Jewish nine-year-old boy, standing on the elevated train platform a few steps from Stuyvesant Park and his family's 15th Street apartment—looking down on the peddler-packed streets of the Lower East Side—today was Independence Day. The summer of 1924 had lain for weeks like a stifling comforter across the city's immigrant neighborhoods, but today Bernard felt light-hearted and liberated. He was on his way. He was leaving one mother's embrace for that of another.

Goldie Lander was instinctively overprotective. This was, perhaps, for good reason. Bernard, her first-born, had not uttered a word in any of the three languages that permeated the Lander household (Yiddish, Hebrew, and English) until he was four years old. By then Goldie and David Lander had shuttled their quiet son to numerous doctors and therapists, the last of whom suggested that Bernard have his tonsils removed. His parents did so, and this helped a bit, but the boy remained silent. Then, as if by magic, Bernard suddenly began speaking fluently shortly after his fourth birthday; a trait that was shared many years later by his own son and grandson. This congenitally delayed speech development seemed to be no impediment to future success, however, and all three Lander men became accomplished orators upon reaching adulthood.

Although Bernard's childhood family was far from affluent, Goldie always harbored a slightly irrational fear that someone would kidnap her young boy and hold him for ransom. The fact that the family lived across
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the boulevard from New York's infamous Hell's Kitchen only added to her nervous apprehension. The area was notorious for its A Manu Neura or Black Hand operators who would extort protection money from illiterate immigrant families by sending them threatening notes consisting of only a palm print dipped in black ink.

Goldie had finally overcome some of these maternal misgivings and had agreed to allow Bernard to ride the elevated train uptown by himself. His destination was to be his second home.

David and Goldie Lander had decided that it was time to pull their precocious son out of the New York public school system and enroll him at the RJJ religious school. RJJ stood for Rabbi Jacob Joseph, a distinguished religious leader who, during the 1880s, was lured away from his post as the Maggid of Vilna in Lithuania to serve as the chief rabbi of New York's Association of American Hebrew Congregations, a federation of Eastern European synagogues. Rabbi Joseph's nickname was "Rav Yaakov Charif (sharp)" because of his facile mind. It was this quality that prompted the school's founder, Rabbi Shmuel Yitzhak Andron, to bestow Rabbi Joseph's name on his new institution when its doors opened in 1900. In short order the RJJ school became a driving force in promoting Torah learning and teaching religious observance to transplanted Orthodox Jews and their offspring in America.

A strong factor in the Landers' decision to enroll their son at the RJJ was a man who would become a towering figure in the life of Bernard Lander. Benjamin Koenigsberg was Goldie Lander's cousin and since 1923 had served as the chairman of the RJJ's Board of Trustees. Ben Koenigsberg was the American-born son of Goldie's uncle (more of a grandfather figure to Bernard), Israel Koenigsberg. Israel assiduously maintained the lifeline between the old world and the new by managing the Kollel Chibas Yerushalayim, a support group for Galician Torah scholars in Palestine. In 1924 Israel took the perilous step of embarking on a sea voyage to British mandated Palestine or, as traditional Jews referred to it, Eretz Yisrael. The sight of his great-uncle Israel's picking up, at age sixty-four, and his traveling to the holy city of Tsefat, left a deep and lasting impression on young Bernard.

But it was Uncle Yisroel's son Ben who was to become Bernard Lander's major role model. Ben, as a young man in 1905, had caused an uproar among the Orthodox Jewish community when he sat for and was admitted

