

F. [sic Naftali¹] Gerbowski

A Bunch of Flowers

For ten consecutive years, I journeyed to Częstochowa as envoy of *Keren Ha'Yesod* [United Israel Appeal]. Each year, I had the opportunity to meet and work together with many people. There were two² among them to whom I took a strong liking, and towards whom my deference intensified from year to year. They were:

Jechiel Jochimowicz – a well-to-do brick manufacturer. He was an expert in the “black dots” [viz. fine print], who frequently took a look inside a *sefer*³ and did not write badly in Hebrew. He was Chairman of *Keren Ha'Yesod* in Częstochowa, and he carried out the day-to-day work as if he had been a paid employee. He oversaw the payment of vouchers [viz. pledges] given by contributors, and rushed around to collect the sums from those who failed to pay on time. During the campaign for *Keren Ha'Yesod*, he was “*rotz ke'tzvi*” (fleet as a deer⁴) from morning till night to find pledges for *Keren Ha'Yesod*.

In his exemplary activity, however, he had a formidable competitor who always tried to outdo him. This was the renowned Zionist activist in Częstochowa, Abram Gerszonowicz. When he saw that Jochimowicz had already reached a respectable number of pledges made, he would become “*giboir ku'ari*” (stronger than a lion) and invest his extraordinary energy in surpassing the former. In Częstochowa's Zionist circles, their “contest” was something famous. In accordance with the standards in the factory city of Częstochowa, they were called “the competitors”. An idealistic competition of this type was truly a rare thing.

Szmul Horowicz— the son of a Częstochowa manufacturer, an engineer by trade - was the *Keren Ha'Yesod* campaign's permanent secretary. Once the *Keren Ha'Yesod* fundraisers began, the management of the Horowicz & Partners factory already knew that its control over this young engineer had ceased, and that, from then on, he would dedicate himself entirely to his service as representative of *Keren Ha'Yesod*. He carried out his secretarial duties with extraordinary precision.

Juda Engel, Chairman of Mizrachi in Częstochowa, was an older man - and clambering up staircases was not a feat too easy for him. But he took no account of his feeble strength or his weak heart, and he fulfilled the commandment of redeeming the Land of Israel [from its Gentile owners by buying property there] with great love.

There were two Zionist activists who, within the Zionist circles, were called “the pair”. This was an exceptionally successful pairing - truly a match made in Heaven. They travelled around together during every *Keren Ha'Yesod* campaign, and worked successfully and fruitfully in unison. They constituted two separate worlds, with [two] separate world views. In the work for the Land of Israel, they would become smelted together with one aspiration and [one] desire - to raise as much as possible for building up the Land of Israel.

¹ [TN: This same article was published translated to Hebrew in *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. I, cols.189-192, and the author's name is given there as Naftali Gerbowski, who is mentioned in historical sources as an important representative of *Keren Ha'Yesod*.]

² [TN: As several individuals are subsequently mentioned, it is difficult to determine to which two the author is referring.]

³ [TN: Heb., lit. “book”; term used in Yiddish instead of a secular “buch” [book] in ref. to religious works, such as the Talmud and its commentators or halachic treatises, for which a fundamental knowledge of Hebrew and Talmudic Aramaic is required.]

⁴ [TN: Quote from Avot, Ch. 5, mishna 20: “Judah ben Tema said: Be strong as a leopard, and swift as an eagle, and fleet as a gazelle, and brave as a lion, to do the will of your Father who is in heaven.” The translations to Yiddish provided in parentheses differ slightly from the English version we have quoted from Herbert Danby's “*The Mishnah*” (1933).]

The renowned Mizrahi activist, [Reb Josef] Blechszajn, was a religious Jew with a beard, dressed in Chassidic garb. His “other half” was Dr Rozen - a man with a European education and a *Maski*⁵ to boot. In the work for the Land of Israel, they became as if “kneaded of the same dough” – and one could see them, [both] during the day and late in the evening, exiting one house and entering another. Częstochowa knew then that the “pair” was at work.

[Even when] the frost was burning and searing and a blizzard covered the streets, the “pair” neither saw it nor felt it, but enthusiastically set out on their sacred mission.

They, and dozens of others, dreamt of the Land of Israel for many years, but did not have the good fortune to flee into its womb and find repose on its soil. They remained there, in the hell of Nazism, to share the horrific fate of their brethren.

I do not know what happened to each of them - but they gave up their souls under refined, inhuman torments, and shared the fate of the millions of martyrs in Poland. May my few modest words serve as a bunch of flowers on their unknown grave.

Honoured be their memory!

Tel-Aviv, May 1944

*) [Editor’s note:] One of the Zionist activists who saved himself [by fleeing] to the Land of Israel was Jakow-Szyja Cohen.

⁵ [TN: Adherent of *Haskala*, or the Jewish Enlightenment Movement, which stood in direct opposition to Chassidism and traditional religion.]