

# MEMORIES AND NOTES OF A COMMUNITY LEADER

by Aharon Shlomo ELBERG\*

translated from the Hebrew by Carole Turkeltaub Borowitz

*For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and from Kutno, the Jerusalem of Poland, the word of the Lord* [adapted from Isaiah 2:3].\*

*With God's help, 4 Cheshvan 5691, Kutno 26.10.1930*

*"For the sake of Zion, I will not be silent"* [Isaiah 62:1]

*I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly...*

*I have sought your happiness – mine has been lost.*

Our rabbis have a Biblical interpretation: Why did God call *Betzalel* by that name? [*Betzalel*, in the shadow (protection) of God, in Hebrew]. Before man was first created there was no meaning to anything. The Lord God created each generation, and its teachers, its wise men, its writers, its leaders and those involved, his nose, his ears, his hands, his feet, his hair, his head. This is a puzzling question, I have tried since then many times with my poor wit, throughout my work, to understand it, and my wisdom, which has helped me over years of energetic and dedicated activity. As there is a great world, and there is a small world opposite it, there is a private and a public person. And in the public person there are those who are dependent on their wit: he has to be the leader and that is a right that has befallen me. Although I am a shy and modest person, who avoided such things, I was propelled forcibly as the war broke out, and matters of the community entered into my very soul without respite.

I was born in 1882 in Kutno, into a prosperous and privileged family. I was employed in Kutno and from there, in 1898, I continued after the death of my father, my teacher (may his memory be blessed) in 1902. I was concerned, for my orphan state restricted my freedom, and I became as if enslaved. After "a war of liberation", war in peacetime, I became a free man in 1903, although only half a worker and half a free man... In 1908 I became a first-rate merchant of "grains, fodder and seeds" to warehouses from Russia to Germany, in conditions that were not easy...

I was an orphan and had to keep up a position and it worked out, although I chased after rest all the time (especially the nights) coming and going abroad for the sake of business. I did not find rest like one of those idlers. Going up and going down, without the repose that I always recommended: the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab, they all went on reigning! [Genesis, 36:39]... Despite everything, life continued to flow onwards. My situation was not a path strewn with roses. Without becoming angry about my lot, I was actually quiet and relaxed at home with my family, reciprocating kindness with my relatives and family, loyal friends benefited from me, one from a loan and another by resourcefulness, I found ample recompense and I donated to all who came under my roof, as the Lord God did towards me.

Until the war broke out, I was concerned with my business and I did not make time for public matters, and everything went routinely, tidy and organized. Only when I went to perform something to do with religion, and this was the induction of Jewish boys into the covenant of Abraham [circumcision], our father Abraham may he rest in peace, I was conferred the title of "Expert Circumciser" since I was privileged to circumcise my own sons into the holy covenant as I was commanded, and the midwife taught me that I have hands skilled in healing.

In the year 1911, I enrolled for the first time at the religious seminary [*Talmud Torah*], owing to a certain event: An old friend, Mr. Berel Fiszer, may he rest in peace, with best intentions arranged a meeting that was appropriate and correct for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Talmud Torah named after the valiant genius Rabbi Yehoshele, may his righteous memory be blessed. A feast, as required, was to be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Elul [26<sup>th</sup> August 1911]. Of course, I agreed immediately with this suggestion and gave a part payment, and his proposition went forward into action and a great feast was held.

The time was "there was no king and every man did what seemed right in his own eyes" [Judges 17:6] before Rabbi Yitzhak Yehuda (may he live long), came from Ciechanów to fill the place of his ancestors. I proposed

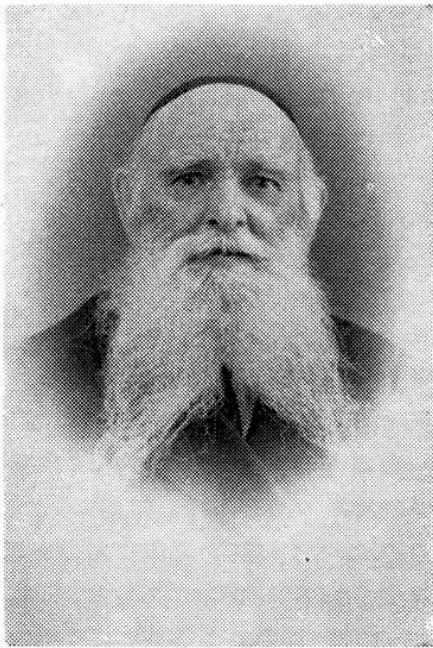
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\* The writer, A. Sh. Elberg, may he live a long life, is among the prominent personalities of public life, in Kutno, in *Eretz Israel* and the State of Israel. He was a pupil of Rabbi Yehoshele Kutner (may the memory of the righteous be blessed), and studied together with Shalom Asz and Nachum Sokolow at the Kutno *yeshiva*. He was among the first members of the "*Mizrachi*" movement, founded an elementary school and the high school "*Am HaSefer*". Was the first member of the Kutno Jewish community council. In 1929 he visited *Eretz Israel* and on his return from there, together with Yehuda Riftin (of blessed memory), spoke in the great synagogue in Kutno about the 1929 riots [in Hebron, Israel].

In 1933 together with his family he emigrated to Israel. He was among the founders of Bnei Brak [a suburb of Tel Aviv] and the *Mizrachi* Bank in Tel Aviv. He visited the United States of America with a Bnei Brak founders' delegation. He assisted in the establishment of the *Poel Mizrachi* Bank in Israel. Contributed to the newspapers "*HaTsofeh*" [revisionist, founded 1938], "*HaMashkif*" [national religious founded 1932], "*Haaretz*" [founded in Tel Aviv in 1923] and religious journals. Until 1960 he was the head of the Association of Former Residents of Kutno in Israel; from 1960 honorary president of our association. He was very active in the production of the Yizkor Book "Kutno and Surroundings".

bringing the members' book of the institution so that new members could be enrolled and this was carried out.

At the beginning of the month of Elul [the new moon] I registered my name as a member and from that day, when I entered into the covenant of Abraham, thirty years have passed and now I have set to work. I waited for someone to give a speech before the audience but as no one did, I tried to be a man, I got up and spoke more or less like this: "Dear members! The obligation to educate all the children of Israel is looming over us! If a child of Kutno should grow and roam about the world, and loses his way, his hand is too weak to redeem him [Isaiah 59:1]. So, the responsibility is yours, since you have sent him off without the Torah, without preparation, without skills, and should he steal and get caught, the blame will be on you; how indeed did you avoid your duty? I was born and grew up in Kutno, although I am helpless and humble, without a complete Torah education, without the necessary culture, I was not taught



the Bible, the *Mishna* [traditional instruction], *Halacha* [religious law], or *Haggadah* [rabbi's legends], writing and grammar, nature study, geography, mathematics and geometry – and so, recklessly, I was sent out to the wide world". My speech was received by gaping mouths and tensed faces – has it ever been heard like that – no one spoke, no one was for, and no one against... although it disturbed me that the festive meal on the first day of Elul was held without any quotations from the Bible, and without songs of glorification... although the rules of the opposing chassidic groups long ago got rid of the chassidic injunction and declared that abstinence was abolished! The *Talmud Torah* was mostly *mitnagdim*<sup>1</sup>.

After the speech I hurried home in order to leave that very evening for business abroad, and everything was forgotten.