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to the New York Bar. At that time there were no Orthodox attorneys, and such a worldly occupation did not seem appropriate for the son of a respected Torah scholar like Israel Koenigsberg. But Ben would have none of this. He believed, as did many of his generation, that G-d had deposited him onto the soil of this new land for a distinct purpose. And that purpose could best be fulfilled by adapting somewhat to the ways of his new homeland. Benjamin Koenigsberg spent his life building a solid foundation for American Orthodox Judaism. Among his many initiatives, Ben

organized the first Friday night English language Torah lecture series. This was done to counter the efforts of Rabbi Stephen Wise, who was planning to establish an English language Reform synagogue on the Lower East Side. The lectures were held at the massive Kavalirer Synagogue, more popularly known as the Pitt Street Shul. The inaugural address was delivered by Rabbi Judah Magnes from the Clinton Street Reform synagogue and the head of the New York City Kehillah. More than 5,000 Torahhungry listeners packed the synagogue. The Pitt Street lecture series was an immediate success and served as the cornerstone for the Young Israel movement that continued for more than forty years under the passionate leadership of Ben Koenigsberg. Naturally, Bernard Lander would, in a few years, become an active member. But on this day, it was not thoughts about his cousin and future mentor that inhabited the boy's head. Instead, he was no doubt experiencing some apprehension and excitement at this watershed moment in his life. As he peered down the elevated track into the dusty morning daylight, Bernard must have imagined that it was his future that was barreling down the rails at breakneck speed.

At his new school, RJJ, Bernard would be but one of hundreds of students—an order of magnitude expansion from his cloistered public school universe. Standing on that platform, with Goldie keeping both her distance and a watchful eye, he was saying a private goodbye to his frivolous childhood. At PS 19, Bernard's academic prowess had shone brightly, but his independent temperament and his impatience with his teacher's slow pedagogic pace, resulted in frequent "deportment" issues. He invariably impressed his teachers with his boundless energy and self-confident aplomb. This self-confidence also served him well when dealing with his non-Jewish classmates. The student body was an ethnic reflection of the Lower East Side neighborhood it served. Bernard, at that point in his life, believed that one half of the world was composed

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of Italian Catholics, one quarter was Jewish like him, and the rest was a mixture of other ethnic groups.

Like most immigrant parents, David and Goldie Lander viewed the public school system as a means of acculturation and a portal to success in the wider, secular society. While many observant families trained their children to shun the glittering opportunities represented by American modernity and stay devoted to traditional Torah study, this was not the case with the Landers. They encouraged young Bernard to read secular books and were pleased that he spent much of his free time at the public library. His parents even went so far as to purchase, for Bernard's edification, a set of the premier children's encyclopedia of the day, *The Book*

of Knowledge—the only known set ever sold in the entire neighborhood. Bernard consumed all twenty volumes with a passion, reading and rereading the dog-eared volumes time and time again. This lust for learning, not surprisingly, resulted in his emergence as a top academic student.

Although they initially sent him to public school, Bernard's parents had no intention of neglecting his Judaic education. As soon as he started at PS 19, David and Goldie had arranged for Bernard to study every day with a private tutor named Mr. Himmelfarb. Mr. Himmelfarb worked as the shamash (deacon) at Tifferes Yisroel, the synagogue across the street from the Lander home. Beginning with the basics of Chumash and Mishna, Bernard quickly advanced to studying the more advanced Gemora. Bernard's parents wished for him to focus on his Jewish studies in order to channel some of his inventive and at times, capricious, tendencies. They were only partially successful.

Bernard was every bit as accomplished at pulling off pranks as he was at his studies. After spending the summer collecting grasshoppers at “Stuy” Park, and then feeding them in captivity, he surreptitiously released fifty of the lively insects in class, causing a major panic. Adding luster to this accomplishment was the fact that he was never apprehended. He was careful to cover his (and the grasshoppers') tracks so as not to be sentenced to the demonic “rat hole”—in actuality, a dark broom closet where a student being punished was forced to stand and contemplate his sins. But Bernard was as clever as he was precocious and, despite his frequent infractions, he never saw the inside of the rat hole.

