

The *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* in Częstochowa (A Page of Memories)



The *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* in Częstochowa, as in all cities in Poland, originated as a synthesis of the World Scouting Movement and the *Ha'Shomer** - pioneering idea. The first *Shomrim* in the Land of Israel who, with their prowess of labour, endurance and heroic defence of the [Jewish] Settlement in Land of Israel in the most remote locations, had a phenomenal influence on the Zionist youth. Over the course of time, an ideology developed and crystallised, which was the opposite to the majority of the youth organisations - *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* was completely independent of the parties of the adults. Using scouting methods in the education of the young members was always an important factor in the life of the organisation - the importance of the individual; his character, intelligence, attitude towards his peers, towards society; his personal ethical conduct, his developed sense of rightness - all this played an important role in *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*. The organisation did not pursue quantity, after the masses. On the contrary - it set itself apart, bridled itself. *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* did not believe in mass-propaganda to convince the public. The goal of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* was to educate the young, as healthy, physically-spiritually mature builders, for *kibbutz* life in the Land of Israel.

I joined *Ha'Shomer* when I was a pupil in the first grade at the Jewish Gymnazjum, on the recommendation of the teacher Janowski. This was at the start of the 1920's. Janowski, a Hebrew teacher, a hearty Jew and a committed Zionist, took an interest in *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* and its activities at the time. But he was later to distance himself from it, due to *Ha'Shomer's* freethinking and socialist inclinations. Together with myself, Herszel Lichter, Mojsze Berliner and Majer Tenenbaum belonged to our "group". Our leader was Wilek Horowicz, who is now in the State of Israel.

The *ken* [nest, cell] was, at the time, located on ul. Kościuszki, in Markusfeld's building. Henryk Markusfeld was very fond of the *Shomrim* children, their meetings [and] their Hebrew songs and dances. The cell's leaders were Birman, Blum and, later, Gitler. Birman was among the first to emigrate to the Land of Israel.

Mania Birencwajg, an interesting and romantic personality, was also a leader of the cell. She taught herself "carpentry**" and went off to the Land of Israel. There, she lived on a *kibbutz* but, due to an illness, she returned to Częstochowa. She had great influence over us children. She survived the War and now works as a bacteriologist at the Institut Pasteur in Paris. She is the sister of Pinkus and Michał Birencwajg, who were also *Shomrim* for some time. Michał was a first-class sportsman and a courageous lad. Tonya Kolin used to call him "our Martin Eden***" This is the same Michał Birencwajg who heroically concealed Jewish families in the *Möbellager* [Furniture Camp]. He perished together with his wife, Hanka Szajnfeld.

A typical character of the *Shomrim* youth in Częstochowa was the brother of Wilek Horowicz. We called him by the nickname *Kotz* [Heb; "Thorn"]. He returned from the Land of Israel to study. Szmulek

* [TN: "The Guard," a Jewish defence organisation founded in Palestine.]

** [TN: With quotation marks in the original.]

*** [TN: Character in 1909 novel by Jack London.]

was devoted with all his being to the work of Keren Kayemeth. He perished together with his elder brother, Lewek.

For about two years, a *Shomrim* organisation also existed in Częstochowa in Tajchner's building, on ul. Piłsudskiego. This was *Ha'Shomer Trumpeldor*, [which was] permeated with the spirit of the heroic life and death of Joseph Trumpeldor and that of A.D. Gordon, who preached the glorification of labour. I belonged to this same organisation for a certain period, under the leadership of Lutek Grinberg, Wajsbard and Celnik.

At that time, my closest friends at the time were: Rubin Berkowicz, who lives now in Rehovot; Jachur [?], who is now in Paris; the gardener and man of nature, Frajermauer and the Hebrew teacher, Aron Luksemburg.

Ha'Shomer Trumpeldor, which was little different from *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*, but later became part of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*. The cell was in [the] Zawodzie [suburb] at the time, not far from the Jewish Hospital.

The leaders then were Leibisz Frank, Wilek Leslau, Josel Hajman, Jankel Braun, Fajwlowicz and the Kolin sisters.

