FIGURE 1. Pinkhes-Dov "Pinye-Ber" Goldenshteyn (1848-1930) in the early 1900s, when he first started to write his autobiography. At that time, his beard was still mostly red. He is wearing a *yarmlke* (skullcap worn by Jews) used by cantors, since he served as the *shoykhet* and cantor of Bakhchisaray. Taken in Feodosiya, Crimea, where his oldest two children resided at the time. Courtesy of Shifra Bernfeld.

Contents

Foreword

During the past year, followers of world events have had a crash course on the conflict-ridden Ukraine and Crimea. Looking back in history, we find that life in these regions was also turbulent over one hundred years ago, as illustrated in *The Shochet*, the newly translated (from the original Yiddish) and fascinating memoirs of Pinkhes-Dov Goldenshteyn (1848-1930). At one time, the towns, villages, and cities of Goldenshteyn's native Ukraine were home to hundreds of thousands of Jews. For centuries, Jews were part and parcel of the area's landscape. In this land rich in woes and wars, the Jews suffered—sometimes together with their neighbors and sometimes at the hands of their neighbors. Antisemitism was rampant; the region was the site of some of the largest number of murders committed against the Jewish people. Goldenshteyn's portrayal of his youth and early adulthood tells the story of Ukrainian Jewry—their traditional way of life and their struggle for survival.

Goldenshteyn was born in 1848 in a Ukraine ruled by the Russian tsars, and that was where he spent his formative years. Orphaned at the age of seven, he was shuttled from relative to relative. His travels took him throughout Ukraine, Romania, and Lubavitch and Shklov in Belarus. He was hired as a *shochet* in the Crimea in 1879, and finally, after working there for decades, he immigrated to the Land of Israel in 1913, where he remained until he died in 1930. The street-wise Goldenshteyn is a natural storyteller, and he tells his story—the story of life in those lands during those years—in a delightful and captivating manner.

I believe that autobiographies are anthropological treasure troves of history, and few sources of history are as trustworthy. Goldenshteyn, in particular, serves as an honest and accurate source of a vast amount of historical data, much of which he mentions unwittingly. In the course of telling his own story, he touches on almost every realm of life. As the translator writes in the Introduction, he gives us clear glimpses into the relationships between adults and children, men and women, Jews and non-Jews, feudal lords and serfs, communities and their leaders, craftsmen and apprentices. Through his vivid depictions, we experience the life of a Jewish child—the *kheyder* (traditional Jewish elementary school), children's games, and the differences between city and *shtetl* children. Having worked in various occupations, he describes the lives

of *shochets* (kosher slaughterers), house servants, cantors, *melamdim* (teachers in traditional Jewish elementary schools), grain merchants, melon farmers, tavern keepers, and storekeepers. He recalls hiding from the *khapers* (snatchers) who seized Jewish children for forcible conscription into the Russian military and seeing the wrenching sight of a battalion of cantonist children-soldiers. He recounts his interactions with various Hasidic Rebbes and their Hasidim including the Tolner Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek of Lubavitch; the great Sephardic rabbi, the Sdei Chemed; *mitnagdim* (non-Hasidim); Karaites; and even informers and apostates. His depiction of a cholera pandemic describes the quarantining of cities and towns and the primitive efforts used to save the lives of the stricken. He describes town fires—which were constant sources of danger, baking *matzohs* for Pesach, purchasing *etrogs* for *Sukkot*, building *mikvehs*, petty synagogue politics, assimilation, and immigration to America and Palestine.

Indeed, *The Shochet* may be rightfully labeled the Glikl of Hameln of Ukraine. Just as Glikl's memoirs give us a picture of life as a Jewish woman in the seventeenth century that no history book can describe, Goldenshteyn's depiction of traditional Jewish life in Ukraine is unmatched by any other method of historical description.