Before moving to 15th Street, the Lander family lived in a cold-water flat at 336 E. 13th Street, directly across the street from Tifferes Yisrael, The Boy on the Platform 15

the synagogue where Bernard's father, David, served as congregational president. The family's shmatteh business was located on the next block and one block farther was Stuyvesant Park, with its lush shade trees and many wooden benches. Down the street, on First Avenue, stood PS 19. Each ethnic group in the neighborhood held dominion over its own well-defined turf, with the park and the school serving as common ground areas. It was a true “East Side Story” environment.

Growing up on this borderline boulevard had molded Bernard into a street savvy kid who knew his way around the block. On the last day of third grade, Bernard had listened to the school kids singing their devilish refrain on his way home from school: “No more teachers, no more books. Hang the teachers up on hooks!” As he hurriedly made his way past the trattorias and cannoli shops, he turned quickly to hear the crack of a gunshot ring out. Ducking close to the ground, Bernard got a glimpse of a

hand releasing a smoking pistol and watched as it fell to the ground next to the body of the victim. Wide-eyed, his heart pumping wildly, Bernard focused on the perpetrator as he watched him smoothly blend into the crowd that was quickly forming around the prone body. When the police arrived, the shooter behaved casually, like an innocent passer-by and was not detained. Bernard considered approaching the police, but then thought better of it. Who would believe an eight-year-old boy, especially a Jewish kid from the other side of 15th Street?

Despite his mother's overprotective nature, there was no shielding Bernard from the rough-cut culture of the street. Like other kids his age, he would spend hours playing punch ball and stickball. This culture also had a particular rite of passage whereby boys were called upon to prove their manhood by jumping from a fifth floor window of one building down onto the fourth floor roof of a neighboring one. Bernard did not engage in this particular bit of bravado, although he was willing to occasionally jump directly from one fourth floor window to another. He survived all these high jinks without a scratch, although similar encounters left him somewhat worse for wear. One day he arrived home with all the buttons of his shirt ripped off. He explained to Goldie that he had had a run-in with a Jew-hating Ukrainian tough they called "The Giraffe." The Giraffe had used his switchblade knife to remove Bernard's buttons one by one and then dared him to do something about it. Bernard walked away, but he already understood the value of alliances and managed, a few days after

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his encounter with The Giraffe, to round up a group of friendly Italian boys who agreed to "take care of him." Bernard never lost another button after that.

But all this was behind him now. At RJJ there would be no more immigrant melting pot. He would become immersed in time honored study techniques developed in Lithuania and administered by Rabbi Shmuel Yitzhak Andron. Most of the other students at RJJ were from Hasidic families. Bernard knew some of them from the Shineveh Shtiebel. The shtiebel, or "little house," was an artifact from the old world that had been transplanted into the Hasidic communities of New York. These were not merely rooms set aside for communal Jewish prayer but also served as community gathering spots. In contrast to a formal synagogue, a shtiebel is far smaller and approached more casually. In the Hasidic communities of Eastern Europe prior to the Holocaust, it was in the shtiebelekh where disciples, or Hasidim, could get close to their revered and beloved rebbe. The Shineveh Shtiebel was where the Lander family would often visit to

pray and reconnect with their heritage. This particular shtiebel was immortalized

in the writings of the beloved Jewish composer Ernest Bloch, who visited there and then wrote about how the sacred singing had deeply affected him: “I assure you that my music seems to me a very poor little thing beside that which I had heard! And that all the kings on earth ... appear to me as very vulgar people beside these old ones, proud in their poverty, rich in their certainties.” Bernard grew to cherish the camaraderie and nurturing warmth of the shtiebel. But inexorably, the rapidly changing world outside this insulated environment would soon begin to impose itself onto the youngster’s consciousness.

