**A Bintel Brief and *Jewish Daily Forward***

For the thousands of Jewish immigrants who flooded into America during the late 1800s and early 1900s, the *Jewish Daily Forward* was far more than a newspaper — it was a lifeline, an advocate and a basis of community. Led by its legendary founding editor, Abraham Cahan, the *Jewish Daily Forward* helped generations of newcomers adjust to life in America.

A Bintel Brief, or “A Bundle of Letters,” was one of the paper’s most popular features. The column, initiated by Cahan in 1906, invited readers to tell their own stories in the pages of the paper. Many of the readers, struggling to make it in America and concerned for loved ones left behind in Europe, wrote in seeking counsel, thereby cinching A Bintel Brief’s reputation as one of the earliest “advice” columns. Less known today is that the feature was also an indispensable clearinghouse for readers in need: Through the column, relatives were reunited, orphans found new homes and difficult communications were proffered under the cover of anonymity. Among the first three printed letters was a letter from a woman who suspected that her desperately poor neighbor had stolen and pawned her son’s beloved pocket watch. Appealing to the unnamed woman to send the pawn ticket in the mail, the letter-writer also assured her that the two would remain friends.

A Bintel Brief provides a window into Jewish life in America and the cataclysmic events of the 20th century, including World War I, the Russian Revolution, the Great Depression, the Holocaust and the rise of communism. Particularly in the earlier years of the column, the letters told of poverty, unemployment and the spread of tuberculosis in the sweatshops. **Instructions**: Read the following Bintel Brief letter, and respond to the letter on the right as if

you were Abraham Cahan. Then, compare your answer to Cahan’s on the following page.





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***Jewish Daily Forward***

**Headline**

**Bintel Brief: Advice for the Modern Times**

Read the following Bintel Brief-like letters and provide advice to the writer. You may choose from any letter and only need to respond to one, however, you may respond to all, if you wish.

Worthy Editor,

I have been attending Religious School for the past five years. I understand that it is important for me to attend so that I may learn more about Jewish history, holidays, culture, and even Hebrew. I also know how important it is for my parents for me to attend regularly. However, it is extremely difficult for me to commit myself to coming regularly. I have homework and have lacrosse practice many days after school. What do I do to make sure I continue learning about Judaism, but also am able to be a good student and lacrosse player?

Sunday School and Sports Don’t Mix,

D.

Esteemed Editor,

I don’t know whether or not I want to have a Bat Mitzvah. I just received by Bat Mitzvah date, and haven’t told my parents that I don’t really want to have one. I know what they will say: I need to do it because they did it, and it’s part of our tradition. But, really, editor, what’s the point of studying Torah stories about sacrifices and learning Hebrew that I will never use? How can I convince my parents to not make me have a Bat Mitzvah?

It’s My Bat Mitzvah and I Can Complain If I Want To,

S.

Worthy Editor,

I was asked the other day at school what I liked about being Jewish. I was able to quickly answer my friend by saying I liked celebrating holidays, eating food, and getting gifts on Chanukah. When I told my mom what I said, she told me that Judaism isn’t always about holidays, food, and presents. Do you know what else is special about being Jewish?

Let’s Eat Hamentashen,

G.