At the outbreak of World War I, I was hastily dispatched to the front... Germans to the west, Russians to the east, like the two athletes tackling each other before our eyes... and I was as one of the losers in the universe, as a

null and void trade agreement. Was I eager to know what this war was about? For without humility and no accountability [referring to Rashba, medieval rabbinical commentator], I would sit on my balcony from the first watch of the morning until the evening and saw militias coming and going, squadrons of the Russian army at first and then, after a few days, separate forces from the two nations, inciting each other. Like a new band of spies, we attacked with horror and fear. However, immediately at the announcement of a gathering of the reserve forces, and the call for mobilization was given, and the death penalty for those evading... sadness and shock fell on all the houses of Israel where their dear ones were forced to gather under the military flag, this was the edict and there was no getting out of it. And all those who were part of the sorrow of Israel, and held the common misfortune in his heart, sensed and felt the pain and suffering... Meanwhile the Rabbi was entrenched [like a tall palm tree – reference to Song of Solomon 7] at a spa abroad and there was no community council member or leader to calculate the needs of the town. All faces turn pale and the eyes of the nations are blinded [Yoel 2:6]. I said at the time that no one was making an effort... I called a meeting of the best businessmen in the town (those considered to be such!) for an advice session, what to do and how to take care of those remaining, left behind from the reserve forces. There is always a ready-made suggestion from the people of Israel: Even if flocks and herds and fowl be slain for them, the slaughter is found too small from them! [Numbers 11:22] The wealthy of Israel, stout hearted, always ready to slaughter the bird of the poorest of the land, and especially that not a drop of their blood should be shed... they are thieves. We counted up and concluded, and already those attending expressed satisfaction with amusement at their dependents, since straightaway we would require a second meeting, what to do with the leftover contributions.

However, before the meeting could take place, someone not from the audience, protesting and screaming: "You have already loaded us with a very difficult and inconvenient problem. Stop burdening with such great suffering, in these days of distress and hardship!" Like soap bubbles the accepted decision burst open pandemonium. The group dispersed with nothing... My head was spinning round and round. All night long I was not able to be quiet, I did not find rest, and at the first light of morning I got up and wrote on a page, work particularly suited to my mood and anger caught up in my very inside... "the lost people" abandoned in an aching imprisonment and concerned for their bitter and hastening fate.

On the eve of the Sukkot festival, the numbers of many families grew smaller. I arranged and checked the regulations regarding the citron [used as an accessory in the blessings for the festival] since the Four Species [in addition to the citron, the closed palm frond, willow and myrtle are used] were very scarce, for when the imitations came back the supplies stopped, the borders were blurred and there were no deliveries. It was proper to sort this matter for each person, equally. I put out a poster: The four principles for

<sup>1</sup> TN: religious opponents of chassidism.

the Four Species – (1) Whoever was successful in buying them should turn them over for public use; (2) Whoever does not wish to turn them over should return them and get his money back; (3) Whoever can afford to buy them but cannot find any to buy, he should pay the price and they will be bought for him; (4) Whoever cannot buy them should volunteer himself to help the public on the festival – and in any case – volunteers – forward! And I am in charge! The first group I promised refusal to trim the citron stems, the second was found since, by great efforts, I was able to achieve my goal. I scrounged the respectable sum of seventy rubles to distribute in honor of the festival from the "anonymous fund" [a fund of anonymous charity donations, from the time of the Temple], the synagogue manager Mr. Osher Kirsztajn (may he rest in peace), the volunteers to direct it my brother-in-law David Yaakov (may he rest in peace), Zvi Wiener, may he have a long life, and myself "a poor guardian" [reference to the auxiliary candle lit on the festival of Chanukah. It has no purpose beyond serving and lighting the ritual candles] bearing the citron. It is worth mentioning the small results from the greatness of the commandment carried out, and it was all down to the Lord God, who made me succeed by my advice and plans.

On the night reserved for the Sukkot festival I grabbed my evening meal and hurried to get to my first "requisition" – hours and hours, until my voice was hoarse, I spoke gently and harshly with my close friend, Zvi Yosef Plocker, who settled in our homeland, and his partner, the phlegmatic and cold natured Itshe Meir Wajngart, a good

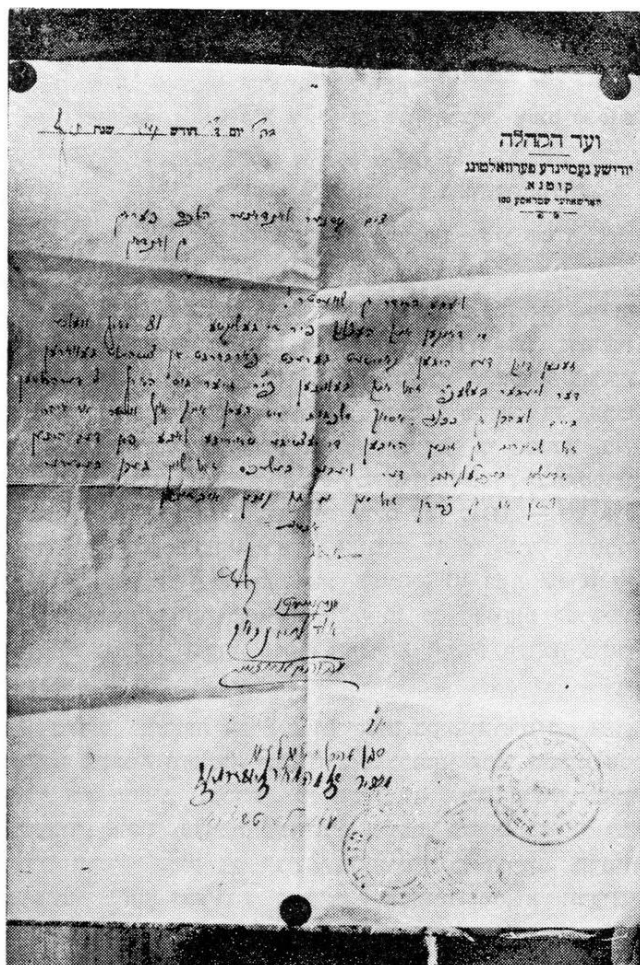
and difficult Jew who wanted neither to give nor to pay for, and in the end, with my pleading and many entreaties I got out of them, "on that very night" [Exodus 12], "redemption money" [Numbers 18:16] of 3 rubles! Wolf (greetings, my brother), whom I compensated with the Berlin Daily Newspaper, an expensive find in those days, at the dangerous time of changing of the militias, got me the citron, and a few more pairs besides that I put in. To run around then late at night was dangerous because of Cossacks...

Early in the morning the volunteers ran hither and thither, banging on the doors of the wealthy who had paid "citron money" along with the Four Species. I took a well-worn prayer book for the blessing of the palm branch – and at my arrival I said effectively: Please have mercy on the poor guardian, here he is, ready-made – write me off, farewell! I rushed off...

When I got to the synagogue, in the middle of the prayer before the special blessing for the festival, Mr. Baruch Hogan leapt out at me, yelling and heated: Is it possible that the blessing "For our lives" [a special blessing said at festivals and on outstanding occasions] had already been said for the first time before I had got there – it was being said at the time. I answered him loudly: If a crowd of gentiles from Corfu chatter without saying a blessing, I won't get angry... Only for a Hebrew prayer would I get angry... Those are words of an ignorant person from a common nation... Be quiet. To smooth things over, when I went up to read from the Scroll of the Law, I straightaway called him up for the blessing.

Great things were done with the money that we begged; two families that had become poverty stricken got their lives back with the help of a loan of ten rubles, letting them live happily for a short time... in this case, Mr. Noah Goldberg who bought himself a horse and cart and supported himself, and David Witkowski who came from the ruined Kalisz after the murder and destruction wrought by the German Prussian warlord. Also before that, for the Day of Atonement, I had lit a memorial candle for the people and their homes, promising a good year, on condition that the cost of the candle would be returned to me and this way I scrounged from them scores to distribute to the poor, for the sake of lighting a limited number of candles.