The cell was divided into troops, and the troops into groups. My "Head" at the time was Judl Kolin. A celebration at the cell was very ceremonial. Every year, we travelled to the *Shomrim* colony [viz. summer camp]. We organised and conducted the colony by ourselves, with our own housekeepers, cooks [and] cleaners. We climbed the Beskidy mountains, held gatherings, [made] camp-fires, [sang] songs and [played] games. The annual colonies and, even more so, the training courses made a great impact on the members' characters. Both the colony and the training course taught one how to live on a *kibbutz* and to be among the last to enjoy amenities. The colonies were organised according to age: *Kfirim* [Cubs], *Tzofim* [Scouts] and *Kshishim* [the Eldest]. From the age of eighteen and over, we were called *Kshishim*, or poor old folks, who need to travel away for training and prepare themselves for the Land of Israel.

Between us and our parents, there usually lay an abyss. To alleviate the conflicts between us and our parents, we had to have clever diplomats. One of them was Leibisz Frank, who was 16 or 17 years old at the time. He had the head of a genius. One leader of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* in Częstochowa was Wilek Leslau, who is nowadays a renowned researcher and scholar. We are familiar with his research amongst the Falashas in the Abyssinian mountains.

Under the leadership of Josek Hajman and Jankel Braun, *Ha'Shomer* developed rich cultural activity. Study-circles were created and we engaged in various cultural undertakings. Different people took an interest in *Ha'Shomer* - teachers and [those affiliated with political] parties. They used to have discussions with us and they wondered how we could tolerate so many conflicting opinions and ideas within our group - how Dr Herzl and Jabotinsky shared an equal position with Karl Kautsky and Kropotkin. Lectures, sport, singing, excursions, books, love and friendship, research and knowledge, freedom of thought and respect for faith, sport and song [and] love for nature and work, were paramount in the lives of the young *Shomrim*.

One of the finest celebrations for the cell was **Lag Ba'Omer**. All the *Shomrim* were attired in green uniforms, with blue-and-white flags. With flutes and drums, we marched completely freely on the city's streets. The signals of Michal's trumpet awoke the inhabitants of the *Aleje* [Avenues], the New [Market] and the Old Market.

Among our members was the talented painter Heniek Guterman, a pupil of the famous painter, Wilenberg. In 1936, Heniek Guterman left for Spain to assist the Spanish People's democracy in the civil war. He perished in the war against Franco's fascists. A singular individual was Jankel Braun. In the critical period, when the youth was spiritually distressed and doubted the ideals of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*, Jankel encouraged us. The *Shomrim* way had then already begun to ripen and become more distinct - Zionism, Socialism and *Kibbutz*-ism. Some left to the right, to the Revisionists and others – to the left. Inside the movement [itself], there were agitators. Constant quarrels took place between the supporters of Mordche Ornsztajn (Orin) and Juda Gothelf. Jankel Braun believed in the Land of Israel as the only path and goal and, with his belief, he inspired those *Shomrim* who would eventually also travel away to the Land of Israel, some of whom actually live nowadays in *kibbutzim*.

In the 1930's, the cell was located on ul. Kilińskiego, next to the barracks. In the late '30's, Mojsze Klarman was the leader of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* in Częstochowa. His brother was the leader of *Gordonia*. Mojsze Klarman travelled to the Land of Israel in 1939, with his wife Różka Ajchenwald. During the War period, he took part in the Israeli [sic Jewish] Brigade and fought in Europe against the Nazis. During the War of Independence against the Arabs, he was with his family at the *Shomrim kibbutz*, Yad-Mordechai. He fell in battle against the Egyptian Army. It is told that he was the last one remaining in his post and he fired upon the enemy with his machine-gun. When the messenger arrived with the command to retreat, Mojsze was no longer alive. To this day, his wife and children live on *kibbutz* Yad-Mordechai, in the Negev.

Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair wrote a magnificent chapter in the history of the Jewish youth in our city's Jewish life. Anywhere the *Shomrim* of old only find themselves, they live still now with those years, which have left a stamp on their views, mentality and character - the stamp of those romantic *Shomrim* years. It is indeed true, what people used to say - "Once a *Shomer* – always a *Shomer*!"