A terribly important hole is filled by this authentic and vital document, for Goldenshteyn's is the first book-length memoir I know of that depicts the life of a religious Jewish functionary (*klei kodesh*) in Eastern Europe. It offers a unique opportunity to examine the reactions of a traditional Jew during a time when religion was being undermined all over the globe, particularly in the Jewish world when Jews were inclining more and more towards secularism and leaving Jewish religious practice. Goldenshteyn's portrayal of this conflict, at times in an agonizing manner, gives us insight into the effects of modernization on traditional Jewish life. His pain in confronting these radical changes makes Goldenshteyn's memoirs a compelling historical and personal description of a tumultuous period of transition.

For many years Goldenshteyn lived in the Crimea, where he lived and worked in a Muslim society. His vivid recollection of the local Karaites—a breakaway Jewish sect originating in eighth-century Babylonia—and the relationships between them, the Jews, and their Muslim and Christian neighbors, makes fascinating reading.

Goldenshteyn's recollections of his move from the Crimea to Palestine in an age where travel was prohibited and prohibitive, his suffering there during the First World War amid the battles between British and Ottoman-Turkish forces, and his description of the fledgling Jewish settlement serve to round out

this unique memoir. His decision to go to Israel, a move he made many years before the idea became popular, is the ultimate reflection of the courage and resourcefulness he displays time and time again throughout his life.

Michoel Rotenfeld's superb annotated translation of this unique work allows the English-speaking reader to learn—for the first time in such granular detail—about daily life in Eastern Europe at a time when the traditional Jewish world was falling apart, hundreds of thousands of Jews were about to be killed in pogroms in the Russian Civil War, communism was at the threshold, and Ukraine and Crimea were poised to become part of the Soviet nightmare. The focus on life in Israel at the end of the book is a consolation. It is comforting to know that our *shochet*, after everything he went through, made it out of Eastern Europe before all hell broke loose. Foreshadowing the experience of the Jews of Europe as a whole, he manages to survive, if only barely at times, and by the grace of God he establishes a new life in the Land of Israel.

The Shochet is a magnificent new contribution to Jewish and Eastern European history. Kudos to Rotenfeld for shedding light on this extremely significant primary source which was known until now only to a small circle of Yiddish-speaking scholars. With its folksy style, it invites a broad audience to go back in time and take a long look at a vanished world.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my tremendous gratitude to God Almighty for granting me the opportunity to be able to translate and annotate this remarkable work.

My becoming the translator of the autobiography of Pinkhes-Dov "Pinye-Ber" Goldenshteyn came about in an unusual manner. In 1988, I was fascinated to read an article in Hebrew about this work by the late outstanding Chabad historian Yehoshua Mondshine, and I hoped one day to find the original Yiddish work. In 1997, I was fortunately able to find a copy of Pinye-Ber's book to purchase. Wanting to find out more about the author, I contacted Yehoshua Mondshine for assistance in finding his descendants. He had met someone who had known the author's great-granddaughter Tsviya Gelbshtein (1944–1992), who had become religious and connected to the Chabad movement. After a phone call or two, I located Tzviya's mother (and Pinye-Ber's granddaughter) Aliza Goldenshteyn Bernfeld (1921–2008) of Petakh-Tikva. Aliza proved to be a fountain of information about her grandfather and the extended family, and she gave me the contact information for some of her relatives in America. Among these, both Cynthia Unterberg and her sister Muriel Casper (Pinye-Ber's great-granddaughters) were very receptive and arranged to meet me right away. During our first meeting, Cynthia told me that she had been looking for someone to translate Pinye-Ber's book and thought I had been heaven-sent to do so. I was reluctant to undertake such a large translation project and consulted with two knowledgeable friends: Max Apple, who strongly encouraged me, echoing my feeling that this autobiography of the traditional everyman of the *shtetl* was an entry into a world rarely depicted; and the late George Greenberg, who believed that I would be the perfect person for the job, given my background and capabilities. Buoyed by their enthusiasm, I contacted Cynthia to tell her I would do it.