Bernard Lander had heard his father comment many times: “Shver tsu zayn a Yid.” The world makes it hard to be a Jew. One could argue that this was, at the same time, both true and not true in the milieu of Jewish New York in the 1920s. It was truly a Dickensian period—encompassing both the best and the worst of times. The Eastern European Jews who had fled persecution and pogroms to arrive to “Der Goldeneh Medinah” had, for the most part, found what they had been seeking: life under a regime that did not interfere with their religious practices. The early decades of the twentieth century saw something of a renaissance in Jewish culture centered in New York and as evidenced by the growth of the Yiddish theatre,

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a host of Jewish newspapers, book publishers, and—among the most observant—

bustling new communities in places like Williamsburg and Boro Park in Brooklyn. These Orthodox strongholds maintained strong links, both spiritual and financial, with their European counterparts, while at the same time support flowed from both sides of the Atlantic to religious Zionist movements, such as Mizrahi, in Palestine. This intercontinental Torah triangle defined the Jewish world up through the 1930s. But at the same time, as this flowering of Jewish culture was taking place in some quarters, the bile of anti-Semitism was spewing across Western nations, including here, in the Home of the Brave and the Land of the Free. The economic boom that had helped to elevate the living standards of immigrant families like the Landers brought with it a dark side. The era was marked by a decided provincialism and a narrowing of the heart. Most Americans understood that “The War to End All Wars” had been, in fact, nothing more than a mere slogan. The National Origins Act, passed in 1924, put an end to the flow of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe as America turned increasingly inward and isolationist. The Ku Klux Klan reached the pinnacle of its power during this period

by combining pagan ritual with its message of hate-tinged white supremacy. And while Henry Ford had, through the advent of the assembly line, placed the automobile and many other consumer goods within the grasp of the average working man, he used the fortune he amassed to underwrite

his virulent anti-Semitic agenda. Ford purchased the Dearborn Independent newspaper in 1919, and it was soon running a daily feature called "The International Jew," in which he published vicious anti-Jewish rants and reprinted excerpts from the infamous bogus tract promulgated in Czarist Russia known as "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." All the Jew baiting paid off handsomely. The paper was soon selling 700,000 copies a week across the country. Meanwhile, as Harvard and other major universities began imposing Jewish student quotas, an obscure radio evangelist named Father Coughlin gained a national following by lambasting the "Jewish Conspiracy" with regularity to the nation's fast-merging

radio audience. Fueled and reinforced by the wave of political anti-Semitism spreading across Europe, American-style anti-Jewish sentiment

was causing Jews to be barred from academic positions, banks, hospitals, and other white-collar occupations. Housing restrictions were also

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imposed with many neighborhoods posting signs identifying themselves as "Christian Communities."

As a nine-year-old boy, standing alone on a New York train platform, waiting to be whisked off toward his own destiny, Bernard Lander was no doubt oblivious to these macro sociological and political forces. But he was soon to encounter their effects. The antipathy and antagonism that was building against American Jews would soon be felt by Bernard as he went to and from his ten-hour study-filled days at RJJ. He was required to pass the grounds of an Irish Catholic parochial school, where the students were taught daily about how their Savior had been murdered through the treachery of Jews. Epithets would be hurled and fistfights would erupt as the age-old bugaboos of classical anti-Semitism were conjured up on the mean sidewalks of New York.

The streams of hatred that young Bernard Lander was required to traverse would, over the coming decade, merge into first a torrent and then a flooding river, rampant with Jewish blood and tears. From the RJJ school, Bernard Lander's next stop along his Judaic odyssey was the Talmudic Academy high school. He graduated from the TA in January of 1933, within weeks of the ascension to office of both Franklin D. Roosevelt and

Adolph Hitler. The stage would then be set for the defining confrontation of the twentieth century. It is against this backdrop and from the flames of that historic conflagration that Bernard Lander first emerged as a driving force in the frontlines of education and civil liberties. His story is the American story, and it began the day he first rode the train by himself to the end of First Avenue and toward the beginning of his life's work as one of America's most influential and innovative educators.

But all this lay ahead. For now, the young boy on the platform could only contemplate the experiences that awaited him at his new school.

