

Jakob Leslau

## The “*Tzeirei Ha’Mizrachi*” Organisation in Częstochowa

The “*Tzeirei Ha’Mizrachi*” association was founded on Chanukah 5677 [1916], during the visit to our city of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Zlotnik of Gąbin and Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum from Warsaw.

Its founders included Mordka Gold (Zahavi), brothers Jakob and Szmul Koblenz, Zvi Granek, Abram Bajgelman, Ze’ev Wiewiorka, A. Oberman, A. N. Sztencel, A. Enzel, D. Goldberg and Jakub Chuna Filik (Plai). A temporary council was elected which immediately began to propagate the idea among the orthodox youth, in general, and especially those sitting in the study-halls. The council strived to strengthen in the hearts of the religious youth their nationalistic sentiments, to awaken their inner consciousness and to keep them away from the influence of those circles hostile to the idea of national revival. For this, a broad educational activity was necessary. Happily, the call to rally around “*Tzeirei Ha’Mizrachi*” bore fruit and many members were added, among them study-hall students.

Although it had grown to encompass the best of the city’s youth, the “*Tzeirei Ha’Mizrachi*” movement in our city experienced a temporary, long hiatus due to the First World War, which brought about the liberation of Poland and its declaration as a free and independent state. A large section of the youth was called to the army which fought against the “Bolsheviks”. Only after the War and the return, to our city, of the released soldiers was work renewed with increased stamina by some members of the former council and by new members who entered the operation.

In Tamuz 5680 [June-July 1920], a general assembly was held, during which a new council was elected which included J. Leslau, A. Bajgelman, J. Ch. Filik (Plai), J. Lewenhof, M. Rozencwajg, M. Goldberg, J. Monowicz, R. Brandes, D. Goldberg (Achiyahu), A. Danziger and A. Holand.

Sometime later, Sz. Włodowski, Ch. Fajnsztadt, M. Ch. Tiberg, Ch. Z. Rozen, J. J. Kon, Sz. D. Kaminski, J. Kac, J. Barkai and I. M. Holand were added to the council.

A broad, cultural operation was implemented. Daily lessons were organised in the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew, Jewish history, Talmudical literature and the Talmud. A library was also established which housed books on all subjects and a reading-hall was opened too. Members also actively participated in raising funds for *Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael*, the “*Ha’Chalutz Ha’Mizrachi*” fund and the distribution of [Zionist] shekels.

Members of “*Tzeirei Ha’Mizrachi*” in our city were also active in neighbouring cities, organising groups in all of the cities in the vicinity. That same year, a district council was also established, made up of J. Leslau, D. Goldberg (Achiyahu) and J. Sz. Koblenz (all three from Częstochowa), Ch. Welner (from Będzin) and Lewkowicz (from Radomsko).

A curriculum was prepared for advanced studies in all the types of subjects - the Hebrew Bible, Jewish history, Judaic Studies\*, religious philosophy (*"Kuzari"*, *"Ikkarim"* [books]), the history of Zionism and *"Ha'Mizrachi"* and in new Hebrew literature.

At that same period, Szlojme Zalman Shragai (nowadays Director of the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem) came to live among us and he, too, commenced active work.

In 5683 [1922-23], a regional conference of our organisation was held in our city, in which youth from all neighbouring cities participated.

In this conference, Rabbi Elimelech Najfeld, the lawyer Aron Blum from Warsaw and Mr. M. Sh. Geshuri from Jerusalem took part on behalf of the Central [Office]. Following these guests' speeches and the reading of reports on *"Tzeirei Ha'Mizrachi's"* activities in their locations, decisions were reached concerning the different operational areas and an announcement was made regarding a special fundraiser for the *"HaChalutz HaMizrachi"* fund to collect moneys and tools with which to fortify and stabilise the position of our members in the Land of Israel.



*Gathering of members for the wedding of the chairman Jakob Leslau, 15<sup>th</sup> Tamuz 5683 [29<sup>th</sup> June 1923].  
Sitting (mbrs. of the council): D. Szczekacz, Ch. Fajnsztadt, I. M. Holand, D. Goldberg, the chairman Jakob Leslau, Sz. Z. Shragai, A. Pik, Berkowicz, I. M. Kac and M. Ch. Tiberg.*

Shragai and Leslau (Częstochowa), Włodowski (Radomsko), M. Szklarczyk (Sosnowiec) and Barankewicz (Kielce) were chosen as management.

Next to *"Tzeirei Ha'Mizrachi"*, the group *"Bnei Ha'Mizrachi"* [Sons of *Ha'Mizrachi*] was also formed. It was directed by a special committee of its members and was under the auspices of a supervisory council on behalf of *"Tzeirei Ha'Mizrachi"*. Every Saturday, lectures and members' discussions were held on the questions of Judaism and its values. Every evening, lessons in Hebrew Bible, Talmud and Hebrew were given.

