

Mojsze Chaim Tiberg

“HaChalutz HaMizrachi” in Częstochowa

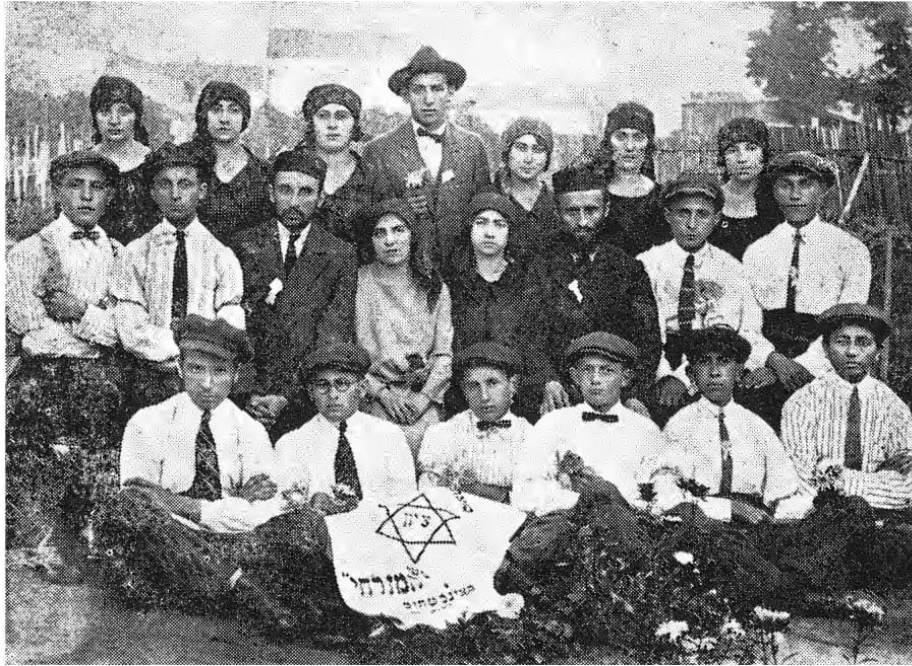


The storm that passed through the Jewish faction in Poland in all its strata, after the start of the First World War in 1914-1918, did not by-pass over religious Jewry either. The essential shock of the collapse of systems, countries and peoples, that brought with it the downfall of the kings of Czarist Russia, Germany and Austria, the rise of Poland and Czechoslovakia in Eastern Europe, the Balfour declaration and more, sprouted deep roots in the hearts of Polish Jews as well, who felt the pulse of the historic period, which augured elemental changes in the values and structure of life until then accustomed and brought the organisation of associations and parties in Polish Jewry.

Our city Częstochowa also, as a progressive city and one of the most important in Congress Poland, was among the first to establish these type of parties, organisations and public institutions. Especially distinguished in our city was the religious-nationalist Jewry who were organised under the *“Ha’Mizrachi”* organisation. This organisation included the most important personages who stood, then, at the head of the public institutions in the city, such as the city’s Chief Rabbi, Reb Nachum Asz, his brother-in-law Reb Mojsze Halter, Reb Józef Szymon Koblenz (called *“the Maggid”*), Reb Szmul Goldsztajn (Chairman of the *Kehilla*), Reb Chaim Weksler, Reb Anczel Warszawski, Reb Abram Henoeh Finkelsztajn, Reb Izrail Plocker, Reb Józef Mendel Lipski and many other important figures in the city. The people, whom I have mentioned, who were men of stature in the most important institutions of the city, drew to themselves the young religious, the students of study-halls and the religious young intelligentsia in the city, who were the city’s *crème de la crème*. They were organised by *“Ha’Mizrachi”* as a branch of the *“Tzeirei Mizrachi”* organisation - a tributary to the Central [board] (first in Łódź and later - in Warsaw).

These youths, on whose heart was engraved the love of the Land [of Israel], were not content with just *“Tzeirei Mizrachi’s”* limited activities, which took the form, specifically, of organisational and cultural activities. They also aspired to train themselves towards the personal fulfilment of *Aliyah* and, at the many assemblies and meetings of *“Tzeirei Mizrachi”*, in their discussions regarding their future work, the idea matured in them that what was existent and accustomed in the organisation’s activities should be changed and mustered into a more practical activity which is - to train members in practical work and manual labour, in order to prepare for the building of the Land [of Israel] through real physical work. Thus was founded the *“Ha’Chalutz Ha’Mizrachi”* organisation in Częstochowa, the first in Congress Poland (only afterwards, as time passed, did other branches of *“Ha’Chalutz Ha’Mizrachi”* arise). Its founders were Jakob Leslau, Sz. Z. Shragai, Izaak Kac (elected as Chairman), Chaim Fajnsztadt, Ch. Z. Rozen, Dov (Goldberg) Achiyahu, Juda Barkai and the writer of these lines. All are in Israel.

