

The Dream Jew

by [Ehud Neor](#) (September 2024)



Burning City (Ludwig Meidner, 1913)

A young man was sitting close to where he stood, already connected to the machine that would transfer his young blood to his own body. He sat down and leaned back while the technician connected his tubes. He looked over at the young man, who was used to being ignored during these sessions.

“Have you heard of the blood libel?”

“A false accusation?”

The old man heard the intonation of a question in the answer. A lack of conviction.

“Passover is coming. I need your blood for making Matza bread.”

The young man, surprisingly unintimidated, answered:

“Matza is just flour and water, no?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

“So you don’t really need my blood for making Matza. That was the blood libel. Jews were accused somewhere of murdering Gentile children for their blood to make Matza bread. You need my blood to survive until you can make Matza bread for the next Passover holiday with your family.”

That was better than the old man had expected to hear. His receptacle was primed. He began his story.

“I am old, and my life will end soon, even with the blood elixir you transfer to me. But my true life ended in Budapest in 1944 when I was separated from the only woman that I have ever loved. I was fourteen; she was sixteen. She was the most beautiful girl in Budapest. Men twice my age desired her. She only wanted me and I her from the moment we first set eyes on each other. I looked older than my age and had matured early, managing the deliveries for my parents’ bakery. I dealt every day with Jews and Gentiles and excelled in dealing with people. I had a natural understanding of them and used it to my advantage and to the advantage of our family business. I was fast and efficient and earned the respect of our clients. And—you would not know it by looking at me today—I was as handsome as a movie star. Go ahead, look at me. I’m ninety-four years old in two days’ time. Then I looked older than fourteen; now I look younger than ninety-four. I go against the grain. Look at me. What do you see? It is hard to imagine me without the wrinkles, isn’t it?”

“This is a story that has been told a thousand times. You will now hear my version of it. My story begins when I saw Eva for the first time. My eyes were opened on that day, and the world was different. I was in love, I know today but, having worked from an early age at our bakery mornings before school and afternoons after school and summers all day, I had nothing with which to reference this new feeling. All I knew to do on the morning after I first saw her was to do what I did every morning, which was to prepare for work.”

The old man paused for a moment. Then he continued.

“What concerned me the morning after I first saw her was whether she felt the same way. This intrusion into my routine was welcome and not welcome at the same time. It was welcome because it is the greatest feeling in the world. It was not welcome because my father depended on me to get the deliveries out accurately and on time. Papa trusted me and I would not betray that trust. Somewhere in my mind I sensed that this new feeling—love—had to be met fully and head-on, and that anything less than total commitment would be a betrayal of the moment. And yet, there was work to be done. I forced myself to put this new thing to the side to the extent that was possible. I stayed focused on the tasks in front of me and performed my duties. Nothing was different except that my feet barely touched the ground. I was floating on air. All was right with the day that stretched ahead in my mind.

“I had seen Eva for the first time the previous afternoon. She and her twin sister Flora were preparing the restaurant where they worked for the evening customers. I would later learn that they had been sent by their father to live with their uncle’s family and to work in his restaurant. They would earn their own keep and have something to send back to their family. This was the custom in those days. Since a rowdy drunken Hungarian crowd was no place for proper young women, as soon as the girls were finished with the preparations their uncle would send them home, to be replaced by older Gentile

Hungarian waitresses who knew how to handle rough customers. My job after school was to pick up the next day's orders from the restaurants on my way to evening work at the bakery. I would normally reach her uncle's restaurant after the Hungarian waitresses had begun work, and I would knock on the back door of the kitchen and take the order from the cook. It so happened that I had recently invested some of my income in a new bicycle so I could finish the afternoon rounds quicker. That day was my first on my new bicycle, and I reached the restaurant sooner than usual. When I knocked on the door, Eva opened it. Her appearance was so unexpected, and I was so unprepared that I blurted out 'You are beautiful!' before I realized that I had opened my mouth. I felt no embarrassment whatsoever. I feel no embarrassment now telling you this. As I sit here, I declare to you that no truer words have ever left my mouth. The cook called her away to give her the order. Meanwhile, her twin sister appeared from behind the door. Though they were identical twins, for me, the difference was night and day. Flora would try over the next few weeks to confuse me, as twins do, but I never failed and, by the end of the few weeks she realized that nothing could shake my dedication to her sister, and we became quite friendly.