Each and every member was required to abide by the following directives: to act in his private and social life according to the laws of Torah and tradition, to study Hebrew Bible, Talmud and Hebrew, to

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\* [Translator's note: Judaic Studies or Science of Judaism is the 19<sup>th</sup> century German concept *"Wissenschaft des Judentums"*.]

purchase the Zionist shekel (through "*Ha'Mizrachi*") and to prepare himself for emigration to the Land of Israel.

Also "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Dati*" [The Religious Guardian] and "*Bruria*" [a women's youth movement] took substantial part in the activities of the local youth. They prepared their male and female members for emigration to [the Land of] Israel and their becoming entrenched in agricultural settlement and in creative work.

With the movement's growth and ramification, for many members, the problem also arose of physical emigration to the Land of Israel.

At that same period, "*Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi*" was founded in our city. It began organising courses for professional training in carpentry and ironworking at the craft school ("*Szkoła Rzemieślnicza*"). These courses were conducted at dusk, especially for our members. It is noteworthy that a significant part of *yeshivah* students also participated in these courses. The religious extremists, however, did not look well upon all the daring innovations and sought to hinder them. But they were unsuccessful and eventually some of their sons, too, came and attended these courses.

In 5684 [1923-24], a "training farm" at ulica Warszawska 27 was established, with the active participation of J. Leslau, Sz. Z. Shragai, L. Blechsztajn, J. Ickowicz, M. L. Haberfeld, Jarkowizna, and Wołoski. Here, members were trained in agricultural work and gardening. This farm served as a model and was praised in the entire region.

Guests at farm's opening ceremony included Mr. Cheszel Farbsztejn, Chairman of the Jewish Community Council in Warsaw and President of "*Ha'Mizrachi*" in Poland and Rabbi Szmul HaLevi Brot, Rabbi of Lipno and a member of the Polish Sejm.

Thanks to the training received at the professional lessons of the craft school and at the agricultural farm, many members emigrated to the Land of Israel. Today, many of them are famous leaders and doers in the State of Israel and are active in diverse public areas.

We may stress that these members of ours were the first to emigrate from amongst the organised groups of "*Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi*" in Poland.

Due to the great interest our townspeople showed in the purchase of plots in the Land of Israel, we opened a special office of the "*Menucha Ve'Nachala*" [Rest and Inheritance] group, at the head of which stood one of the elder leaders of "*Ha'Mizrachi*", Reb Lewi Lewin-Epszajn z"l, whose goal it was to enable the broad masses to settle, in practice and in action, in the building of the country. To this aim, the group purchased lands in Jalil [Ijlil al-Qibliyya village] in the vicinity of Kefar Sava.

The "*Tzeirei Mizrachi*" movement in Częstochowa integrated many youngsters and young adults; its representatives took part in all areas of Zionist and social activities in the city and its institutions; the name of the "*Tzeirei Mizrachi*" organisation - with all its extensions - became famous among all the youth groups in the city and [it] was one of the most active of all "*Tzeirei Mizrachi*" organisations in Poland.

It is also possible to learn of "*Tzeirei Mizrachi's*" welcome activities from the great number of its members who emigrated to the Land of Israel, who occupy important positions in the building of the

country and whose activity is apparent in diverse branches of financial and construction life, *Aliyah* [immigration to Israel] and in the fields of education and culture. The exile Częstochowian training achieved its target and was not in vain.

Over the course of time, [some] distinguished themselves in our city as active members, who took part in diverse operations, whose names are worthy of mention. They are **D. Szczekacz, A. Pik, A. Tatarka, Z. A. Ruzewicz, H. Baron, Z. Mendelowicz, J. Birman, M. Borzykowski, Sz. Zygelbaum, the Rozental brothers, the brothers A. and M. Kaminski, J. J. Grynman, A. Lipinski, Sz. Kac, J. Buksztel [?] and Z. Bratt.**



“B’nei Mizrahi”: **Ze’ev Rajchman, Gecel Szczupak, Szlojme Fajgenbaum, M. A. Berliner, Aryeh Holand, A. Luksemburg, Efroim Windman, Jakob and Izrail Tiberg.**

Some of them immigrated to Israel. But, to our great sorrow and despair in our hearts, the majority of them perished in the Holocaust and only a minority of a minority were saved and are still living abroad and have not yet come to the redemption and inheritance in the land of their desires in the past.



(We are very sad for our devoted members who have not yet had the privilege to fulfil their vision and our [heart] break is as vast as the sea for those whom the oppressive enemy put an end to their magnificent lives and the lives of their families. May their memory ascend together with the memory of all the martyrs of the Częstochowa community, may God avenge their blood, to whom “*Sefer Częstochowa*” is dedicated and may God, to whom vengeance belongs, avenge their spilt blood!)



*“The flowers of Mizrahi” in 5683 [1922-23] at their meeting with J. Leslau and Sz. Z. Shragai.  
In the photo the leaders of the movement: Jakob Leslau and Szlojme Zalman Shragai  
and among the “flowers of Mizrahi” are Borzykowski, Sztajnhart,  
Holand, Rajchman, Wajcman, Tatarka and Tiberg*