

Dr Benjamin Orenstein

Yechezkel Silver (Zylberberg) RIP



Yechezkel Silver, the son of Reb Chaim and Miriam *née* Staszewska, was born in Częstochowa.

In 1929, he arrived in Montreal, Canada and, in 1931, he brought over his wife Bessie *née* Perelman, who gave him two children - a son Louis and a daughter Roslyn.

He was a silent, tranquil and modest man. He never sought any Eastern Walls [fig. honours¹], and also never sought to be at the forefront in communal life.

Following the Second World War, when *landsleit* who were miraculously saved from the Nazi hell arrived in Montreal and felt lonely and even depressed, because not all of them were able to settle down straight away, Yechezkel Silver brought them near to him. His shop on Main Street and his house became rendezvous points for newly-arrived *landsleit*. For each of them, he had a word of comfort, for each of them he had advice as to how to settle down and he also gave personal loans for an indefinite period of time. It is really no wonder that the *landsleit* elected him, against his will, as President of the *Landsmannschaft*.

He carried out his duties with great assiduousness and with the greatest devotion. At the beginning, there was almost no income. All the newly-arrived *landsleit* were not yet settled down, and they had no financial possibilities to contribute to the conducting of the *Landsmannschaft's* activities. On the other hand, letters arrived from *landsleit*, both in Israel and in other countries, regarding aid. Yechezkel Silver would provide the money needed to help out *landsleit* suffering need. This was a characteristic trait of Yechezkel Silver. This activity was, for him, a sacred work and he did this with great devotion, up to the last minutes of his life.

At all the functions, arranged by the *Landsmannschaft*, as President, instead of occupying the forefront and giving instructions, he personally performed all the work he was capable of carrying out himself.

Yechezkel Silver exercised an immense influence on the Executive [Board]. He created a family-like atmosphere, comradely devotion and respectful treatment of one another. He was known for his punctuality. He attended all the sessions and gatherings, never failing to arrive on time, even in the worst winds.

¹ [TN: The Eastern Wall of the synagogue is where the Holy Ark is located, and the foremost pews, nearest to this wall, are reserved for the community's most respected members, such as the Town Rabbi and the wealthiest men; the latter usually donate large sums in order to secure these seats.]

He supervised all the activities and knew how to fit each individual's capabilities to the appropriate work. He followed the principle that every person applying for aid ought to receive it - never to turn away an outstretched hand with nothing.

Yechezkel Silver was President of the *Landsmannschaft* for ten years and, during this entire period, he was the example and tone-setter for the activities - both with his devoted works and with his considerable monetary contributions. He participated in all the festive occasions of the *landsleit* and, from one of these celebrations - a bar-mitzvah - where the speeches of the bar-mitzvah [boy] and the representatives of the *Landsmannschaft* were recorded, there is also the speech of the deceased President, Yechezkel Silver RIP. He [also] took part in moments when a *landsmann* was in grief, Heaven forbid! Let it be mentioned here, that nothing ever stopped him from paying his last respects to a deceased *landsmann*. He travelled all the way to Toronto for the funeral of Mrs Rena Waga RIP.

At the beginning of September 1959, he was admitted into the Jewish General Hospital. It was said that he went for a "check-up". The Executive members became uneasy as to what had happened. All the Executive, as one man, and an entire array of *landsleit* went to visit him in his illness. He inquired, in detail, as to all the preparations for the [annual] memorial service that was to be held, whether the invitations were already ready to be sent out, whether the programme had already been completely worked out and regarding the correspondence that had arrived.

The conversation then turned to the personal affairs of the Executive members. He was sitting in the guest room and some even joked that a healthy man had decided to go to hospital. He, too, laughed. This calmed everyone very much, and they were convinced he would be home within two or three days. This calculation, however, was erroneous. Two days later, he was operated on and the doctors forbade any visits. Two days after the operation, on the night from 12th to 13th September 1959, he expired his soul.

All those, who had visited him in hospital two days before the operation, were utterly unable to believe that it was possible that the good-humoured, smiling President of the *Landsmannschaft*, Yechezkel Silver, was no more.

A special funeral session of the Executive was immediately called, which was held on Sunday, 13th September 1959 at eleven o'clock in the morning, at the house of Chairman Berl Ickowicz.

All the decisions of this meeting were scrupulously carried out. *Landsleit* freed themselves of their occupations and came to the funeral on Tuesday, 15th September 1959 at eleven o'clock in the morning.

The *Częstochower Landsmannschaften* and aid societies sent condolence telegrams. Flw Szlojme Waga travelled from Toronto to the funeral. Dr Benjamin Orenstein, the General Secretary of the *Landsmannschaft*, eulogised the deceased President Yechezkel Silver RIP.

The President's memory was also immortalised. In addition to the tombstone erected by the family, a special stone (monument) was raised, with fitting inscriptions in Hebrew and English. May his name and memory be everlasting.