

Lajbel Landau

Lajb Landau was a typical example of the bygone elementary teachers, the so-called “*dardekei melamdin*”¹. Despite the fact that they were not special pedagogues or men of knowledge, they nevertheless played a large role, because they dispensed the elementary instruction, after which the pupils continued learning in higher scholastic institutions and completed their studies.

Most of the *Częstochower* children - the boys - studied with Lajb Landau, because he was strict and the fees, which he took, were small. These two things suited the parents from the broad masses, who toiled to earn their daily bread and wished their children to be in firm hands.

Melamed Lajb Landau was a terror for the children. They were afraid of his dark glasses and his long, black beard - even though he was a short, good-natured man and was fond of his pupils.

Lajbel Landau would arrive unexpectedly, at night, at the home of his pupil in order to check whether he had said his evening prayer or if he slept wearing a *kape'le*². If he lay in bed without a *kapl* or had not placed water by his bed³, or if he found out that the pupil had not said *Krias Sh'ma*⁴ - that pupil was not to be envied. He took the pupil out of bed, and had him perform all that he had taught him. The pleas from the parents, that the child had forgotten and that he regretted the incident, were to no avail.

Lajb Landau would shout, “I am the Rebbe⁵! I am answerable for him and have rights to him!”

The pupil would beg the *Rebbe* for mercy [saying], “Rebbe, I will not forget again, I will already do everything, I will already obey everything...”

[But] it did not go by without punishment. On the following morning, when the pupil arrived in the *cheder*, the *Rebbe* delivered a sermon, in front of all the pupils, regarding the sin that that pupil had committed. After this, as punishment, he put a black hat with pins upon the pupil's head and made him stand in a corner of the classroom holding a broom. A pupil, who arrived late, was also not to be envied. Lajb Landau already had various punishments, so the pupils were wary of such things.

A month before Pesach was the “high season” for Lajb Landau's pupils. All were required to know the [four] questions by heart, with the translation into Yiddish and their meaning. Besides that, each one was required to know the entire procedure of the *Seder*. Just out of

¹ [TN: *Yid.*, from Heb./Aramaic, “small children's teachers”; the *melamed* who teaches the very smallest pupils the alphabet etc.]

² [TN: “*Kape'le*” or *kapl*” is the term used in Polish Yiddish for “*yarmulke*”, viz. ritual skullcap. Before attending *cheder* for the first time at the age of three, children are deemed too young to be initiated into religious practices, and are thus allowed to sleep without a “*kape'le*”.]

³ [TN: A basin with a receptacle full of water with which to perform a ritual handwashing upon awakening, without which Halacha forbids walking, talking etc.]

⁴ [TN: Heb., “Reading of the Hear (o Israel)”; prayer recited every morning and evening in the prayer service and also just before going to bed at night.]

⁵ [TN: Heb., “My master/teacher”; term used by children in ref. to their *melamed* or by *Chassidim* to their leader.]

fear, everyone knew everything excellently, because ignorance of the full procedure was considered a sin.

Every *Chol Ha'Moed*⁶ Pesach and Sukkos, Lajb Landau would visit each of his pupils and test him in the presence of his parents. In this manner, he made sure of the pupil for the upcoming semester.

Children, who did not do well in their studies, were sent to Lajb Landau, who already made “people” out of them. He explained to the children what a great sin one committed if one did not study. Just out of fear for the “sin”, about which Lajb Landau told them, the children learnt well.

Lajb Landau had thousands and thousands of pupils. He died an old, impecunious man, who characterised the typical *melamed* of old.

⁶ [TN: Heb., “Weekdays of the Festival”.]