"On that day, I had seen Eva for a total of not more than thirty seconds. She did not look at me when she returned with the order, and I left concentrating on work, on helping Papa. After work I did not have trouble sleeping, and I do not remember dreaming, but I do remember waking up and feeling that my world had changed. Feel free to chuckle. I chuckle when I remember that day. I will just add this. Save your judgement for later when you have heard the rest of the story.

"On the day after we first met, I reached the restaurant full of anticipation. When Eva handed me the order slip, she continued to hold on to it until I looked at her. Her eyes told me all that I wanted to know. As it happened, that was to be the extent of our physical contact, if you can call it

that. Yes, her handing to me the slip of paper with the next day's order. For two months this continued. An entire courtship conducted within a daily contact of a few moments. Eva understood my dedication to Papa, and I understood her dedication to her family, but still we managed to have a few words when we met. We knew without saying that it was not time to begin an official relationship. Though what we had was as true as it gets.

“And that is where the problems began. Once this kind of love makes an appearance, it resonates throughout the neighborhood and within nearby hearts. Love of such intensity and purity is a rare thing in our world, and those who do not experience it are envious of those who do. This envy appears and does its work in many ways. If you want to understand the field of the common man's imagination, observe him when he is envious. He will conjure mechanisms out of thin air. His creativity will be on the level of an artist. The envious one will force the issue to its climax, and either the targeted love will hold or will not. Envy will prevail or will not. In our case it was laughable to think that something like this could affect our love. Laughable, except that the Iago in this case was her twenty-year-old cousin Joska, who lived in the same house with her.

“The way he saw it, she should have been his. He was the heir to one of the city's best restaurants but, as he was in university, he was nourishing even greater prospects. He would be her provider and guide in life, and she would be his beautiful wife. She should have been thankful. That she wasn't drove him insane. He could not understand. He thought that there was nothing in her life outside of work and home. At some point he discovered the truth. She preferred a fourteen-year-old *pisher* on a bicycle. He started a battle of which for a long time only he was aware. He began sizing me up. What was there to size up? I came to the back door, knocked on it, waited, then took the slip of paper from her. For a moment our

eyes met. We exchanged a few words. That's it. That is what he saw. That is all there was. Nothing, but everything. More importantly, something that he sensed he would never have. So he did what all truly small men do. If he were denied, all would be denied. He became a destroyer.

"For a few days I did not take notice that things had changed. The cook handed me the order for three straight days. I was disappointed but I just assumed that she was busy, as I was, and simply continued my way. Now I imagine that he was watching me at that time, hoping to see me suffering. Did he expect me to break down and cry over the handlebars of my bicycle? If he had known me, he would have known better than to hope for that. But when it is jealousy, or even hate, that drives a man, then any knowing or understanding by him will be twisted. I imagine that she also did not give him the satisfaction of seeing her in distress. I think that things would have continued this way until he lost interest. But then the Nazis arrived, and the flow of Jewish life in the city, the good with the bad, disappeared.

"You remember the interview, correct? National TV. The brave journalist asking the question about my wartime activities at age fourteen. Everything I said was a lie. Anyone who had the least interest could have done a quick internet search and seen what the reality for Hungarian Jews had been. Let me spell it out for you. Being a Jew and cooperating with the Nazis was not an option that brought with it life. I thought that my 'coming out' would be when the interview was broadcast. It was so easily verifiable. Then again: people. There was such a need to believe that I was a Nazi collaborator. I survived; most did not. Therefore I must have sold my soul to the devil. I stood accused. I stand accused to this day. Me and my billions of shekels. In that interview, I put the interviewer and Humanity to the test. All failed miserably. This was the final sign for me."