In his autobiography, Pinye-Ber traces the divine providence in his life; certainly it was by divine providence that I discovered so many connections between my ancestors and the author. My first research trip for the translation was in 2001 to Israel, where the author had lived for the last seventeen years of his life. I immediately went to interview Aliza and her daughter Shifra. In one of my interviews with Aliza, I learned that Pinye-Ber had frequented Petakh-Tikva's Great Synagogue, where both of my father's grandfathers had prayed. My father, a native of Petakh-Tikva, told me that, in the early 1920s, when the

population was less than 4,500 people, all the adults knew each other. On a trip to Petakh-Tikva's Segulah Cemetery with Aliza, we were amazed to see that my great-grandmother and her mother are buried right across from Pinye-Ber's wife Feyge. And only after working on this project for several years did I recall that my grandfather, who died before my birth, had managed one of Petakh-Tikva's only two book stores in the late 1920s and early 1930s; he would have likely sold the original Yiddish edition of this book when it was published in 1928–1929. He was said to have been a voracious reader and would likely have read it.

Parenthetically—but also providentially—important information about my own family emerged as a result of my research for this book. During my perusal of Uriel Gellman's annotated bibliography appearing in *The Heder: Studies, Documents, Literature and Memoirs* (2010), when I was looking for sources that would help me better understand the life and times of Pinye-Ber, I noticed an entry for the autobiography of an A. S. Melamed, who had lived in the Crimea as Pinye-Ber did. With great difficulty, I obtained scans of Melamed's two-volume work and was startled to find that he was raised in the same small Ukrainian village where my paternal grandfather's family had originated. In reading it, I was excited to see that he mentions at length my own great-great-grandfather, along with his wife, father, and other relatives, beginning in the 1870s. With some research, I located Melamed's elderly great-great-niece in Israel who sent me the unprinted manuscript of the third volume, which turned out to mention my great-grandfather and my great-aunts. I can't help but feel that I was directed to this family treasure—an autobiography no less—as a result of my devotion to the translation of Pinye-Ber's autobiography.

This project would not have been possible without the unflagging commitment of Cynthia Unterberg and generosity of her daughter Kara Unterberg to bring this translation to the light of day. A very refined soul, Cynthia has inherited her great-grandfather's spiritual sensitivities and concern for the spirituality of her family. During the first few years of this project, Cynthia kept turning up one important document after another in her basement, including a copy of S. Niger's 1930 review of Pinye-Ber's book, her grandmother's engagement contract handwritten by Pinye-Ber, and ten handwritten letters by Pinye-Ber from the 1920s. I am also grateful to Cynthia's daughter Lisa and her husband Michel Delafontaine for their constant encouragement and great interest.

Pinye-Ber's descendants and extended family with whom I have been in contact have been wonderfully supportive as they shared their family memories, photographs, and documents. In particular, I would like to thank Shifra Bernfeld, Christopher T. Blue, Michael Budiansky, Muriel Brockman Casper,

Myriam Pozwolski Cronin, Virginia "Ginny" Starr, and Nancy Merenbach Zuniga, as well those who have since passed away, Samuel Solis Goldeen, Jr., Dvora and her husband Meir Gavrieli, Yosef "Yoske" Grinberg, Abraham Solomon "Sol" Levitt, Hadassa Perlkvort Levitt, and Henry P. "Hank" Starr.

I cannot thank my close friend Rabbi Yitzchok Stroh enough for generously sharing his vast knowledge of European Jewish life throughout the entirety of this project. He referred me to scores of important sources and suggested multiple areas of research. He reviewed every page of my translation and compared it to the original Yiddish. His insights and criticism were invaluable. I was particularly humbled by his patient attention to detail in editing the Introduction, much of which is based on my notes from our conversations about the book over the years. His assistance in deciphering the author's handwritten letters was also essential.

Without help, no single person could possibly adequately translate such a difficult and large work—which is written in an unpolished Yiddish, with little punctuation and numerous typographical errors, especially in regard to its Slavic components. For clarifications and elucidations, I reached out to experts, too numerous to mention, in various fields. Thankfully, I started this translation when the older generation of Eastern European Jews, who were able to explain certain words and phrases, was still alive. I also feel privileged to have met and corresponded with the last few individuals to have known Pinye-Ber. Naturally, I alone am responsible for all errors.