In addition, a technical correction was made in the version of the rules, in order to enable the Four Species to be brought and carried without losing too much time. As is known, the "Hoshanna" prayer, said in the synagogue on the seventh day of Sukkot, comes after the Additional prayer [following the reading of the Law], and not immediately after "Hallel" [special prayer of praise] (according to the custom of the Spanish Jews). And so, they would oppose changing the custom and would respect it during the timetable of the festival. The rabbi was not in town and he had not yet returned – what was to be done? Before the festival I had a heart-to-heart talk with the head of the synagogue, a great opposer, an elderly and respected noble person, Mr. Matut Goldman, may he rest in peace, and I succeeded in proving that I myself was exactly what was required. There were temporary circumstances that required changing the order of things – and I was successful and got



Letter from the community of Kutno to the *landsmanschaft* in London – 1925

this letter out of him: Owing to the current requirements I hereby agree to say the "Hoshanna" after the "Hallel".

After the festivals I drew up a protocol and a detailed list of the volunteers and the donors, with their names and community. According to the law [from the Talmud], when two portions are collected, they are divided into three, and I stuck on to the doors of the prayer houses a notice calling for praise and glory: "Joyous songs of praise" [Psalm 98] – so that they would know that the publisher of the notice was carrying out a good deed, because it was necessary in the future.

And so, I became a busybody. While working I continued desiring to be "Achiezer" ['my brother is my help' – Numbers 1:12] and "Achisamach" ['my brother is my support' – Exodus 31:6] in the daily problems. I was saddled with the suffering of the burden of the Congregation of Jacob [Deuteronomy 33:4], so poor and lean, so that all the deeds were cut according to the Chief Speaker [referring to Rabbi Judah, so called by the Romans], in every place which I did not previously see as good. After attending to "bread for the hungry" [Psalms 146:7], I turned my eyes and my heart to occupy all my time for the benefit of the infants of the school "Take care, for the children of the poor are those that bring the Law!" [Talmud, Vows 53]. And at that time many wealthy house owners became impoverished and their incomes were smaller, and they did not have any possibility of paying the salaries of the religious law teachers, teachers and students both.

I was playing with time and my business was successful "To excite my anger and my fury" [Yermiyahu 32:31], for I despised money – a saying of Shmuel *HaKatan* ["Little Samuel – a member of the Sanhedrin 1<sup>st</sup> century CE], which did not renew anything to change an annotated Bible, "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls" [Proverbs 24:17] and certainly he meant when others fall... do not rejoice. "If a deluge of blood flows" I will not be wealthy... I arranged the Talmud Torah school so that the voice of Yaakov [the Jews] and the voice of the children of Israel will not be silent and that he who was not able to pay for the *cheder* would not be ashamed, between the poor and the rich with the anonymous fund, and I transferred my son Ze'ev Zvi into it. I ordered the Talmud Torah pupils to learn it and I repaid! They receive their salaries on time which was not usual. And when I paid them out of my pocket at the beginning of the salary month, and the little "kopecks" [100 kopecks equal one Russian ruble] were no longer collected and the fund was empty. I looked for tricks how and with what to fund the institution that I stood at the head of.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, 1914, the German occupation began, and no one in the town could write German and I, thank God, have many skills, and I made my house into an office for anyone who called for a written application – and the fee – for the *Talmud Torah*! I looked for reasonable advice and, with permission from the authorities, I made some raffle tickets for the benefit of the *Talmud Torah* – one thousand tickets, half of the winnings went for the salaries and the drawing was in the presence of the Rabbi and respected citizens of the town. The beginning of the month of Tammuz [June] 1914, the winners were paid

and a deficit of 182 unsold tickets, and salaries for the *Talmud Torah* were paid up.

In addition, I managed to get some active friends interested in the good of the institution and my neighbor, Mr. Chaim Rabbe was the head of them. To clothe and shoe the poor children, so that they would not be ashamed, and it seemed to me that at the New Year of the Trees [Tu Be'Shvat] a survey of the pupils was carried out by the town worthies, after shaving and washing, the clothing and shoeing... I spoke then in front of the great and small (those with less and those with more) a speech like this: Dear Audience: The children are the future of our people? They could inspire the Divine Presence and they could split up families, and all the splendor of the daughter of Yehuda has gone away– when did I threaten? Her babies have been captured by her enemies (Lamentations 1). The elders have been exiled but the Divine Presence has not, even though the Jewish lawmakers are exiled, the Divine Presence is not, only when infants are exiled [interpretation of Lamentations]. This day you have lifted them out of the pit of exile. It is worthy that the Divine Presence should remain amongst us.

Dear children! Are you familiar with the story of the minister of the beverages [of Pharaoh] and Yosef? And there we have a Hebrew servant boy? And what was done with this Hebrew servant boy? He became a deputy to the king!? In what way? And he was lifted up out of the pit and shaven and his clothes changed. We have made all this preparation for you children and you will study and succeed, and each and every one of you will become deputy to the king! For all of Israel are the sons of the king. You will try to succeed in your studies and we will try to raise you up out of your pit of exile and then you will become a holy nation! I have given my eyes and my heart to educate the children of Israel and especially as a commandment by the wise elders – take care of the poor for the words of the Law will come out of them!

In the summer of 1916, I was at evening prayers when a young man was praying in front of me, swaying and bending, absorbed, with his bag under his arm, and in his hand a recommendation from his father Yitzhak Meir Krochmalik, pouring out his problem [Psalms 102]: The bearer of this note is my dear son Moshe Eliakim, on whom my hopes hinge, aged 12 years...I request you to spread your wings of loving kindness over him, to take care of him. This is from the children of Łódź who are fainting from hunger. I requested that he be added to the list of pupils of the Talmud Torah and to arrange a daily meal for him, and he and my son became close friends. His sister came and lived in my sister's house.

Every now and then I arranged committee meetings for the setting up of the Torah Fund, to correct damage done to the rooms (schools) that the conquerors had already put their eye on them, and danger was looming over them. In those days there were no schools for the children of our people, and culture was in a debased and faulty state and the breach was large. I felt a great need to request for each matter an application to the authorities and whoever did not put his hand and mark to it was a great ignoramus. Reading, writing and arithmetic were not included in education at all,

and I always stand up and shout: Jews! Gentlemen! If it is recalled in the interpretation of the Bible and the Talmud that there were many schools for the children of Israel and they were praised, so that when those who hated them came, they were amazed at the writings they had – pen of the writers, how did the pen fall from the hand of the mighty?