"Sign?"

“Sign you ask?” The old man paused. “Look at it this way. Signs are my religion. I believe in signs. I bow down to signs. I think that when I am finished telling you this story, you will believe in signs too.

“I sometimes imagine a world in which the Jews of Europe read for what they were the signs that the Nazis erected when they came to power. It is not easy to imagine; why wouldn't the Jews have thought of Hitler as just another murderous Jew-hater in a long line of Jew-haters in Europe? At worst they were expecting a pogrom here, a pogrom there. They had seen this many times and though hurt, had survived. But if they had, for some reason, believed that the Nazis meant what they said, what might have been?

“You do not answer. I do not have an answer either. Nine million Jews rushing the borders? What a sight that would have been. Hard to imagine. Put it this way. If you knew for a certainty that someone was coming who would shoot your children in front of you—or worse—and then throw them into a ditch that you helped to dig, and then throw you in after them to be buried alive...well, what would you have done? In hindsight, everyone knows what they would have done. And everyone knows what the Jews should have done. And everyone disdains them for not having done it. But I am getting ahead of myself.

“Not surprisingly, Papa had information about what was coming, and he managed to pack us up in a vehicle that travelled for days along the back roads of eastern Europe until we somehow found ourselves in London. I assumed that all the Jews, including Eva, left shortly after us and that Papa, being Papa, was just ahead of the game. In London, no one spoke about what was happening to the Jews of Europe. Few really knew, and those that knew, did not know the extent of it. I believed at the time that once the war was over, I would be reunited with Eva, and we would go on with our lives. The war did end, and with Papa's help I tried to get information about

Eva. We found a survivor that had been on the same transport as Eva, who saw that she and her sister Flora were taken aside at Auschwitz. That was it. By then we knew what that meant. There were no secrets anymore about what the Nazis had done. She was lost.

“Papa had landed on his feet and quickly became a successful businessman. He insisted that I go to university. I did. I plunged into my studies and excelled at them. It helped take Eva off my mind. I studied economics. At least that is what is on my diploma. What I really studied were the people around me. Economics and people, for me the two became one, and even before I graduated I understood how I would achieve financial success. It is all one big confidence game, capitalist, socialist or communist. Choose the field of activity, identify and study the key players, create a proposal that seems beneficial to all, but was mostly beneficial to yourself, execute the plan, and then move on to the next project. Simple but effective.

“I make it sound simpler than it is. In the case of our organization, there was a single turning point that became definitive, and lifted us beyond being a deal maker among deal makers. Every great corporation or organization has a moment or moments as this. When big money is involved, so is a certain amount of sordidness. A self-respecting organization will do what it can to whitewash such stains, and we were no different. The official history of our organization begins after our period of sordidness, which was short, violent and successful beyond our wildest dreams. In most cases, one needs to hoodwink a trusting partner or associate, or a third party to a particular deal. One needs to force the transfer of control of capital to oneself, to the detriment of the one who was previously in control, and do it in a way that when he discovers what is happening, it is too late for him to do anything about it.”

“Sounds like an ordinary hostile takeover?”

“Yes.”

“So?”

The old man chuckled. “So?” He paused. “So. One needs to have the stomach for such an endeavor and its effect on the deal’s losers. One needs a touch of cruelty. One needs to be a bully. I was not that way from birth. It came to me when I was thinking about the cousin as I did from time to time. He was just jealous, and that we can understand in him. We’ve all been jealous in our lives. What was repulsive in him was the cruel streak that accompanied his jealousy. Maybe we all have that, but not everyone acts upon it. They call it ‘blind jealousy.’ Some go so far to say that blind jealousy was what energized that evil crazy corporal from Austria. Which is all to say that where the historians see a will to power, I see a will to cruelty. And as I thought about this and realized that once the will towards cruelty starts moving, for it to be stopped someone or something needs to take a stand against it. On the personal level it could be a hard slap across the head coming from a loving father. If not stopped early on, it can take armies to do the job. As I pondered the effectiveness of a single-minded dedication to cruelty—however it was packaged—I came to see that this type of delusion of grandeur can be manipulated, that there was a field of play that was a natural fit for this sort of unregulated activity, and that field of play was the business world. To think that it was her cousin’s seething jealousy that became my inspiration in business seems incongruous, but it undoubtably was my inspiration.