(Many members remained standing guard for the organisation abroad and were unable to perform *Aliyah* in time, among them being the illustrious Abram Danziger, who were annihilated at the time of the Holocaust, and may God avenge their blood).



The horticultural farm group of "Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi"
From right to left (standing): *Guczka Woznica, Ruchel Szwarbaum, Dwojra Szpilberg, Chune Tatarka, Hela Gliksman, Ruchel Szpilberg and Feigel Bratt*
Sitting (middle): *M. Ch. Tiberg, Ch. Fajnsztadt, Sz. Z. Shragai, Miriam Shragai, Chaja Leslau, J. Leslau, Juda Barkai and I. M Kac*
Sitting (bottom): *Ch. Z. Rozen, J. Wajcman, N. Klajner, J. Berman, A. O^{*}fman and J. Goldrajch*

At the beginning, the idea was to start working the land on the city's Jewish horticultural farm - at "Ferma Ogrodnicza". However, a group of members formed who championed the idea of establishing an independent group of farmers of "Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi" in Częstochowa, in order to train its members for *Aliyah*, with the goal of emigrating together to the Land [of Israel] and founding a cooperative kibbutz there through "HaPoel Ha'Mizrachi". This idea was successfully implemented by Izaak Kac, Chaim Fajnsztadt, Chaim Ze'ev Rozen, Juda Barkai, Natan Klajner, and the writer of this article (all are in Israel), Jakob Berman (lives abroad), Jakob Goldrajch, may God avenge his blood, who returned abroad due to an illness and Jakob Wajcman and Hofman **, may God avenge their blood. These members organised as a group of farmers (by initiative and with help from Leslau and Shragai), and they succeeded in being not only among the initiators of the idea, but also its executors. They rented a plot of land inside the city, on Ferens' grounds ul. Warszawska 27 and, in the spring of 5683 (1923), they began preparing the soil and working it under the guidance of an experienced Jewish instructor in our city.

Female members, who had religious views, also belonged to "Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi" in our city, seeing as how the "Tzeirei Ha'Mizrachi" organisation was only for young men only. It was not easy for us, the students of the study-halls whose origins were in Chassidic homes, to admit women as well into our organisation. But the needs of the settlement of the Land of Israel and the relentless pressure of these girls, who pointed out their willingness to take part in the pioneering work and the goal of *Aliyah*, overcame the hesitations and it was decided to admit them as members of "Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi". Among them were also some who signed up for the farmers' group. Since the men did not wish to work

* [Translator's note: Spelled beginning with an Aleph in original]

** [Translator's note: Spelled beginning with a Hey in original]

together with the women as a team, we rented another garden for them (from Mr. Wyszynski, on the "Second Aleja") where they worked under the guidance of a renowned agronomist - separately, and they only participated together with the male members for lectures and Hebrew lessons. A few of them are in Israel. They are Ruchel Szwarcbbaum (my wife), sisters Ruchel and Dworka Szpilberg (Mr. Sz. Z. Shragai's sisters-in-law), and Hela Gliksman. Of those who were not able to emigrate in time and were lost in the Holocaust, there was Feigel Bratt, may God avenge her blood. Gucia Woznica lives abroad.

Besides the locations mentioned above, we also sometimes worked at the Jewish horticultural farm in the crop fields, ploughing, harvesting etc. Working the land was very hard and it crushed the body, especially when, after a day's work in the fields, we went out at night on *mishmar** in shifts. But the great enthusiasm with which our pioneers were blessed made [us] forget the physical hardships, and mighty singing in Hebrew, filled with longing, always accompanied the work and the resting hours following it.

The prolific and daring activity of the young men and women caused great interest in the city and brought different visitors almost every day. They came to see, with their own eyes, the great wonder, how youngsters, versed in the Talmud and its commentators, diligently worked the land and also spoke Hebrew among themselves - and not just regular Hebrew, but with the Sephardic pronunciation. Not only that but, after the backbreaking work at the farm, they sat and learned lessons Talmud, [the] *Zeraim* [order of the] *Mishna*** etc. and all in Hebrew! The extremist religious circles, too, did not cease to speak about this and, amongst them, there were many who interpreted it negatively and argued, "How can this be? To leave the Talmud and do farm-work?", and they began to examine whether our deeds there were legitimate.

I recall that my father and teacher, Reb Dawid Berisz Tiberg, may his soul be in Eden, who was counted among the *Chassidim* of [the] Aleksander, Biała and Stryków [dynasties], once said to me, disapprovingly as it were, [but] with a hidden tone of satisfaction, "Tell me that you study Talmud there, is that correct? Well, well...wouldn't you do better to sit and learn at the study-hall?". My mother, of blessed memory, also expressed her approval of father's words with a nod of her head and a smile on her lips (by the way, my parents had the luck to succeed in immigrating to the Land [of Israel] even before the establishment of the state, and also to bring the entire family. They died and were buried in Rehovot). However, this attitude of hesitation and dismissal passed and, after a short time, even the *Chassidim* in the city ceased criticising us. Our number of supporters grew and surpassed that of those who opposed us until, finally, they even took pride in us and said, "Come and see what these youths are capable of!"