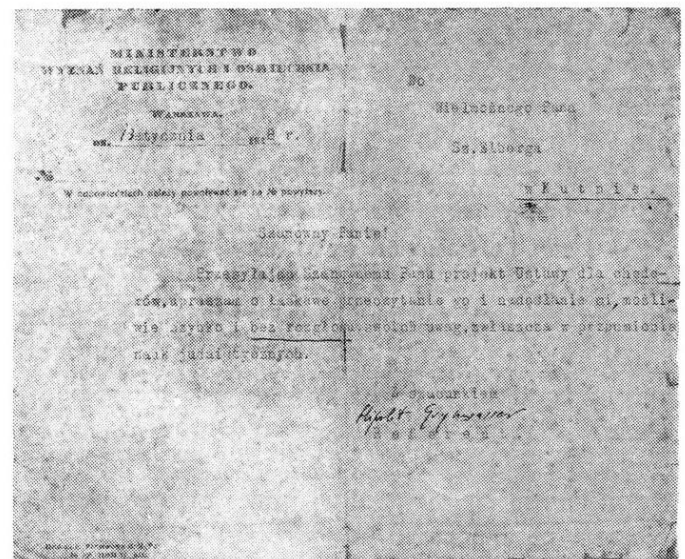
Among the religious my voice was not heard, just like the voice calling from the desert. I organized during the holidays a committee which included surveyor Hirsberg, engineer Margalit, Mr. Israel Turbowicz (his soul is in heaven), who died and was the founder of a school, and myself, representing the authorities, and I was appointed head of the committee. At the opening ceremony the Mayor Mr. Titz, school inspector Mr. Hirsberg, Erdberg, head of the teachers, who passed away, and myself, chairman of the inspecting committee. I spoke about the miracle of patience that the Russians lacked and the Germans relate positively towards national minorities and the motto of chancellor Bittmann-Hulbig "excuse for immigrants to look for talent", the democratic motto and words fitting the needs of a celebration such as this the population was successful and as a good sign of this, the days of the coming of the Messiah are described since the prophecy of the apocalypse has survived with us: "and they will beat their swords into ploughshares" [Isaiah 2]! The authorities informed our leaders that there was a barracks deserted by the Russian army in the old market, with large rooms that went down to the foundation. And it was furnished according to the needs of a school in layout and style and a great sign was hanging at the entrance, in Hebrew and German: "Municipal school for Jewish children" – a victory – I made a contract with the district inspector concerning the study program. After much dithering I managed to divert him to agree to the method that I had arranged, the program allowing for four hours religious study a week... his evidence and emphasis to show justified reasons that this would not be the leading goal. If the authorities wished it, they would move the Children of Israel from the old fashioned "*cheder*" to modern schools.

It must be known that this jump from 48 hours a week would not succeed! We agreed that the authorities would account for a program allowing for 24 hours a week, out of which 18 were for secular subjects and 6 for religious, i.e., 3 ordinary days against 1 religious. Apart from that, on the Jewish community's account, the permit would allow the addition of two more hours for each religious teaching hour, so that the allocation would be half and half. Of course, I had to arrange these two hours specifically for the teachers and tutors separately at an hourly rate, from my own pocket since an agreement had not yet been reached with the orthodox community on this change. Libelous critiques had been stuck up on the synagogue walls that the grandson of Rabbi Yitzhak Yudel (of blessed memory) wanted forcibly to convert two hundred who were learning secular studies with uncovered heads, and doing gymnastics, who had heard of such a thing? To get rid of the mistakes and the suspicions I put a lot of capital into keeping the religious program. Every single month I paid the salaries for religious instruction. I ordered two hundred prayer books, bibles and commentaries, and tens of pairs of phylacteries. I bought a dozen pairs of shoes for the poor among them, and set up a

religious inspection committee, as well as a parents' committee. Of course, the value of the Talmud Torah did not become less; this institution I also brought up to be a high standard body on account of the secular learning hours, and comparing these institutions with each other, one was religious and secular, and another was secular and religious.

At the same time, it was election time for the municipal and community committees, and I was a candidate for all of them. A coalition was made for the town council with the Polish church officials and a third of them, six in number were allotted to us, and an agreement was made and signed to vote for eighteen joint candidates. At the last moment there was treason in the secret vote and Moshe Lieberman was elected in my place – he died.

Although I was elected to the community council almost unanimously, the presiding Rabbi pleaded and I gave in, respecting his seniority, although all management matters had been set out, they went through according to my advice.



Certificate of approval from the Ministry of Education for the opening of the school "Am HaSefer" (1918)

I tried out and discovered various tricks to increase the income of the community and on the eve of the holiday in 1914 I put forward a request to the occupying authorities: "Since the Harvest festival is about to occur and the rejoicing of the harvest and its produce has stopped and for half a month (a new month, Day of Atonement and Sukkot!) we have been enjoying the traditional bread made from pure semolina. Therefore, I request that the community change the portion of coarse flour distributed to the men for semolina flour, for the Jewish residents in the two districts, Kutno and Gostynin". The request was granted. According to the surveys there were nearly twelve thousand people, and because of them the distribution of flour took place at once, while in Łódź for example they stood in queues on the Shabbat and holidays, for a portion of coarse flour to stay alive.

I read the following item in a Polish newspaper: Blessed seed of Abraham – "By the efforts of a Zionist Community leader Mr. A. the Jewish residents of Kutno, received flour for their festival – would it be that we would also receive some for Christmas". From the distribution of

the flour, I got some income that increased the funds of the community, and I added 10 pfennig a pound and increased it by 3,500 (I reduced my interest – thieves broke a wide hole in my store, the distribution center, and stole a lot of produce – and life goes on!).

I offered to set up a vital venture – a cooperative to sell cheaply, or a loans fund, on condition that the officials would add their own amounts. To my regret, the sum was used to take pity on the budget and it was finished and lost.

I had an effect on the daily life and society, I was among the organizers of tea and bread stalls for the poor [originally set up in Łódź in 1899 by Poznański and Majzel for poor Jews] and common vagrants who multiplied particularly during the first part of the war, affected by the exile and destruction.

When the typhus disease (may we be saved) broke out in 1918 I arranged perhaps for effectively the first time "Magen David Adom" [Hebrew ambulance and medical aid service] and a force of youngsters, with permits from the authorities, worked and received salaries like office workers. I was a "community mediator" energetic and consistently dedicated, and my hands were clean and pure. I was the manager and inspector in all matters, whether they concerned the authorities or the community and its institutions.

I remember a characteristic event, on one occasion when I attended the evening session of the community council, a bitter and vociferous woman, the sister-in-law of the late Abba Braun, and this was the matter: her husband had died here, in the house of her brother-in-law, and because the authority claimed he had sickened from an infectious disease, they buried him quickly, according to the requirements of the Burial Society. The society members joked that she did not weep over her dead husband, only over her money. She was a rich widow. I parted from her peacefully, promising I would take her side. The same evening, a question was put on the agenda and, again, a light hearted and joking apology from the members of the institution. I opened with these words: An important rule is before us. It includes every case! All of the milk, half portion of the milk, all of the leavened – mixed and hardened, each insignificant citizen who no longer needs his mother, each widow – even a rich one – and what are a woman's riches and her children at a time like this after her husband dies? "And I will punish all that oppress them" [Yermiyahu 30:20]. Of course, even the charities manager and the manager of the Burial Society abstained and, in the end, a third of the sum was returned.

At a similar time to that described, some refugees from Pinsk were wandering about, in extreme hunger, and illness, and suffering because of the isolation and quarantine, and they made our lives miserable. We summoned Psalms to be read in the great synagogue (the Rabbi also lay on his deathbed!). I spoke passionately and many of those attending cried. But we are to blame that we saw our brother in anguish and he begged us for help and we did not answer, and so these troubles fell on us [Genesis 42:21]. So, at the same time I called for a meeting of the rabbis of Kutno and Gostynin and members of their community councils. Seven communities participated at that

time, in delegations of about thirty people. My hope was, with the agreement of presiding rabbi, to bring democracy into the community council. My proposal was to release the poor citizens from taxes, and so it was necessary to arrange for slaughtering and ritual bathing to be free of charge! It was just like the town's rabbis to worry about the budget and to oppose. We defended proposals with secret views and solid reasons – they had no answer: The sins of the sons of Eli [Samuel I 2] – whom the text accused of sleeping with women who had in fact deserted their homes – do you accuse them of sinning? Do you wish to call that a sin? Would you receive for yourself forbidden foods from criminals and the dregs of the people? The time was such and my aspirations were not realized during my lifetime, for our paths are not strewn with roses – so the ancient weapon remains banished and the communities maintain the blessing of Esau: By the sword shall you live [Genesis 28:40]. The sword of the king of the messiah – the explanation of the Burial Society, and the slaughtering knife, the dregs of the people, are paid for out of the pockets of the rich.