“Within a year I had spotted a major player that was acting recklessly, and I set my sights on that player. By major player I mean sovereign country. They were a few hours from total bankruptcy if they refused to deal with me. I could have bankrupted this country had I wished. They were so late in coming to the realization of the danger in which they found themselves that they jumped at my offer. I walked away a

billionaire.

“It was immediately obvious to anyone who had a head on his shoulder that this operation could be replicated. All vulnerable countries, meaning every country in the world, immediately shored-up their defenses within a few days, usually at great loss, while I enjoyed my new-found status as a humanitarian, not because I had mercy on the target of my attack, but that I had not done the same thing to anyone else. Everyone knew that I could have done so. The greatest nation came to me too, at first threateningly, then as a supplicant. They asked me if they were vulnerable. They were, and I showed them how, and they stood aside. And they all left me alone for the simple reason that they feared that I may harbor a poison pill. They were wise to think so.

“I was called many things after that. Financial wizard. Evil genius. But I was not called the one thing that I most expected to be called: A Jew. To my surprise, this irked me. Looking back, I have some understanding as to why I was perturbed. But at the time, I had no understanding, and these thoughts would gnaw at me day and night. It grew into an obsession to being seen as a Jew. To be seen as a Jew. How does one accomplish such a thing? It was not so difficult to arrive at a solution. In the end, I received my inspiration from those for whom seeing Jews is their field of expertise. The single graphic that underlines all Antisemitic depictions of Jews is a large, bent, and protruding nose. I did not have such a nose. I decided to obtain one. The plastic surgeon was surprised, to say the least, and the procedure was more complicated than I had anticipated.

“‘How big do you want it?’ he asked me.

“Big enough that if someone in a crowd mentions that I am a Jew, Gentiles within hearing distance can glance at me and say to themselves: Yes, that looks about right.

“I know that it is hard to understand. You ask yourself: after being recognized globally as a financial genius, this is what concerned me? You are correct in your assessment. There are many ways to pronounce your Jewishness. Join a synagogue. Set up a scholarship and host an annual dinner. I could have joined the world of Jewish philanthropy and would have been at the top of that world. This, I did consider doing, but I rejected that approach because if I had done so I would at most be seen as a Jew by other Jews. I needed a wider audience.

“It was the right thing for me to do. I felt it. I do admit that I had second thoughts. It was so against my nature! One cannot function in the world of finance without a plan. Until this point in time, I had been conducting my life as a business. To do something like this, on impulse alone, bordered on insanity. It was the opposite of having a plan, and I knew it at the time, and I embraced it.

“I went ahead with it. The result was a magnificent unaligned protruding piece of art. I went into seclusion while it healed, but once in seclusion I realized that it wasn't just my nose that needed to be healed. I took time to ponder what my life had been until then. I was astonished at how easy it had been to become what I had become, how easy it had been to do what I had done. I had become Joska, without any effort. But mostly, I was astonished at how easily I could have brought the whole world-wide financial structure tumbling down.

“In my seclusion, thinking that I now looked like a Jew, I began thinking like a Jew, for the first time since I studied for my Bar Mitzvah. And I was filled with remorse for the damage that I had threatened to cause. Deep remorse, remorse that almost buried me. In thinking as a Jew, I returned to what I had once been, a Hungarian Jew walking in the snow, only now along a trail behind my temporary home that led to the local library in a sleepy town in New Hampshire. My house

was deep in the woods, isolated. On my walks to the library, I passed only one inhabited hut, strangely situated on the far perimeter of the field behind the library, where my path through the woods emerged. It must have been a gardening shed at some point, but it was now serving as a home for someone. The hut stood there between the cultivated lawn of the library and the wild woods like a book trying to escape from its place on a shelf. I made no effort to engage with the inhabitants of this hut. I wished to bother no-one and have no-one bother me. The librarians and the townspeople respected my desire for privacy. They may have known who I was. I have no idea if this is so."