Among the experts in Yiddish linguistics with whom I have been in contact were Paul (Hershl) Glasser and Yitskhok Niborski. Among those who have already passed away were Joshua A. (Shikl) Fishman, Marvin (Mikhl) Herzog, and particularly Mordkhe Schaechter, with whom I discussed the project at length.

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I want to express my heartfelt thanks to my dear friend Todd Berliner for his guidance in writing the Introduction and throughout the publishing process. Likewise, I am grateful to Glenn Dynner and Joshua M. Karlip for their assistance in helping me formulate the Introduction. Thanks, as well, to Andrew Escobedo, Pearl Lam, and Rivka Schiller for their editorial assistance.

In 2016, the JewishGen Bessarabia SIG announced that they were looking for sponsors for the transcribing of the recently located supplement to the

1858 *revizskie skazki* (revision list) of the Jews of Tiraspol, the author's place of birth, in the State Archives of Kherson Oblast (fond 22, inventory 1, file 72) in Kherson, Ukraine. A revision list was a poll-tax census for taxation and conscription. Unlike US censuses, each revision updated the previous revision with births, marriage, and deaths. Cynthia Unterberg generously sponsored the transcription and translation of this revision list, which has since been posted to the JewishGen Romania-Moldova Database. This supplementary revision list turned out to include the author's maternal grandfather and several other individuals mentioned in the text. No nineteenth-century metrical records have yet been located for Tiraspol. For their assistance in translating other Russian-language documents, much thanks is owed to my relative Denis Krol, who was instrumental in seeking out numerous Ukrainian documents, and Lyudmila "Lucy" Schwartz.

I am also indebted to the librarians at the Library of Congress's Geography and Map Reading Room for their expert assistance in helping to identify some of the elusive villages mentioned by the author.

Mrs. Bashe Simon, Director of Touro University Libraries, was encouraging and supportive throughout the lengthy process of bringing this book to print. The dedicated work of the following Touro University Library staff members helped me obtain materials from libraries across America and Europe: Carol Schapiro, Edward Schabes, and the late Sarah Nakar.

I offer my sincere thanks to the editors at Touro University Press, Michael A. Shmidman and Simcha Fishbane, and to the president of Touro University, Alan Kadish, MD, for their support of this project. I am also deeply grateful to Israel Singer, vice president of international affairs at Touro University, for his insight into the value of this work and for his encouragement. I would like to thank the staff at Academic Studies Press, particularly Kira Nemirovsky, Ilya Nikolaev, and Ekaterina Yanduganova, for their professionalism and high standards.

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A Note about the Translation

The romanization of Yiddish words and phrases follows Uriel Weinreich's system in his *Modern English-Yiddish/Yiddish-English Dictionary* (1968). For the unfamiliar, this system concerns itself solely with conveying the pronunciation; hence, it does not attempt to indicate the Hebrew-character spelling of its Hebrew and Aramaic components. Although based on the Northeastern (Lithuanian) Yiddish dialect, Weinreich's system provides a uniform manner of romanizing Yiddish words and place names in all Yiddish dialects, as done by Mordkhe Schaechter in *Yiddish II* (1995:443–446). Yiddish words and phrases have been transliterated using the Southeastern (Ukrainian) Yiddish dialect, the author's subdialect of Southeastern Yiddish, and the Northeastern (Lithuanian) Yiddish dialect. Stressed syllables are indicated by accent marks directly over the stressed vowels, the first time a word or place name is used. For details, see the Introduction to the Glossaries and the Romanization/Transliteration Schemes.