Once it happened that two young Jewish girls died, Szpazewicz and Gajst, and the vigorous members of the Burial Society managed to get a lot of money out of them. The brother of the second girl, Mr. Shimon Gajst, made a great scandal, got angry and threatened calling the authorities. I wanted to make a peace offering and put the same money towards a school for girls, something which was very lacking, and Mr. Gajst wanted to add to that amount a special sum in memory of his sister, may her soul rest in paradise. However, the Jewish law [Torah] holds "the prohibition of the new" [Leviticus] and whoever has heard of that being applicable to a school for girls? There was lively gossip amongst the orthodox and protests based on the Torah Shlemah [by Menachem Mendel Kasher – an encyclopedia of the Torah]: Everyone who teaches his daughter the Torah, teaches in vain! I stood up for myself, I was not fearful of anyone! I discussed this a lot, and friends in the community – there were about one hundred pupils at the Talmud Torah and about two hundred at the municipal school – three hundred male children against the verdict of some females? To grow up without the Torah and with no manners? The rule is: "Carry out all the active commandments not dependent on a particular time" [Rabbi Nissim of Verona, Ran], and all the passive commandments apply to both men and women equally. Therefore, where is the obligation and the commandment to study the living law! In these days of emigration, souls are made to wander around – all that is not living has to be destroyed [Rabbi Fatchiya Mankin, interpretation of the Ethics of the Fathers] – could you accept responsibility for them?!

There are things not to do in the Torah: Jewish females should not be made into whores! Who should warn and who should punish? Should it not be the members of the community and the leaders of the people? From when were these words of the Torah? From the time of the "yellow passport"? [valid for one destination country only, often issued by Russia for prostitutes]. No! No! The duties of raising, guiding and teaching discipline to girls is a holy obligation that rests on you, to take care of both male and



female infants – and why are you backing out of it? Take on your obligation! We need to teach them a pure and easy craft, since laziness leads to boredom, and much idleness causes wandering from the pure path... I raised my voice and called out: "Jewish girls are pleasant, but poverty in the Torah and knowledge make them despicable". And who is to blame? Around whose neck hangs the noose? Ours? A veteran member of the community, a work friend, Mr. Yonatan Majranc, always apologized whenever a difficult question was being asked on the agenda: Let us ask the community in Warsaw, the capital city, what is their opinion on this complicated question. Although I always hurried to reply to Yonatan, a modest person, I would not be embarrassed if the community of the capital city could not learn something from the country community – ours.

On one occasion, at the meeting of the community, I said to Mr. Yonatan, my friend, a nice saying which rings true: My dear Mr. Yonatan the two of us go along with the law of God, adhere to it and its values. However, this is the difference: you are the old-fashioned type of public worker, so you keep the commandments. He who sticks to his ways, holds up the fallen, cures the sick and sets the imprisoned free, these are the values of the Lord God, expressed in another way: restores the wind and brings the rain down [from the prayer for rain, said in autumn]! After bad winds blew down the fallen, God returns to raise him up, and he who is sick, is returned to health, and after he is imprisoned, He comes back to release him. But I am a modern type of public worker. I keep the commandments, like a helper who saves and defends, before the rude wind can cause damage, I try to help to prevent the fallen from collapsing, to assist before he gets sick and to shield him so that he does not fall into captivity. This is all possible with nurture and education, attention and support from the dawning and days of childhood, and you have made the way that they should go known to them and how to do it, for the sake of those beings created by the Lord God! And hold fast to them! Although it is difficult to uproot false, distorted and damaged ideas that have settled in the hearts of human beings, and a token that has been accepted as a good coin can go and deceive the rest... I was not successful in redirecting the friend's feelings and the Jews have not yet reached the time of the popular proverb: What common sense does not do, time will [saying of Rabbi A. Y. Kook]. Rejoice sons of my loins that you foresaw this! [Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon]. Meanwhile Mrs. Iberal expressed a wish to arrange, on her own account, a girls' school. I helped her with offices and rooms from the boys' school and she started with studies and succeeded. Life went on smoothly despite the layabouts [Isaiah 56:10]. The urgency of studies took over the will of the wealthy and rich parents and they rushed to the schools to learn the Law and religion since the driving force to learn is like oxygen for the soul.

The matter of distributing unleavened bread for the Passover also brought up many problems, negative and positive. In 1910, for the first time, practical people got together, headed by the late Rabbi Yaakov Witkowski (his soul is in Paradise) and David Kolski (may he attain a long life), and offered to arrange for the baking of unleavened

bread for the benefit of the town's people, and with correct organization and regulation they succeeded in putting a reasonable income into what was needed for Passover. (Once before the sales season of Passover, I was a bit ill, I swallowed palm oil, went to the community office and sat all day working, despite the screams of my wife... without baked casserole all day!...). It seems to me that this routine was repeated twice, in the year 1915, and it was already the chapter "Remember" [Remember what Amalek did; Deuteronomy 25:17] from the weekly Bible reading and we had no wheat for Passover. We cancelled three festive meals and, together with the presiding rabbi, we went to the district authority, who sent us to his deputy, von Pudlitz. We were received at once. Although his reply made my ears ring: "Since, like many of our brothers, the Jews cheat us on wheat, therefore you have sealed your fate this time to remain without wheat for matzos [unleavened bread]". When I heard his answer, my patience was exhausted, in anger that exploded from my heart, I jumped up and replied to him at great speed: "Sir, district deputy, give the cheaters a cross! And to us, give wheat for the matzos!" He did not take the hint and pretended amazement. Then I concluded: "I speak as a member of the community council of Kutno and Gostynin, in the name of twenty-five thousand inhabitants and we demand wheat for matzos!" (According to the law, the prosecutor for a public client is the forceful claimant.) We got rid of him and returned at once to the district head. We told him what had happened at the office of his deputy, with the same anger and annoyance. He telephoned at once to the second deputy and we were sent to him, and when we arrived, we were welcomed. He telephoned the communities of the district and the authorities, until it was announced that, in Gąbin, wheat had been found and reserved for the Passover requirements, and the order was given. On the second day already, we received the wheat. We ground it and got ready to bake the matzos and sell them to the citizens as usual.

In the year 1916, the blockade by Great Britain against the Central Powers [Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria] grew even more extreme, and the stockpiling in produce and foodstuffs was being carried out very vigorously. An order went out from Bezler in Warsaw to distribute the Passover necessities from the remainder; eighteen matzos per person for eight days. At the community meeting I discussed the cut back and said: Gentlemen! This is nothing but an order from the governor – either eat leavened bread on the Passover [this was forbidden] or kick up a hunger rumpus in honor of the Passover! In any case, we will end up with a line of inspectors of the Passover necessities". Like roosters at an inspection building my friends surrounded me with a question: But, what do you think – should we cheat? Our hands will steal if, in your opinion and on your responsibility, this is what you want. Going into the heart of the matter, I could not see any other way out – Jews I am your sacrifice. I went away alone to carry out my plan. Remember me, my God, for good [Nehemiah chap. 5, v. 19]. My brother, Eliezer, who was a scapegoat and suffered disgrace and wanderings in exile, at that time was a clerk in the official produce storehouses. He was a high-up clerk,

although a clique of the smugglers was among the authorities controlling the country. Of course, that was the trouble! The informers knew that Bezler offered the Jewish population eighteen matzos of what was left, and I also distributed the balance per person (32 portions in a pound) – where did it come from? Where not! Certainly, most likely from the smuggling of those who had cheated. It was reported to the senior authorities, who uncovered the plot. My brother was caught and with him some other traders. On the eve of Passover, I looked for advice from my relatives, if it was not worthwhile and proper that I should also give up crossing the border of Piotrków, Austrian territory, because of the fear that I should be contaminated by his wrong doing, heaven forbid. My brother took the blame for all the mistakes and the Jewish council was cleared of all suspicion, and you and me, myself, "with clean hands and far from evil, we can go through safely" [Proverbs].