"I'm from New Hampshire," the young man said.

"I know."

The old man continued.

"I refined my skills as a recluse over the following half-year. Walking slowly to and from the library, head lowered in thought. At home I read deeply, pausing whenever I wanted to savor a particular passage, at times measuring its relevance to my own life. I was unhurried in my life, and in my thinking.

"Then, inevitably, spring came, and with it a thawing of my soul. I found myself hurrying through the woods to reach the library grounds, well-groomed, full of green promise. There was something about the library and the town beyond that began to pull at me. Surprising myself, I wanted to re-engage with the world. My healed nose found purpose in inhaling the smells of spring.

"It was in this spirit of renewal that I looked over towards the hut, really seeing it for the first time. As I passed by there was no sign of life, but as I continued towards the library I found that my curiosity had been piqued. Here was someone no less reclusive than me. I returned my books and, as

if making a statement to myself, I did not borrow new books. I had turned a corner. At that point it was just a feeling, but it was a definitive one. I would be making decisions soon. I was ready and willing. I was imagining myself back in the world, only this time, doing good. As I approached the woods I looked over at the hut. I still observed no signs of life, but someone had pasted a black-and-white picture on a single pane in the window on that side of the house. The black background of the print disappeared into the background of the room, so that the subject of the print floated ghostlike in the window, the head facing to the side while the single eye seemed to look straight at me, like a figure from an ancient Egyptian relief. I continued walking swiftly towards the woods, but then something unexpected happened to me. This tidal wave pushing me forward to my renewed engagement with the world, new nose and all, disappeared in an instant. I did not have it in me to take a single step forward along that path in the woods. Without hesitation I turned back to stand in front of that hut again and to my surprise and wonder, someone had pasted the mirror-image of that first picture on the pane facing it. Was it done for my sake? It was like a paper-cut snowflake had been spread across the window. But now there were two eyes, and I leaned forward into the yard and squinted and watched as the heads turned towards me and I saw four eyes. They were not drawings. They were faces. Faces that I knew and loved, pale faces now twisted and tortured.

“What do you think went through my mind during that indescribable moment? Don’t even try. Everything that you could imagine eventually did go through my mind, but not then, at the moment of discovery. Then, at that time, where I stood, I thought only of my nose. Isn’t that the craziest thing you’ve ever heard? I was ashamed, and my hand flew up to cover what I felt at that moment was a jutting Mount Rushmore. The expression on the twins’ faces did not change as I stood there nursing my self-inflicted wound and my self-inflicted shame. Soon enough though, I focused on their faces. I lowered my

hand and I smiled at them, surprised that I could not tell them apart. Their expressions did not change, and they turned their heads towards one another, and then downwards, as if returning to some activity that my appearance had interrupted. They could have been knitting scarves. At first, it did not occur to me that they might not have recognized me. Without moving, I urged myself inwardly towards the window, wanting to reconnect. Though I had not moved physically, they reacted as if I had, and both were looking at me and I began to sense recognition when suddenly they covered their ears with their hands and opened their mouths wide; I was seeing Munch's 'Scream,' in stereo, but it was silent. A curtain was drawn and they disappeared—had I seen them?—and I stood there.

"I stood there. What could be the meaning of this? Their faces had been imprinted on my eyes, the ovals of their mouths angling up in a field of wrinkles that turned the tableau into some kind of Rorschach test, demanding an answer of me: "What do you see?" I stood there and I saw. I saw, young man. Before I could raise up my head to register a complaint with the Creator, I realized how futile it would be. Listen to me. Sometimes a coincidence is so much a coincidence that it cannot be a coincidence. One sees it for what it can only be: a sign. A sign from above if you like. I stood there and waited, for though I realized that justice in a form that would be acceptable to me I would not have, still, there would be justice, in a form that would give meaning to this meeting. I knew this in the depths of my soul. I did not have to wait for long. I heard a door opening around the side of the house.