What sort of friends would he make? What would his teachers expect of him? Was he good enough to study Torah and Talmud beside the sons of rabbis and Hasidic scholars? These doubts crossed his mind as Bernard opened his school bag to make sure he had plenty of pencils and notebooks. He had decided not to bring along the jar full of grasshoppers.

Chapter three

The Path of Learning

The Holy One, blessed be He, gives wisdom only to one
who already possesses wisdom.

—Talmud, Berakhot 55a

What Bernard Lander discovered, once he began classes at the

Rabbi Jacob Joseph School, was a world that clearly delineated the sacred from the profane. The demarcation line arrived during each long school day precisely at 3 pm when *limudei kodesh*, the school's Jewish studies curriculum, ended and *limudei chol*, its general studies program began. During the *limudei chol* classes, that ran until 7 pm, students progressed as they did in the New York public schools, according to their age group. In *limudei kodesh*, however, pupils were grouped according to their abilities. A child who was brilliant at Torah and Talmud, for example, could find himself moved ahead regardless

of his actual age. So it was for Bernard, who typically was placed with other students two to three years his senior.

But while Bernard soon demonstrated his prodigious academic skills, he just as soon proved that he had not left his wild ways back at PS 19. His report cards were resplendent with As for both religious and general subjects, but also contained Ds—as in deportment—when it came to conduct.

The fact that Bernard was frequently found fighting with the other students no doubt stemmed in part from the teasing he was forced to endure

as a “Mama’s Boy.” Goldie would often appear at the school during a break to bring her son a hot meal or a warm muffler. These visits did not go unnoticed by his older classmates.

“What’s the matter?” they would taunt, “did little Dov Berish forget and leave his *tsitsis* at home?” Such mockery would easily provoke the scrappy lad to retaliate with his fists until he was pulled off forcibly by

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his teachers and dispatched to the Rosh Yeshiva’s office to cool his heels and his temper.

Young Bernard was indelibly influenced during his years at RJJ by its president Julius Dukas, a true giant of the New York Jewish community. Dukas was one of the founders of the Orthodox Union and served as president of RJJ from 1913 until his death in 1940. Bernard recalls how Dukas's Sundays were spent raising funds to support the poorer students. His devotion to the most needy at RJJ was legendary.

Bernard Lander was blessed with a host of outstanding instructors at RJJ. Foremost among these was Rabbi Jacob Reimer, who taught advanced

Gemora. Rabbi Reimer bestowed upon his more advanced students, such as Bernard, not only the details of the Talmud, but also the analytical skills required to master it. He provided Bernard with a *derech* in learning—the defined path towards a life of study. Rabbi Reimer was blessed with an extraordinary intellect and had actually memorized the entire Tanach (Torah, Prophets and Writings — the Jewish Bible). He would challenge students to stump him by asking them to recite a passage that he would be unable to identify. None ever did. Rabbi Reimer was a warm and loving teacher who left an immutable mark on the emerging scholar.

But not all of Bernard's influences during those years arose from school. He maintained a close friendship with a neighbor boy he had known since early childhood, Leonard Berkowitz. After a long school day, Bernard would look forward to palling around with Lenny at their nearby apartment on 15th Street. Unlike the Landers, the Berkowitzes were not an observant family. Like many secular young Jews of that period,

Lenny's parents were avowed socialists, active in the Young People's Socialist League. Through his contact with Lenny and his family, young Bernard was exposed to the Jewish intellectual community. It was this sort

of knowledge that would serve him well in future years.

Bernard Lander graduated eighth grade as part of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School class of January 1929. The school had just inaugurated a new high school program that Bernie attended for only half a year. In the fall of 1929, he transferred to the Talmudical Academy, the affiliate high school of Yeshiva College, where his parents felt he would be exposed to much broader academic opportunities.