Then I was at the judicial and district ministers, trying to get my brother released. The district minister muttered, saying: "It is said about you that you are involved in something". I scolded him with a reprimand: "Who is it that dares to give me a bad name?" At once, he corrected himself: "Not involved, only know about."

An event which was also of great significance was saving the people from Łódź from expulsion. The event went like this: In the last stage of the war Germany had conquered the eastern states and it was considered that they would settle and stay in the permanent sites. The places were too small to find themselves large living spaces for the many

our town in the early days of the war. What was to be done? A decree was issued that the tenants from the war time had to leave their houses and other places, and return to the place they had come from. Screams and wailing were heard from the unfortunate people, since, in Łódź, unemployment and hunger were rife. Many of them had been successful in supporting themselves with great dignity, and lived prosperous lives and to where were they being banished? I knocked on the doors of several authorities in various delegations, but we were not successful! I showed the district minister the articles in the *Berliner Tageblatt* about the situation in Łódź in 1914 and now, how many textile factories, by hand and by machine, had closed down, and how much raw material had been requisitioned, and I asked: "has absolutely everything been taken into account?" I showed how expensive everything was there, how anyone could send refugees back with a clear conscience, to expose them to hunger and disease? After this evidence the German district minister cancelled our meeting and sent me away after a lot of small talk. Meanwhile, the prohibitions of the decree increased and grew stronger and in order to round up the refugees they were issued with (sort of) food coupons, so that essential commodities were distributed to the new people in order to get them to go away. Once they came to my house crying and shouting, since the decree was already signed and put into action. Are you asking what Mr. Yonatan, the lay judge in the town council, says? There is nothing to be done! A severe verdict! I said "go and demand that Mr. Yonatan the community member and the presiding Rabbi should go once more, and I will accompany them and despite everything I will try whatever they are doing in this affair to annul the decree and no going back!" It was not to



Certificate of the community council of 1927 – For the travel of the Rabbi Yonah Baruch Kac

officials among the military and district authorities. Therefore, they had their eyes on one hundred and fifty families from Łódź, who had settled and became citizens in



Community council of 1928. Sitting: A. Ajzman, Rabbi Yitzhak Yehuda Trunk, Yonatan Majranc



be! It is impossible to allow cruelty like that to be carried out before a nation. There were protests and outcries about these evil decrees, and that they should be stopped, but by gentleness and meekness encouragement is given to cruelty! In desperation, spirits were raised up and they went and entreated me to compel the evaders from being persuaded considering that the matter was a closed verdict and no going back. We came before the district minister, the three of us, the Rabbi, Majranc and me. He handed us over to the town minister and when we arrived there we were welcomed: "Rabbi, members of the community council, you are welcome! What do you require?" (we sat comfortably on the fine benches). The veteran of the community and its Rabbi found it correct to give permission for the opening words to be spoken by the youngest of the members, myself – he would speak and the answer would come. This was a complete surprise for me; I opened my mouth and spoke: "Sir, town minister! It is well known that, during the Middle Ages when the darkness of ignorance covered the land, we – the Jewish people – were troubled by many calamities "Blood libels". At the Passover holiday antisemites sometimes murdered a person in order to throw his body near synagogues, to spread libel that the Jews murdered for the sake of using blood for preparing matzos. And much killing and destruction was carried out in revenge. Do not get angry, Sir, if I say that a new, modern "blood libel" is being done to us! Roteks [factory in Łódź] and their excuses are using you to expel the Łódź people, that is a kind of "blood libel". It is said that they are hiding confiscated goods and trading with them if not today then already at the end of the month, and those 150 families, 750 people, who were not given "ration books" – what are they supposed to do? Who will have mercy and be forced into evading by you, if they die of hunger? I will tell you a secret – you have already made us, the members of the community council, into evaders! How? They come and bang on our doors, hungry and thirsty, women and babies begging for a crumb of bread that might have dropped from our mouth at the beginning of the month, since we said tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, you see, if we give them now and they give us back at the end of the month, the mistake is made by you and it's there. We must avoid the forbidden before we die, saving a soul is more important than everything else. If you stood in my place, you will have sinned like I have". At the end I stood up and said, with great feeling, "It is your decision whether or not to imprison us, and I say that if you do not revoke the decree to expel them to Łódź, the ruined city, the poorest refugees who have already visited our town, and are to be forcibly evicted and pursued for their lives, old people and babies, if they are not given back their ration cards as usual, every month, allow me to announce in public, to the whole wide world, about the extreme cruelty that has taken root in your hearts". They acknowledged and knew everything, since the Germans are like barbarians (with great feeling!) (as is known, much propaganda was made during the war in both camps, scouting under the password: Who are the barbarians? The English called them Germans and the Germans said they were the English, and proved it in literature and loudmouthed deeds by battle scandals. Who then are the barbarians?). The town minister was silent and

amazed. He telephoned to the district minister with the urgent demand from the Rabbi and the community members to revoke the evil decree. He received his permission according to his suggestion and the same day the ration cards were returned to almost all the new refugees, and rejoicing and happiness and gladness. They greatly appreciated this venture and the Łódź people put an announcement in the newspaper: Many thanks and keep it up! To those who kept faith with public needs and revoked the evil decree. My name was emphasized, especially since the truth is I endangered myself and I could have ended up in prison over audacious words, like stabbings of a sword, that I slapped in the faces of the conquering authorities during the war and an hour of the most violent emergency.

I knew the obligation of a community member as the shepherd of his flock, but the large responsibility to supervise my great business and everything was a daily burden, who he by himself and the members of his family have to decide whether to relax from his work. He has to be patient and put his soul in danger by saving the poor.

Redemption for prisoners! This commandment, as being lost in exile, I discovered it and took it over. After the arrangement was made for me to be deputy at the Talmud Torah institution, to set it up for secular and religious studies, and the municipal schools, created for secular but open to religious studies, I turned my attention to the high schools which were anyway religious and I took the opportunity to announce in public, to other members of the council and my friends: Come let us fill an important need and found an Ulpan [school for intensive Hebrew language studies], based on the high school in Łódź, for growing and developing young boys, so that they will be set out to the battle of life equipped with a suitable and plentiful amount of Torah Law and religion! To my regret, they made fun of this, as if even the officials in favor saw that they had failed their children.

I yelled like a cuckoo: Jews! "Let us make man!" [Genesis 1]. That is a commandment to the wise men of the generation and the parents, since "Man is born like the wild ass's colt" [Job 11:12], and we have to guide his intelligence and educate him. He was born just like a bull or dog or goat or calf, not to mention lamb or kid. They are born with their natures in the same eternal way, which is not so in man. Early and late you have proved, my regret and my request have not been answered, a voice calling in the wilderness. Once on the eve of the holy Shabbat "Repentance" [the Shabbat before the Day of Atonement], straightaway Mr. Yosef Ajzman, the elderly guest of honor, and Mr. Shalom Kronzylber (of blessed memory) came in the name of the Rabbi, to ask me, to visit him; I was surprised – what is going on? He needed synagogue caretakers – a very important matter! I hurried to the Rabbi's house (may he live long for many good days, amen!) and here was a matter to clear up. Since Kostro, the manager of the municipal high school, oppressor of Jews, forced his Jewish pupils to desecrate the Shabbat, we have to go and cancel the verdict (the messenger has a son). I refused and gave my arguments and reasons, since the area around the school was such that even on weekdays havoc was wrought. Therefore, I realized that I must take care to make things better and not to expect

a bandage to lessen the pain. That is to say, we have to build a Hebrew high school. The Rabbi suggests that at present that is impossible and we have to go by the general rule: Choose the lesser of the evils. I gave up my opinion for the current needs and we went, full of bitterness, for we had transgressed the saying: Do not provoke the wicked when things are in their favor.

