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The “Gordonia” Movement in Częstochowa

In 1933, Polish Jewry awakened towards the approaching [events] and Jewish youth began to establish training-groups, pending *Aliyah* to the Land of Israel. The song of those coming to see off the few pioneers emigrating to the Land of Israel echoed at train-stations in different cities. The entourage returned to their homes and, in their hearts, beat the belief that soon they, too, would make *Aliyah*. The youngsters among them returned to their branch, cell or lodge, depending on which movement they belonged to. The “movement” was the bridge between the youth and the great goal they to which they aspired.

Among those active in “Gordonia” of Częstochowa, we must mention the members Jarzombek, Leibel and Iwecia Mandelbaum, Blumenkranc, Rozenwajn, Zelig Lewkowicz, Nuchem Klarman and Ciaciura.

Part of the Jewish youth swarmed, at staggering pace, to the central point of the youth movements – “*Ha’Chalutz*”. Among these movements was also “Gordonia” – a popular, pioneering youth movement, which was organised in groups, from the ages of 13 to, and including, 18. Groups were known as Buds, Scouts, Wakers, [and] Fulfillers.

The “Gordonia” lodge in Częstochowa was located on ulica Krótka.

I shall attempt to recreate, along general lines, an evening at the lodge, in the days that have passed and are no more. Around three hundred boys and girls spent there their evening hours. The “Buds” group has just finished their activity, the “Scouts” listen to a story, the “Wakers” make the members dance and the “Fulfillers” group discuss the day’s events and the news received from the older members in the training groups, who are preparing for *Aliyah*. The essence of the movement was expressed in the blessing with which the members used to bless each other: *Fulfil - and ascend!*

Over the course of time, some members left the movement and returned to the bosom of their family. They did not wish to rebel against the path which their father and mother followed. On the other hand, another group of members left for training in Sosnowiec.



The leadership of the “Gordonia” youth movement cell

A second group, graduates of the Jewish high school, went to Zadońska-Wola. A third group joined the "Atid" [Future] movement and left for Pabianice, while the youngest group went to Tomaszów Mazowiecki. This was the fruit of many years of labour!

Meanwhile, the gates to *Aliyah* had been locked and "certificates" became something that members had to wait a year or two to receive. Conditions in the Diaspora were unbearable and the heavens above the Land of Israel darkened with clouds. The year 1936 had arrived, the year of the [Arab] revolt in Palestine. On the "ascent" [to the top of a mountain], five members went to work and were killed by enemy fire. Mourning was announced in the movement. Their memories were commemorated in poems dedicated to them and the location was named "*Ma'ale Ha; Hamisha*" [The Ascent of the Five]. Those who stood fast and did not relinquish the cause believed and sang:

***"It is our destiny, it is the command.
This is the path; this is the line."***

Again we saw off members who, little by little, made *Aliyah*, after a lengthy sojourn in the training squads.

The movement's graduates, upon leaving it, became its supporters. They donated to Keren Kayemeth Le'Israel, to the Party. They bought shekels and voted for the Working Land of Israel.

Due to a lack of budget, we were forced to leave the lodge on ulica Krótka and to carry on our activities at the "Party's" lodge, under difficult conditions. Nevertheless, by orders of the main leadership, we continued. Emissaries from Warsaw and also from the Land [of Israel], who occasionally visited us, instilled in us the spirit of faith. They spoke of "possibilities" of an "*Aliyah B*", without training.

The year 1938 approached. Again, a few individual members made *Aliyah*, with or without certificates. From Germany, came evil tidings. We met, face-to-face, with the pioneering youth that had left Germany, joined our training squads and found refuge in the pioneering movement. We felt that a similar destiny also awaited us, as Częstochowa is only 30 kilometres from the German border. The German broadcasting station incited, and the danger was approaching. The Jews of Zbąszyń, who were expelled, also found refuge in our city, and their youth found its place in "Gordonia" and in Częstochowa's horticultural farm. Life flowed like the waters of the Warta River that passes through the city – until the year of woe came – 1939.

(On Friday, the first of September, we heard the first shot. It was clear to us that a decisive shift was occurring in our lives. On that day, and the following day, on Saturday, the remaining members of "Gordonia", "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*", "*Freiheit*" and some of the members of "*Poalei Zion*" and "*Hitachdut*" gathered in order to decide what we were to do. Despite our ideological differences, we were united in the concern that enveloped us all. We experienced a new event – the German invasion. We were helpless. We abandoned the lodge, together with the archives and banners in it.

A beautiful period of educational work in the spirit of A.D. Gordon, after whom our movement "Gordonia" was named, had come to an end.)