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Entering the gates of the Talmudical Academy was Bernard's first contact with Yeshiva College, an institution that would profoundly shape the course of his life. By the time Bernard began his studies in 1929,

“Yeshiva,” as it was commonly referred to, was already the American Orthodox

movement’s flagship institution of higher learning. Achieving this position of prominence was primarily due to the accomplishments of one man, Rabbi Dr. Bernard (Dov) Revel, a Torah giant and brilliant scholar. Rabbi Revel brought Yeshiva into being in 1915 and served as its guiding light until his death in 1940. Though physically slight, Revel was considered

a giant among his peers and his presence dominated Yeshiva during the years that Bernard Lander studied there. Rabbi Revel’s influence on Bernard Lander was profound and his story is one that is unquestionably worth telling.

Emerging from Lithuania at the close of the nineteenth century, Bernard Revel was early on a free thinker. After achieving semicha (ordination) at the age of sixteen, he earned a Russian high school diploma through independent study and then became caught up in the revolutionary movements

of that time. It was a period of earth-shaking political unrest. The pursuit of social justice and the improvement of the human condition motivated Revel to become active in the General Jewish Worker’s Alliance

(the “Bund”). His published articles, considered subversive by the regime,

led to Revel’s arrest by Czarist forces in 1905. Released the following year,

Revel wasted no time immigrating to the United States.

Upon arrival he immediately enrolled at New York’s RIETS (Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary), the only Orthodox rabbinic academy

in the United States. RIETS had been established in 1897 as a yeshiva for advanced Torah study, meant to attract European scholars who had fled to America. Not neglecting his general studies, Revel was also awarded a Master’s degree in Medieval Jewish Ethics from New York University

in 1909. Two years later he earned his Ph.D. when he became the first graduate of Philadelphia’s Dropsie College and its noted Jewish civilization

program.

Ever the iconoclast, upon completing his education, Revel decided to heed Horace Greeley’s advice and “Go West, young man.” He opted to join wife Sarah’s family business in the rich oilfields of Oklahoma. Even as he amassed a small fortune thanks to the black gold pumping from the

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family oil wells, Revel's heart and soul continued to flow with the words of Torah and Talmud. He realized, due to his exposure to the far horizons of Oklahoma, that Torah teachings and modernity could successfully co-exist

in this vast new land.

Revel returned to the New York educational milieu as a relatively wealthy man just as the waves of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe

were reaching their crest. He witnessed how the children of these mostly Orthodox immigrants were soon being drawn away from their traditional heritage as they were lured toward America's new native strains of Conservative

and Reform Judaism. He recognized, probably before anyone else, that American Orthodoxy needed to be modernized in order to retain the religious affiliations of its children. He set out to recast European Orthodoxy

into a New World mold.

Choosing "Torah over oil," Revel's first act was to meld two struggling New York yeshivas. His alma mater, the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological

Seminary (RIETS) was merged with the Yeshivat Etz Chaim into one successful school where Orthodox students could study the Talmud and the worldly philosophers without undergoing a conflict in their loyalties. Revel became the new school's first Rosh Yeshiva (principal) in 1915, introducing

such subjects as homiletics (sermon preparation), pedagogy, and some secular instruction.

Revel's first priority after taking over the helm at Yeshiva was to organize

the Talmudical Academy, or TA. Opening in 1916, the TA was the first high school in America to combine Jewish and general studies. Similar

to the structure of the RJJ School, it was Torah studies in the morning and a general curriculum, based on the courses being taught at New York public high schools, in the afternoon. Revel soon recognized that as students

graduated from TA, those who wished to pursue a general education left for other schools, leaving only the rabbinic candidates behind to study

at RIETS. Even among those who remained at RIETS, many, he discovered,

were taking courses elsewhere at night and over the summer in order to shore up their general education. Revel realized that Yeshiva needed to provide concurrent parallel courses in both rabbinics and general studies. Under Revel's leadership, Yeshiva announced in 1923 its intent to establish

a four-year comprehensive liberal arts college to operate parallel to RIETS with a dual curriculum according to the model of the Talmudical Academy high school.

