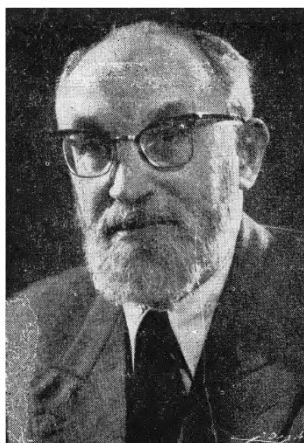


The Book Committee

Reb Jakób Leslau



He was born on 7th Iyyar 5657 [9th May 1897] in Częstochowa to his parents Reb Chenech Henech and Itta (daughter of Reb Abram Goldrajch).

His father was one of the prominent Jeżów and Stryków *Chassidim* and his mother was a descendant of the Rebbe of Ciechanów, Reb Awrum Landau z"l, author of the books "*Zchysa DeAvruhom*" ["Merit of Abraham"] and "*Ahavas Chessed*" ["Love of Charity"], whom his generation referred to as "The *Tzadik* of Ciechanów".

He began his studies, as usual, in *cheders* and he later studied in the *yeshivas* of Zduńska Wola and Radzymin Torah and Chassidism, in the style of Kotzk [Kock].

From the days of his youth, he was infused with a fierce desire to act for the public and, already in 5677 [1917], when he was still quite young, he founded the *Etz Chaim Yeshiva* in Częstochowa, whose purpose was to enable young men, who were studying Torah, to also learn secular subjects, without having to relinquish their place of study and their traditional way of life and adapt to a lifestyle which was not in accordance with their ideology. (In Volume One of this book we have published a protocol, characteristic in its originality, regarding the foundation of this *yeshiva*.)

Meanwhile, the First World War had come to an end and what ensued were a period of national [viz. Zionist] awakening and a hope for the Zionist ideal to be implemented in reality. The Balfour Declaration was made public and the belief was reinforced that the longed-for redemption of the Jews and their land was imminent.

Leslau and several others, who shared his views, felt that the time had come to also act amongst the religious and Chassidic youth, in order to include them within the ranks of the activists, so as to hasten the redemption. At the initiative of chosen individuals amongst the religious youth, the *Tzeirei Mizrachi* movement was founded in Poland and, later, *Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi* also.

Leslau established a branch in Częstochowa and was elected its Chairman, as well as a member of the movement's main leadership. He also took a very active part in the establishment of branches in cities throughout the Zagłębie [region] and organised their activities.

The religious extremists of the city and its vicinity did not look upon this favourably. But they realised that it was not within their powers to hinder him, for they also took into account his and his family's lofty standing. They concluded that, in this case, it was better to do nothing.

In 5683 [1923], Reb Jakób Leslau married Chaja, the daughter of Reb Duwid Majer Granek, one of the old Stryków *Chassidim* and the owner of a soap factory.

With his entrance into active life, his public-religious-nationalist activities did not cease. On the contrary, they even intensified. Leslau, on behalf of *Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi* - of whose national

leadership he was a member - organised courses for the professional training in carpentry and metalwork of *yeshiva* students who intended to emigrate to Palestine. The courses were conducted at the city' *Szkoła Rzemieślnicza* [Crafts School].

He also founded the first agricultural farm in Poland on behalf of *Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi* and was among those most active for the Jewish National bloc¹ in the elections to the Sejm, as well as to the City Council and the Jewish *Kehilla*.

He also dedicated himself to the work for the national funds and was given power of attorney on behalf of his movement for the *Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel* and the *Keren Ha'Yesod* council.

In 5684 [1924], he fulfilled his life's dream and emigrated to Palestine. There, he soon became one of the most active people in "*Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi*," a movement which was forced, at the time, to fight for "a day's work" for its members. The *Histadrut Ha'Ovdim Ha'Klalit* [General Organisation of Workers] was perceived in its endeavours as "a dangerous rival", as it wished all those requiring its [assistance] to be connected only with them.

During that period, the hands of those engaged in arranging working positions on behalf of *Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi's* employment bureau slackened and they proposed yielding to the *Histadrut's* demand - to cease operating separately and to join its ranks. Leslau was among those who opposed this vehemently and, thanks to him, *Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi's* independent bureau was not liquidated and, to this day, he has remained one of its principal activists and leaders. Shortly afterwards, the "dissidents" returned to their source of origin - to *Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi*.

Over the course of the years, the movement's financial enterprises were also consistently stabilised and Leslau's merits were great in organising and managing the *Olim-Bonim* [Immigrant Builders] company, which was a type of religious *Solel Boneh*².

Leslau was also head treasurer of the *Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi* Centre's and was the founder of its taxation system, as a member of its Executive Board.

He was also among the founders of *Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi's* Loans Fund, which is now called "*Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi* Bank". He has been its Director since it was first founded in 5688 [1928], when its base capital was 200 [Palestine] pounds (literally: two-hundred pounds) – which now reaches five million [Israeli] pounds. He is, to this day, its General National Director, with the bank having 28 branches.

Mr Leslau is also a member of the *Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi* movement's financial institutions' board of directors, a member of the Adanim Bank's management, a member of the management of the *Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi* Bank's investment company, Chairman of the directorship of the Gilad Pension Fund, a member of the *Mafdal's* [National Religious Party] executive board, a member of the *Mafdal* leadership in Tel-Aviv, a member of the directorship of *Midrashiat Noam*³ and a member of the movement's global auditing committee.

He was among the founders of the movement's *Mishkenot* an *Ha'Boneh*⁴ financial projects and is a member of their managements. As a member of *Ha'Mizrachi* and *Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi's* Executive

¹ [TN: It is unclear whether the reference is to the Mizrachi Party, which participated in the elections to the Sejm, or to the Bloc of National Minorities, which was co-founded by Izaak Grünbaum and included Zionist factions.]

² [TN: Lit. "Paving and Building"; the earliest, and formerly one of the largest, construction and civil engineering companies in Israel.]

³ [TN: Religious-Zionist school in Israel.]

⁴ [TN: Housing companies.]

Board, he was a member of the second Assembly of Representatives⁵ and also a delegate to the 19th-24th [World Zionist] Congresses. During the time he lived in Jerusalem, he was a member of its *Kehilla*. He is also a member of the Tel-Aviv Religious Council (from the day it was founded to this day), the chairman of the Tel-Aviv *Chevra Kadisha* management, Chairman of the *Ezras Torah*⁶ [Fund] [and] HIAS [Hebrew Immigrants Aid Society]. He was previously was a member of the Financial Council, next to the Prime Minister's Office.

Mr Leslau served as Chairman of this *Sefer Częstochowa* Book Committee and, if we have been privileged with its publication, he has played a large and important part in the colossal and responsibility-laden work, which was necessary in order to carry through this onerous mission!

⁵ [TN: The elected parliamentary assembly of the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine.]

⁶ [TN: Philanthropic organisation that provides Torah students with financial aid.]