"She approached me, her wide white forehead radiating good will. She looked directly into my eyes and said as if it were a known fact, 'Anton.' I nodded yes. She smiled at me and handed me an envelope. She remained, smiling, waiting for me to read what was inside. I opened it and read.

Dear Anton. You have found us. We knew that you would. What is this game that God has been playing with us? We recognized you the first time you passed by our house. You were so preoccupied! You never looked our way. Still, we knew that you would, someday, because how could it be that we were brought together to this same quiet corner of the Earth if not to meet?

Do not try to come in. You know what that bastard did to twins. We are not presentable. Please honor our wishes. Remember us as we were.

But I have my daily order ready—it is in your hands. Not for baked goods this time.

- 1. Find the monster that did this to us and deal with him and any of his helpers that you can find. The Earth cries out for it.*
- 2. Please take care of the wonderful person that is standing before you. At great sacrifice to herself she has made our lives bearable.*

We have followed you since you came to prominence and were thrilled when you disappeared from the eyes of the public and appeared in our back yard. Then we waited patiently, knowing that you would discover us eventually. Anton, do what must be done.

“I looked at the messenger. She had performed her duty as a good human being on that day, and on every day during the previous thirty years, as I was to learn. She had a wholesome New Englanders’ beauty that was fitting to the job of caring for my beloved twins who had had their own matchless beauty ripped out of them like some fish being stripped of its skin. I opened my arms to her—it is your mother we are talking about—and invited her to a hug, meant to be passed on to my beloved twins, but also meant for her.”

"My mother?" the young man asked.

"Yes, your mother. I came to love her over the years, as she continued her care for the twins—even when she was pregnant with you—during the ensuing years of their slow decline unto death. Be calm. Allow me to fulfill my promise.

"I found him of course, with relative ease. I had resources that I could apply at a moment's notice. I had the evil one and his associates corralled into a secluded location, with their wives and elderly children as witnesses, and filmed the weeks long torture that ended in their crumbling to their deaths in their own excrement. When it was over, I released the families and notified the Israelis that they could stop looking and sent them photographic evidence.

"Come. Stand with me here."

He guided the stricken young man to the window overlooking the city.

"On that fateful day, I was on my way out of seclusion to do good in the world, as a Jew. I had many plans. I would have funded Jewish research centers in all the important disciplines, whose results would be shared freely with the world. I would have funded Jewish philanthropies, doing the work of easing the pain of those living within meager means. All this I would have done as a Jew, as a lover of mankind and as a lover of life. When I left that hut, my plans had changed. The first thing that I did was repair my nose. I would go back to being a movie star.

"Next, I made a deal with the Sign-Giver. I would do my best to destroy His world of signs. The Jew-hater accuses the Jew of being Satanic and wanting to control the World. Thus, have they willed me into existence. In turn, I have willed them into being true prophets. I now control the world to the extent needed to destroy it. It is crumbling as we stand here. The Jew-hater will soon face a satanic reality that he could

not have envisioned in his worst nightmares. It is coming.

“Look over there. You see that neighborhood on fire? That’s just the beginning. By tomorrow there will be four neighborhoods burning, and nothing to stop the further expansion of the conflagration, here, or in any of the cities of the world. I have succeeded beyond my wildest dreams.” The old man paused for a moment, then continued. “There is one thing that could in theory stop this, and that is good will amongst men, but it seems that not enough good will remains in the world.

“Take this briefcase. In it you will find what you need to get to my compound in New Zealand, you, and your family. My son is already there. You will be able to exist there in comfort until the conflagration has run its course, in twenty to thirty years. With this I have kept my promise. With this, I salute your mother, a woman of valor.

“Now we shall see if the Sign-Giver will have mercy on Humanity.”

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