Meanwhile, the fields began to yield their produce and we suddenly realised that the stalks were heavy with an overabundance of fruits and vegetables, and no wonder, for the labour we invested was done faithfully and with true commitment and the processing of the soil was intensive. But a new problem was created for us - how and where to would we market the harvest? We had not dealt with this question earlier and we did not know how to solve it.

But we found the desirable solution to this, too. One fine day, Jews and non-Jews gathered around our wagon, which stood in the municipal marketplace, to the brim with vegetables and fruit. Two of our young men sat on it and, at the top of their voices, advertised the produce they had brought. This time, they yelled not in Polish and Yiddish, but in Hebrew! And whoever did not see the happiness of the

* [Translator's note: "Mishmar", literally "guard duty" is the Jewish custom of sitting up all night in the study-hall and studying the Talmud.]

** [Translator's note: Zeraim ("Seeds") is a section of 11 tractates in the Mishna dealing with liturgy, tithes and agricultural laws.]

Częstochowa Jews on that occasion has never seen happiness! These first fruits, of such beauty, the product of Jewish labour - was truly the beginning of the Messianic Era. Of course, our produce was literally snatched from our hands and this was repeated almost every day until we had sold the entire, bountiful crop. Our proceeds covered the group's deficit and we had money left over to support our members at the time of their *Aliyah*.

Obviously, the visitors who came to us from time to time also included people from the Centre in Warsaw and many members from the neighbouring cities - Zawiercie, Sosnowiec, Będzin, Radomsko and others, from where the farm's fame had reached. One of the visits that are engraved in my memory is that of Rabbi Reb Szmul Ha'Levi Brot of Lipno. We all wore our uniform gala attire. Rabbi Brot and his escort (of the important people in the city and in the "*Ha'Mizrachi*" organisation), toured the plots and praised us for each and every garden bed, which were all finely processed and taken care of.

On that same day, the embroidering work was completed on the flag which displayed, in gold letters, the embroidered words "*Farmers' Group of Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi in Częstochowa*" and, in its centre, a Star of David with "*Zion*" in the middle. In honour of the guests and the flag, that day was designated as the festive opening of the farm. The group, together with their guests, were photographed with that flag flying above us. The celebration reached its peak with the speech of the honoured guest, which he delivered in the garden's pavilion, in praise of "*Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi*" and especially the "*Częstochowa group*" and, of course, in praise of the Land of Israel - first and foremost. This visit from Rabbi Brot and the speech he delivered before a great crowd of the townspeople made a great impression upon us and upon all those present.

We also retain indelible memories (which were also immortalised in photography) of the farewell-party which we held for our members Jakob Leslau and Szlojme Zalman Shragai on the occasion of their *Aliyah*.



At the conclusion of my words on "*Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi*", I cannot avoid mentioning another occasion on one evening, during which the same pleasant evening spent in company of a member of the Center, the martyr Reb Jakob Radzinski, may God avenge his blood, who came from Warsaw to visit us. That same evening, - after work and after the lesson, we heard his charming lecture. We then organised a campfire and spent time with him until a very late hour - almost till dawn - in friendly conversation and singing. We all spent that night in the barn, which was in our neighbourhood. We did not fall asleep and our clamour - the sound of song and dance - was heard in the entire vicinity, which attracted the attention of different night watchmen, who came to see how the "*Żydzi*" were "going wild".

(Who would have thought that this would be our last meeting with such a charming and dear friend? Woe over those who are gone, in general, and over the dear spirit of Reb Jakob Radzinski. May God avenge his blood, in particular, whom the oppressor, may his name be obliterated, killed in an unnatural manner (may God preserve us), and his bitter destiny was the same as all the rest of the "*Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi*" members who remained in Częstochowa, who hallowed God's name in public when burnt at the stake for His sake. May God avenge their blood and may their memory be blessed.)



As I have already mentioned, most of the members of the "farmers" group of "*Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi*" in Częstochowa made *Aliyah* and they are in Israel- A large number of them even succeeded in bringing their parents and families.

Also, here in Israel, a bright page was written by this group which, in 5685 [1924-25], founded the "group" in Rehovot, on cooperative lines, named "*Yehuda Aryeh*" - after the Rabbi Reb Juda Leib Kowalski z"l, the Rabbi of Włocławek and one of the first rabbis and leaders of "*Ha'Mizrachi*" in Poland.

About this group in Rehovot and its activities, there is also a special article published in this book, under the title "*The Religious Labour Movement in Rehovot*". The book "*70 to Rehovot*", which is dedicated to its 70th anniversary, also tells of the "*Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi*" Częstochowa group.