The author uses certain Yiddish words as they were once commonly used, though their usage has changed. For example, Jews in certain areas, including the Ukraine, used the word *fraynt* (or as the author writes *frayn*d) to mean a relative, while a *guter-fraynd* meant a friend. Another example is *mistome*, which was formerly used to also mean "certainly," though today it is exclusively used to mean "probably." *Lang* (and its inflected form *langer*) was formerly used, at least in some areas of Eastern Europe, to also denote "tall," though today it is exclusively used to denote "long." Similarly, *sibe* (סיבה) was formerly used to also mean a "mishap" or an "accident," though today it is exclusively used to mean a "cause" or "reasons." And *geveyntlekh* was formerly used to mean "of course," while today it is used to mean "normally" or "usually." With the Hebraization of Yiddish over recent decades, some speakers of Yiddish will be unfamiliar with the traditional Yiddish pronunciations of certain Hebrew and Aramaic components of Yiddish, for example, *Yontef* instead of *Yomtov* (meaning a Jewish holiday). Since not all such words (not even all of those listed above) have been noted in the footnotes, if the reader notes such discrepancies between the original Yiddish (the digitized version can be accessed at https://archive.org/details/nybc206510) and today's usage of certain Yiddish words, an appropriate first resource would be Beinfeld and Bochner's *Comprehensive Yiddish-English Dictionary* (2002).

Similarly, the Yiddish pronunciation for certain words or names might be different from that to which the reader is accustomed. For example, the name Joseph is transcribed in Yiddish as Yosef (not Yoysef) being that Yosef (with a short "o") is the traditional Yiddish pronunciation of this name.

Personal names in the text have been romanized according to their Yiddish (or Ashkenazi-Hebrew) pronounciation and have been used similarly when mentioned in the footnotes or introduction, for the sake of consistency (see the Glossary of Jewish Personal Names). On the other hand, some names mentioned exclusively in the translator's footnotes and appendices are transliterated using a Modern Hebrew scheme. Nonetheless, sometimes the names of well-known personages are spelled as commonly rendered into English. See also the Glossary of Jewish Personal Names.

It is important for the reader to understand that many of the author's actions were conducted in accordance with *halakha* (binding and sacred Jewish legal statutes) and were not matters of optional tradition or personal preference. Hence, when the author mentions aspects of Jewish life associated with *halakha*, the specific section in the *Kitsur Shulkhan Arukh* (*Abridged Code of Jewish Law*) has been noted. The translators of similar works such as Aronson (1983), Kotik (2002), and Shapiro (2002) also cite the *Kitsur Shulkhan Arukh* at times. The *Kitsur Shulkhan Arukh* has become the classic guide to practical observance in all Orthodox Jewish circles and is readily available in English translation in several printed editions and freely accessible online. If a particular *halakha* is not found in the *Kitsur Shulkhan Arukh*, then the relevant place in the *Shulkhan Arukh* (*Code of Jewish Law*) or other Hebrew halakhic works has been cited.

The chapter titles and their year spans were provided by the translator, with the exception of those of chapters 14 and 32. All comments in square brackets and footnotes were added by the translator, including the section headings in chapters 1–3. Regarding the author's chapter summaries at the beginning of most chapters, sometimes the entries in the original Yiddish are not in order or even appear at the beginning of the wrong chapter. Though amended in the translation, not all such discrepancies have been noted. The beginning of chapter 4 has been removed and attached to the end of chapter 3 in order to separate the story of the author's parents and siblings from that of his own life. When the author writes "as you already know" or the like, a footnote indicating the incident's location in the text only appears when occurring in a different chapter. For the sake of clarity, the translator at times changed the order of the sentences (in less than a dozen places) and changed the order of the paragraphs (in a handful of places).

Unless otherwise indicated, Hebrew calendar dates are footnoted with their corresponding dates according to the Gregorian calendar and not according to the Julian calendar, which was still is use in Tsarist Russia until 1918.

Jewish personal names mentioned in Russian-language metrical documents and revision lists cited in the footnotes have often been slightly altered to be consistent with their presentation in the text, for instance, Mirke instead of Mirka.

I have attempted to identify the current name and location of every geographic location mentioned. See the Glossary of Geographic Places in Eastern Europe. I have transliterated places in Israel according to the Modern Hebrew pronunciation and not according to the author's Ashkenazi pronunciation, for example, Petakh-Tikva instead of Peysekh-Tikve, and Zikhron-Ya'akov instead of Zikhren-Yankev.

Information readily available in popular dictionaries and encyclopedias has not been cited.