

The Holy “*Etz Chaim*” *Yeshivah* at the Local Study-Hall

Mr Jakób Leslau’s private archive contains the preserved minutes of this *yeshivah* which was established in 5677 (1917). Its publication, accurately retaining its style, can contribute much to the examination of the thoughts and actions of religious youth in Poland fifty years ago.

We therefore publish the minutes verbatim.

With the help of God almighty!

In the year *Ezra*’s¹, in the month of Iyyar [April-May], the “*Etz Chaim*” *yeshivah* was established at this locality. Precisely in these evil days, at the hour that, here and there, the sword and the hunger, the scarcity and the starvation, slash to the right and left and fell victims, victims; precisely in these bitter times, at the hour that thousands of Jews roam and wander without food and sustenance and without cover in the cold... precisely when the body is tortured and bent down to the ground – has come the hour to strengthen limp arms and encourage downcast souls by raising the Torah horn: by establishing *yeshivahs* and *cheders* to teach Torah to the infants who have not tasted the taste of sin, [a cause] which is more important than building the Temple², may it soon be built!

Thus, precisely now, in the hour of emergency, is the time to act for God, at the hour when the body is weakened, the heart is aching and the mind is confused, we must revive the soul of the People of the Book; precisely now, at the hour when popular “culture” clutches all the minds and hearts; high, middle and low schools multiply from day to day and the voracious lust for learning in various libraries assails the best of our sons, and who knows if they shall ever return to the study-hall? How shall the heart of the folk not ache, and take care to save the few who still remain loyal to God, His People and His Torah? One cannot deny that our leaders of the *Haredim* [God-fearing; religious] are involved in a hearty task of teaching Torah, the “*Machzikei Hadas*” Society, and they do well; for this, thanks and blessings!

However, no one takes to mind to establish a *yeshivah* glorified in holiness for bachelors in need of receiving good instruction from expert teachers! Thus the bitter question pecks, unwillingly, at our brain: What will happen to those leaving these *cheders*, after finishing their quota of studies there? And what will happen with them later, when they mature? Therefore, in the hearts of the charming lads here, it arose to settle this question and establish a *yeshivah* for these young bachelors.

And to the committee for the foundation of the *yeshivah* were chosen these bachelors: Jakób Lewenhof, Jakób Leslau, Icchok Roter, Szlojme Włodowski, Zelig Szacher [and] Leibel Wajnrajch. And they established a *yeshivah* named “*Tree of Life*” to them that lay hold upon her [Proverbs 3:18], and about fifty young men were admitted and it was divided into two divisions. The first division learn a lesson [from a teacher] on the tractate *Beitzah* [“Egg”; of

¹ [TN: *Ezra* is “The Help of” (God) in Heb. The word’s numerical value in gematria is 5677, i.e., 1917.]

² [TN: See Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 119b: “One may not interrupt schoolchildren from studying Torah, even in order to build the Temple”.]

the *Talmud Bavli*] with the *Toisfes*³ commentary and by themselves study three pages per week of the tractate *Kiddushin* ["Betrothal"] and, in the second division, they also learn a lesson on the tractate *Beitzah*, with the *Rashi* commentary, and by themselves study three pages per week of the tractate *Kiddushin*, and also *Tanach* [Hebrew Bible] and Secular Studies. And from that committee, three managers were elected: the bachelors Jakób Leslau, Szlojme Włodowski and Leibel Wajnrajch.

And the bachelors⁴, who pledged themselves to study and to supervise the *yeshivah* are: Leizer Borensztajn, Zelig Szacher, Chune Borzykowski, Szymson-Joina Guterman, Icchok Kaufman, Icchok Roter, Szlojme Włodowski, Awrum Rusiecki, Jakób Lewenhof, Leibel Wajnrajch, Jakób Leslau, Isachar Temer, Aba Bomac, Anczel Borzykowski, Józef Edelist, Zalman Bomac, Herszel Klajnman, Pinches Lenczner, Duwid Kroon, and Reb Wolwiz Borensztajn, Reb Bencion Wysokinski and Reb Jakób Wolf.

And the daily schedule is:

- from 7:00 to 9:00, reading in the tractate *Kiddushin*;
- from 9:00 to 11:00, prayer service and the breakfast;
- from 11:00 to 14:00, a lesson on the tractate *Beitzah* and [?]⁵, and recapitulation of the lesson for Class B;
- from 17:30 to 18:30, *Tanach* for Class B;
- from 15:30 to 18:30, a lesson on the tractate *Beitzah* for Class A;
- from 18:30 to 20:30, Secular Studies for Classes A and B.

The *Tanach* studies for Class A are on the Eve of the Holy *Shabbes* [i.e., Friday] from 13:30 to 16:30 and on the Holy *Shabbes* from 13:00 to 15:00. The study of [Halachic] laws is on the Holy *Shabbes* from 7:30 to 9:00 for Classes A and B; from 14:00 to 16:00, *Pirkei Uves* [Ethics of the Fathers] for Class B; from 16:00 to 17:00, examination on the lesson for Classes A and B; from 15:00 to 16:00, *Pirkei Uves* for Class A. The reading examination is on the Eve of the Holy *Shabbes* from 11:00 to 12:30 for Class A, and from 11:00 to 14:00 for Class B.

Studies began on Sunday of the [weekly] reading of *Acharei Mos-Kedoyshim* ["After the Death" and "Martyrs", respectively (Leviticus 16:1-20:27)], Iyyar 7 [Apr. 29], and the local Head of Court, Reb Nuchem Asz, may he live for many good days, and some of the city's dignitaries, were present at the inauguration and blessed us "may it please God that His Presence dwell in your handiwork, and that in merit thereof God, may He be blessed, should grant that we see the building of the *yeshivah* at Yavne and its sages⁶, soon in our days, Amen!".

³ [TN: Also pronounced *Tosafot* (Heb. "Additions"), the *Toisfes* are medieval commentaries printed together with the main text of the *Talmud*. These commentaries are considered more difficult than the more basic *Rashi* (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki; French medieval Rabbi) commentary, also printed on the page.]

⁴ [TN: The last 3 were obviously not bachelors but teachers.]

⁵ [TN: Unclear abbreviation (יכב); may stand for "kibud", i.e., refreshment.]

⁶ [TN: Famous 1st century CE rabbinical school in Judea, which, according to tradition, shall be rebuilt in the Messianic Era.]