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The third leg of Yeshiva College actually came into being a few years earlier in 1921. That was the year Yeshiva agreed to incorporate a teacher's

training school from the Mizrachi Organization of America that was unable

to keep it afloat. When Mizrachi established the school in 1917, it sought to populate the growing number of afternoon Hebrew schools around the nation with professionally prepared teachers who were advocates

of religious Zionism. After the Teachers Institute, or TI, as it was known, fully became part of Yeshiva, it continued its mission with a curriculum

stressing modern Hebrew and Bible study. Incorporating such a modern-style institution as the TI into the traditional Yeshiva environment

was viewed as something of an anomaly by the prevailing heads of RIETS. Yet it was precisely this type of bold innovation that earned Revel

his reputation as the Rabbi who saved Orthodox Judaism in America.

The school grew in prestige and with time became Yeshiva College, the first Jewish liberal arts institution in the United States. Revel's successor

added the Albert Einstein College of Medicine with a faculty that included not only Reform and Conservative Jews, but non-Jews as well. As America enjoyed a period of post-war prosperity in the 1920s, Revel was a tireless and highly effective fundraiser, collecting more than \$5 million in support for the new Yeshiva College that included the TI, the TA and RIETS. In 1924, he used the funds to purchase two square blocks in Washington Heights on a site three hundred feet above the Harlem River. His fundraising was effective because of its outreach to the non-Orthodox world, where he spread his message of academic openness. In a 1926 solicitation letter to a prominent New York attorney, Revel wrote: Other (non-Orthodox) students who desire the knowledge

of the Torah and Hebrew culture as a part of their general development, who wish to acquire their education in a thoroughly Jewish atmosphere, will be welcome to its influence, and such non-Jews as may seek to add to their own, the knowledge of Judaism, may also come.

In recruiting faculty, Revel was again a pioneer and an innovator.

Seeking to engage the best instructors available regardless of their religious

orientation, he preferred Orthodox Jews who would serve as positive role models for his students, but not at the expense of quality instruction.

On September 25, 1928, Yeshiva College opened its doors to thirty-one

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students, mostly graduates of the TA. A few weeks later, 15,000 people gathered at the dedication of Yeshiva's stunning new building, which was to house the Yeshiva Liberal Arts College, RIETS, the Talmudical Academy and the Teachers Institute. Together, these schools, soon to be known collectively as Yeshiva College, encompassed Rabbi Revel's vision

of a solid foundation upon which to build the future of Orthodox Judaism in America.

To say that Revel's groundbreaking accomplishments served to inspire Bernard Lander would be a gross understatement. As we shall see, Lander's course, while played out on a global stage, was to be marked by the same fearless dedication and inspired innovation as was displayed by Rabbi Bernard Revel in the establishment of what would become Yeshiva University.

Bernard came under Rabbi Revel's wing not only as a student, but also as a family friend. It was Rabbi Revel who tested each student personally

at the Talmudical Academy and it was he who decided when a student was prepared to move to a higher level Talmud class. Bernard became friendly with Rabbi Revel's two sons, Norman and Hirschel, and was a frequent visitor in the Revel home. Rabbi Revel took a real interest in his budding student and appreciated Bernard's intellectual brilliance and outstanding memory. During one visit, he asked Bernard what he was planning to study over the summer. He then placed a formidable challenge before his student: to study and memorize the Talmudic tractate of Nedarim with the commentary of Rabbenu Nissim. Bernard was flattered that Rabbi Revel would think him capable of such a challenging task. He applied himself vigorously over the summer and returned to class in the fall having perfectly memorized, word-for-word, the ninety