Many were full of scorn that, by our application, we had proved that we had accumulated restrictions – I had already had conversation and business with "The Great Jews" and they agreed with his opinion that our request was no other than a shrine to wisdom. How is a shrine built with one hand when the other hand is destroying? A silent speech since we left in disgrace. We went to the elderly priest in order to take him to influence Kostro. We pleaded with him and he replied that our pleas were useless. Again, he preached to the messenger: To influence our youth who adheres to the Bolshevik heresy... I gave him an answer from Jewish law: That our demand is for "complete equal rights" and even in Bolshevism. For in that respect the Poles have Marchlewski and Dzierżyński [prominent Bolshevik activists] and we can claim Joffe and Trotsky [both Jewish activists].

On our way back I said to the Rabbi: "Now do you see that I was right? Where are the commandments "redemption of the captives" [important Jewish religious commandment] that even over rows of stones to build the Lord a place of worship, redemption of the captives is preferred – the act of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair [who was on his way to redeem prisoners and requested a river to allow him to cross, to fulfil this commandment]. Indeed, I knew

how to save from enlistment and military service, or from the priests, but to save them from the benches of a school like that one, that was a real good deed, like saving souls.

In this way I organized propaganda but to my regret it was not successful. Although, when the burning question was forced onto me, I went by myself with a few friends. I called the young academic Wajzbicki who was living in our town and we said to him: Take up the organization of a Hebrew high school!!" He said: I wander how or where? And we replied to him: This is the building arrangement for the Jews – you build two huts according to the Jewish law and a third even very small. Afterwards, when you wish to use them on the rainy days, cover up with a roof over it, finishing with a layer of plaster, and a proper house is built. After difficulties and great pressure, by different variations, adapting to times and study seasons, a high school for our interests was built. Year after year another room is added on, and a class and teachers for religious and secular subjects. Desks are added for the pupils, and they come from all around to learn – from Gąbin, Łęczycza, Łowicz and Kiernozia, and from the rest of the towns, and the institution goes on growing. Its name was "*Am HaSefer*" ["People of the Book"].

The high school was also "50/50" – the budget for the religious studies cost as much as the secular ones, since three experienced and expert teachers taught in a desirable and sufficient way. The supervising committee with the Rabbi at its head made regular visits, to inspect the progress of the girl and boy pupils.

Once a quarrel broke out between me and Wajzbicki, and this was it: Before the school vacation the classes had



Parents' council of the Hebrew high school "*Am HaSefer*" in Kutno

their photographs taken, and these photos, on the Shabbat eve, did not come out well. What is to be done? He ordered the pupils to come back on the holy Shabbat, to have their photos taken again. An argument flared up and I requested his resignation. He claimed that this was an unintentional mistake and he did not know he was to blame. Anyway, in all events, the time had come for his resignation. We employed a member of graduate teachers from Cracow headed by Dr. Abraham Lasman. The budget was increased and its worth ensured. A "pyramid" of budgets made in rotation each month showed costs rising and the high school was on the verge of danger. I set myself to give lectures to the parents and teachers on Saturday evenings, to instruct the parents about the craving for their children's education, and to teach the teachers a lesson in Jewish tradition, since the university students had acquired a foreign culture and our moral fiber was strange to them. For some time on the Shabbat I gave a lesson on the chapters of the Sanhedrin [Talmud] to the student graduates, in order to educate them in the law and order of the Jewish people. These tractates are fundamental to the system of Jewish law, in the Land of Israel. I participated at conferences of the Union for the Foundation of High Schools, chaired by Dr. Bruda from Łódź.

The conference of 1924, before I immigrated to Israel was held in Warsaw, with the participation of members, supervising committees and principals. I suggested, then, to include, in the study course, the program "*HaSiddur*" [the daily prayer book] to learn sections with sincerity and logic, in good taste, and knowledge. When they looked over this strange proposal, I emphasized with well-grounded reasoning: "Do not despise your mother when she is old" [Talmud, tractate *Berachot*]. Just look at the French language which was the royal language among cultured nations. Altogether, when they count, they cancel out the 60 – but when they get to 70, they add 10 to 60. What is 84? – 4 multiplied by 20, plus 4. If we aren't philologists, we would be able to renew and add in order. Hear this: The glory of old age renews.

Year after year we could not decide over the question of building apartments, in order to enlarge the classes at the high school. After the war and building had stopped,

There were days of blockade and apartment shortages, and the municipal authority inspected the citizens. Every apartment which with great difficulty fell empty was confiscated. Once I made a "pact" with the municipal minister, Klipo was his name, that I would have the opportunity to release an apartment, to be confirmed by contract with a tenant whose business permits him to go out to another town. There, he would be offered, in exchange for his apartment, an apartment that I promised him the right to use. My erstwhile friend, Mr. Avigdor Groman, left for Łódź and his apartment was left for the high school. Although the question was still not solved, we tried many ways to get out of this complication, and the suggestion was made to send a high school delegation to America, since, there, things were good for the Jews, and everyone who went there filled his purse. What is more, for a public building – it was proposed that I, as president of the institution, should set off. Although I had never taken

money for inconveniencing myself or for idleness, and that does not change my outlook, to abandon my home and business again for some months was impossible. And so I suggested handing over the delegation to the Rabbi, and so it was. Sixty thousand marks from the funds of the high school were handed over to him for him to travel to America; but, once more, it was a failure, since the Rabbi did not manage to overcome "mixed roles", and the lamb was caught between the wolf and the shepherd. Then a visitor from America came, Mr. Yechiel Kibel. We welcomed him and requested support for our institution and we received \$50 which we handed over to Mr. Yakel [Yankel] Bromberg towards an apartment for the principal, and they were swallowed up into oblivion.

One time we made an effort and bought a building from Mendel Auerbach, who bought it from Asher Goldman for the sum of 110,000 marks. We paid him an advance of 35,000 which disappeared into his pocket. That was the year of the war between Russia and Poland. The currency was going down in value and additional sums were demanded on a daily basis. We gave a notarized letter and at the time we had to go to the notary, we went first to the Rabbi to compromise. When we got there, Rabbi Szpira had invited his holy brother from Płock, the talking was over and time for afternoon prayers had come. We managed to finish the next day. Meanwhile he came cunningly to the notary, and since the high school forces were not there, he won and we became bankrupt.

During the intermediate days of the Sukkot holiday, I was ill and God was angry and did not show mercy to the cities of Israel [Lamentations 2:2], and I was chosen for the district council of the schools from among 20 members of the Polish town elite ["fat of the land"]; I was the only Jew among them. Towards Chanukah and the civil holidays, the question of organizing a festive party came up (1920). We budgeted a date for distributing the ration cards – semolina and sugar for our children's Chanukah party, and a Christmas party for their children. In his speech the district doctor joked and said: At the time of the Christian birth there was not even a lamp to give light, and now there is even electricity.

