

Reb Jakób Lewit



Reb Jakób Lewit, who in Częstochowa was affectionately nicknamed “Reb Jantshe”, was born in the town of Miechów (Kielce region). He arrived in Częstochowa in 1906, where he married Ms Taube (née Lubling), a god-fearing and generous-hearted woman, after which he settled in our city.

Already from his beginnings, he became famed as a successful and very accomplished businessman in the field of industry and commerce. In just a few years, Mr Lewit became one of the most prominent figures in Częstochowa’s financial life - at first, as one of the main representatives of the gigantic Stradom concern and, after some time, also as one of the important share-holders in that business.

In 1918, he established the Lewelen linen factory, which became famous, throughout Poland and beyond, for the quality of its products. The factory progressively expanded, developed and broadened and, before the First World War, employed over 300 workers.

In Jakób Lewit’s praise, it should be noted that he made efforts - although this entailed no small difficulties, due to the opposition on the part of the Polish workers - to also employ in his factory Jewish labourers - and not just as simple workers, but also as foremen, professional experts and accountants. Their number reached 70, viz. about 25% of his factory’s entire workforce.

Jakób Lewit did not confine himself within the narrow scope of his private business, despite the fact that this took up most of his day’s hours. He did not relinquish his public and Zionist activism. Seeing as how, in his paternal home, he had been taken with the Zionist ideal and [that of] the national revival in the spirit of the Torah and tradition, he was also counted amongst the leadership of the *Mizrachi* movement. [He served] alongside his peers in views and actions - alongside Goldsztajn, Weksler, Warszawski and Zylberberg - who were among the founders of this movement in our city. He also took part in all the Zionist events.

Concerning his contributions to the national funds *Keren HaYesod*, *Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael* and to *Mizrachi’s* Land of Israel Fund, Mr Lewit donated personally and [urged] others to give [also]¹. After giving his own contributions handsomely and generously, he actively - and with his full vigour - participated in soliciting donations from the rest of the city’s wealthy residents, who followed his example.

He was also one of the founders of our city’s Hebrew high school. One of its halls was named after him and his deceased wife - may he be set apart from her for a good, long life²!

Although Mr Lewit, [both] officially and though his lifestyle, belonged to the Nationalist and Zionist camp, he did not withhold his aid even from institutions which were not noted for their sympathy towards the nationalist movement, as he recognised their public value. Thus, he was found amongst

¹ [TN: With quotation marks in the original Heb; reference to Pirkei Avot, Ch. 5, Mishna 13: “He who desires that he himself should give, and that others should give: he is a pious man.”]

² [TN: In traditional Judaism, it is considered inauspicious to mention a live person in the same sentence with a dead one, thus a “differentiation” must be made.]

the important supporters of the *Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin* [Academy of the Sages of Lublin], when its founder, the prodigy Rabbi Majer Szapira ztz"l, turned to him for a contribution in order to establish this *yeshivah*. Jakób Lewit's donation was large and very valuable, as may be judged from the fact that his name was gloriously displayed on the marble plaque that was affixed at the *yeshivah*'s entrance, alongside the name of the famous industrialist Reb Uszer [Oskar] Kon, owner of the renowned Widzewska Manufaktura factory next to Łódź.

Reb Jakób Lewit visited in the Land of Israel, at first together with his son Dawid in 1932, to explore the possibilities for productive investments.

He travelled again in 1934 - this time alone - and embarked on his practical investments and on organising the export of his wares to the Land [of Israel]. At this point, he also made plans for moving his family and assets there. To this end, his son Dawid arrived in Palestine in 1938 and settled there. In 1939, Reb Jakób arrived for the third time, bringing his son Izaak with him. They celebrated Izaak's *bar-mitzvah* there, after which he was left in Palestine to continue his studies.

Jakób Lewit returned to Częstochowa in order to permanently liquidate his businesses in the Diaspora. Meanwhile, the Second World War broke out and, only by a miracle, he was able to escape with his entire family and make it to Palestine.

Thanks to his initiative, diligence and capability - with which he had already been blessed in his youth - he managed to establish a spinning and weaving wool factory near Petah Tikva, called "Jakób Lewit and Sons" - an important factory employing 180 workers, whose production is mainly intended for export. The Minister of Trade and Industry valued this factory and, due to its large export, was acknowledged as a Certified Exporter. The [Minister] even proclaimed that it was an "excellent exporter" and one of "the country's most special textile factories".

He was also graced with the current Minister of Finance's esteem and particular attention for his welcome and beneficial activities towards the financial development of the country in the industrial field.

It should be noted that Reb Jakób Lewit - the same now as before - also continues with his important public activity.

Among other activities, he is a member of the *Ha'Mizrachi* Investments Bank's Board of Directors, a member of the *Ha'Poel Ha'Mizrachi* Bank's Board of Directors and Chairman of the council of the Beit El Synagogue in Tel-Aviv. He is one of the active members of the public committee for the commemoration of the Częstochowa community, which is involved in the publishing of the book in its memory.

Additionally, Mr Lewit was active in a whole series of various types of institutions - social, financial, communal and others.

May our aged *landsgman*, who is respected by all as a man of action and thought [and] who continues working wonders with his youthful vigour, be blessed with many more years of health and fruitful activity for the benefit of our People and our redeemed and rebuilt land!