two-sided folios of Nedarim plus commentaries. Dr. Lander could still recite passages from the tractate when he had reached his nineties. Bernard soon fell in love with Yeshiva's new campus. In particular he adored the steep cliffs overlooking the Harlem River. On each day that the weather permitted, Bernard would visit the cliffs during his lunch break. There he would make the perilous climb down to the riverbank and then hike back up in time for his afternoon classes. He was a swift and energetic climber and loved to challenge his friends to see who could more quickly ascend to the heights. While Bernard never sustained any injuries, other students, attempting to emulate his climbing prowess, would often come away bruised and battered. Tragically, several years after Bernard had left the school, a Yeshiva student would lose his life along those very cliffs. Those enthusiastic bolts up the mountainside were emblematic of Bernard's precocious personality in high school. He was a young man in a hurry: in a hurry to compete with his classmates and moreover, in a hurry to challenge himself to stretch and press against the boundaries of his world, both physical and intellectual.

This fire in the belly was certainly present when it came to religious studies, and it also drove his thirst for general knowledge, although perhaps with not quite as much fervor. Many evenings were spent reading in the public library, where he amassed a vast independent knowledge base about Western Literature. Bernard's favorite general studies class by far was World History, in which he became a star pupil. He was able to easily manage that temporal balance that allowed him to devour the latest copy of the New York Times aboard his school-bound train each morning and then delve into the most venerated Talmudic tractates once he arrived. It was during this period that his political outlook was being shaped, not only by world events, but also by his friend Leonard Berkowitz's socialist parents. He looked forward to their political discussions and found himself attracted to their notions of "redistribution of wealth" and "fair working conditions."

Friday nights would often find Bernard attending Shabbos services at a Hasidic shtiebel on East Houston Street and then staying afterwards for the camaraderie and spirited discussions. Relishing the atmosphere of learning, Bernard regarded the shtiebel as a place to pray, to study and to

replenish one's soul.

Another pillar of Bernard's early teenage years was Bachurei Chemed, a youth group to which he was introduced shortly after his Bar Mitzvah, by Ben Koenigsberg's brother, Chaim. Most of the other boys in Bachurei

Chemed were from transplanted Galician Hasidic families. The group stressed learning and piety and conducted its business in Yiddish.

Emerging from Bachurei Chemed, Bernard soon gravitated to the burgeoning

Young Israel movement. He found its distinctly "Americanish" orientation appealing and would often attend services at its first storefront shul on East Broadway. The Young Israel movement grew rapidly,

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establishing a presence in the Orthodox communities of Williamsburg and Boro Park in Brooklyn. By the late 1920s, they were in twenty U.S. cities. Bernard liked the fact that the classes were conducted in English and that the services reflected a new and decidedly American sensibility.

In distinct contrast to the immigrant "greenhorn" shuls he had attended all of his life, at Young Israel there was no sale of Torah honors (aliyot) or other such old-world trappings. At Young Israel, with its focus on attracting young observant Jewish men, Bernard would occasionally attend

holiday social events. No social butterfly, Bernard far preferred the company of his friends who chose to devote their time and energies to intense Talmudic learning.

Bernard Lander completed his studies at the Talmudical Academy in January of 1933, along with forty-four of his classmates, and began taking

courses immediately at Yeshiva College.

The decision to follow the path of Jewish learning beyond high school was an almost automatic one. With Bernard's evident aptitude and his already

established breadth of knowledge of religious texts, any other course simply would not make sense. While he certainly entertained thoughts of following his father into the business arena, the world in which Bernard found himself had no place for such a scholar/entrepreneur. Parnassah, or one's livelihood, was one thing, and Talmud study was quite another. Both

required a consuming commitment, passion and dedication. They were, for the most part, mutually exclusive. As they had done for centuries, religious

scholars would still need to depend upon the generosity of others

to sustain themselves. At this point in his life, this stark practical reality did not disturb Bernard Lander very much. But as the young man continued

on his path towards Rabbinic ordination, he would begin to question this dichotomy. “Why not?” he pondered. “Why can’t I combine a life of religious learning with a profession that provides me with a livelihood?” It was a question that would become the hallmark of his future career.