



Martin's Story, Chapter 7

And then as I say eventually we went to some other relations we had in Brzesko.

Brzesko was in those days a very small primitive village, I don't know what it's like today, but there I saw a way of life which was different from that in Krakow. In Krakow my relations had lived in a flat which was part of a house. Here people lived in wooden huts and it was still a completely Hasidic form of living, the one member of the family who earned a living for the whole family was one of my uncles who was what we call a Dayan. Now a Dayan is something, it's a term which is unfamiliar to most people but in the Jewish community the Dayan was the judge. The word means judge. And that meant that occasionally he had to adjudicate in disputes that arose between individuals or between families in the village.

But a Dayan had other functions as well. When Jews eat meat it has to come from certain animals and the animal has to be slaughtered in a particular way and then the meat has to be prepared in a particular way but sometimes when meat is being prepared one notices a blemish on it, some kind of lesion on the animal and sometimes that is enough to prevent that piece of meat from being kosher, at other times it isn't. So every now and again we were visited in the morning by somebody from another part of the village, usually a young girl who had been sent by her mother to take this piece of meat with a blemish to the Dayan who would then adjudicate whether it was kosher or not. That was one of his functions. And the rest of the family as I say, apart from household tasks, devoted its life completely to religious study and religious observance. And my uncle the Dayan of course would get up at a very early hour of the morning, something like four or five o'clock, and spend a few hours studying Talmud before he started the day's work.

It was a way of life which was even more strange to me and I feel very privileged to have experienced that way of life because of course it no longer exists now since the Holocaust destroyed all this. Again people lived in extreme poverty. The village was so primitive, we certainly didn't have any gas supply, we didn't have a water supply. Every now and again one had to go with a bucket across some fields to a well and draw water, and we had a large water

butt in which we kept the water. We covered the water butt with a muslin type of cloth which was on a metal ring and the water had to be poured through the muslin into the water butt to filter out any impurities – you can imagine how good muslin would be at filtering out impurities – and of course one also had to be very careful because to get water out of the water butt you had to remove the muslin to ladle out the water, you had to be very careful to put it back the right way up otherwise you would wash into the water butt anything that you'd filtered out. We, the cooking was done on a wood burning stove but there was one way in which we were not typical of these Jewish villages or a Jewish shtetl, to give it the Yiddish name. Nearby, outside the village, there was what I was told was the largest brewery in Poland. Now even in Poland and even in those days you couldn't run a brewery without electricity, and the state didn't provide electricity so the brewery had its own generators and they supplied the village. So unlike most Jewish shtetls we did have our electricity supply. Only for lighting not for heating, for heating we had to use a stove, but in that way we were just a little bit more advanced than a Jewish shtetl of those days usually was. But it was a way of life that was completely different.