When it came to my turn to speak, I made a suggestion: Concerning the program of visits to the schools, I started with the same beginning and said the same as the doctor had before me. It was decided like that and I took the liberty of "plagiarism", that is the opposite of what he said. At the time of the birth of the Christ there was "electric light" in the world, that of brotherly love, affectionate relationships, that studied his world. However, now even a spark from that light has gone! And I started describing the pogrom in Lwów and its threat. I gave the same part of the speech by the Trudovik [moderate Russian labor party member] priest Tuchbinski in the Russian parliament on the abolition of the death penalty. We can imagine, I spoke about two children, both adults aged 30 years old, and their fate is that one of them sits on the bench of the accused, expecting the death penalty for committing murder and the other one sits on the judge's chair. We are witnesses that we were born together, simple and honest, and did it happen that, over time, one sits to give judgment and the other is

judged. But we are to blame! We have not educated the poor child like the rich child was. And I added a saying from the Jewish Law, the story of the decapitated heifer [Deuteronomy 21]. And they answered and said – Elders and judges, it is not our hands that have shed this blood. This is the matter, if the blood of innocent people is spilt, we are to blame! In order to fulfil our obligation that our education will not bring disturbances, we must educate according to the Jewish Law and culture! I proposed that a combined inspection committee be set up, and the Jews among the inspectors would visit the Polish children's schools, to show, moreover, that the Jewish population also has full rights. The profession of education was only part of my work of making a living, but even so, my hand was outstretched also towards the rest of the professions in the community. Twice I was the mediator between the butchers and the court, or the community, at a time of disagreement. I also stood on the lookout and guarded the purity of the ritual bath. Once when the Rabbi was away in Sopot, the contract between him and Abraham Klingbajl went bad and he, the lease holder, ordered the law court, to open the ritual bath, before the demands of the contract could be fulfilled, with the remark: Better to desecrate one Shabbat than many Shabbats. When I was notified, I strongly opposed this. I went to the Gur chassidim to demand them to join Rabbi Pinchas (may his memory be blessed), that time to disobey the Rabbi's order and my words were: When God is blasphemed, the Rabbi should not be honored! I held my opinion according to the Talmud – tractate Sanhedrin 30:7 – it is forbidden to be without the immersion and without a blessing. When the Rabbi returned, I told him, quite openly, that I did not want to deal with his arguments again.

(Like that, I travelled together with the *Admor* [scholarly leader] of Radzymin to the Land of Israel in October 1924. I said that I opposed the fact which was accepted in Warsaw, that refusal to circumcise a boy whose father did not keep the Shabbat, this contradicts the decision of the Rambam [Maimonides, medieval scholar], and I did not agree with it!).

Prior to the Rabbi's leaving for America, at a meeting of the community council, I requested, that since supplies for increased heating were so expensive, and the ritual baths were closed, I requested that some scrolls of the Law be sold there so that heating materials could be purchased. The question was asked – which is preferable – to sell scrolls to preserve the purity of nation [by regular immersion in the ritual baths] or keep the scrolls in the synagogue while purity is being observed? At that time, I was informed that an article was printed in "*Kol Koreh*" [religious bulletin] concerning the purity of Jewish women. I also carried out the commandment of appointing religious judges and I enjoyed my activities. The current religious law court remained without a unanimous verdict ["insolent court"; Jerusalem Talmud, tractate *Berachot*], the Rabbi, Judge, a distinguished scholar and genius, Rabbi Yehoshele [Trunk] (the memory of a righteous man is a blessing) remained without supporting them. At a meeting of the community council, I requested the appointment of Mr. Zelig Majzels. I said: is it possible that the town of Kutno should do bad things twice? To support an "insolent court" of two judges

and also to cause an innocent soul to go hungry for bread. Apparently, his wife "gave birth" as midwife and now other midwives have come and pushed her away. And he who also "gave birth" received a predetermined destiny and now it is cancelled! After difficulties I was successful. I took care of a thrifty life style. Still before war broke out, I called a meeting of the tailors (by chance, a journalist Z. Tigel was there) to organize them into a cooperative society, in order to buy trade requirements cheaply, and to organize work regulations and their assistants' salaries, and work hours. I was not successful since they had spoilt habits before I was trained. From the money that I had collected semolina flour was distributed, since after all, I had wanted to set up collective grocery shops. Influential people with private connections came and opposed this. I wanted to set up a loans fund instead of banks that destroyed but I did not find a reply from the hearts of the stout hearted – my friends mocked me.

In the time before I got ready for my journey to the United States, I wanted to organize a wholesale cooperative for the shop owners and the burial society collectors, who inspect many businesses on the Shabbat to check that they are being run according to the Law. But there was no majority – their ears were deaf to hearing the timely demand.

In the crisis that fell on many of our nation from the tax ministers that Grabski, the financial minister, introduced and the spiral of the taxes and property taxes began to squeeze hard, I screeched like a cuckoo at the community authorities that somehow every district community must have in place a lawyer to organize the business of taxes, so we would not be victims in the lions' jaws and depend on the injustice of each tax minister. Much pressure is put in awful cruelty by those who wear stockings, made from the skin of the poor [Job 18:13]. However, to my sorrow, I was like a voice crying in the wilderness. (Also today, after ten years, it is important to do it). I always demanded self-help protection and self-defense. At the outbreak of war, I strongly opposed to sign my name on the request for the institution "Berlin Relief Organization" at the coming of the American "*Joint*", in order to get support afterwards; I claimed that it was a disgrace to demand support for a city that had not suffered. I really withdrew from work altogether during the period that Hoover, the president of the United States arrived with food stuffs for infants, and many people became businessmen. Businessmen accumulated and popped up and all sorts of truffles and mushrooms. With their filthy and impure hands, they dabbled in the "public cooking pot". Then I found I owed it to myself to resign from my public business and to sit to one side. However, the prize in the title of holy works had always been for me the building up of Zion and increasing Zion's sons and builders. I had already fulfilled the pure saying "for the sake of Zion" and "I will not be anxious about your admirers". I saw that the Diaspora drew the scum of impurity. There is no existence for the Jews anywhere except in Israel. From the Law, from the tradition, and from the holy obligations, we have to dig deeply to achieve this goal. Furthermore, following the war, this change in values has occurred, for the Diaspora countries are not receiving us. The gates are



# ZARZĄD

Gminy Wyznaniowej Żydowskiej  
w Kutnie,  
Warszawska 100.

Kutno, dn 10.II.

192 3r.

## Z A Ś W I A D C Z E N I E .

Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska niniejszym

The Jewish Congregation

zaświadcza, iż p. Aron-Szlama Elberg jest  
członkiem Zarządu od 1916 r. Pan Elberg  
zostaje wysłanym przez Gminę Wyzn.  
Żydowską, do Palestyny w sprawach społecz-  
nych, związanych ze wzmożoną emigracją do  
tegoż kraju.

certifies herewith, that  
Mr. Aron-Shloma Elberg is  
a member of its Committee  
ever since the year 1916.  
Mr. Elberg has been delegated  
by said body to Palestine,  
on an important mission in  
connection with the increased  
emigration to that country.

Wszelkie instytucje rządowe i prywatne  
w kraju i zagranicą, proszone są, ułatwić  
p. Elbergowi powierzona mu przez nas hono-  
rowa misja.

All government and  
private institutions here  
and abroad are requested to  
facilitate Mr. Elberg his  
honorary mission.

Członkowie Zarządu;

Główny: *Rabbi J. Frank*

*A. Eisner*

*A. Hryniewski*

*J. Chajnik*

*Transcribed from the original of the Jewish Community Council of Kutno: Rabbi J. Frank, A. Eisner, A. Hryniewski, J. Chajnik, and others.*

*Kutno*

Burmistrz

Certificate of the community council for the mission of Aharon Shlomo Elberg in Eretz Israel

closed and in the places of the Diaspora our footsteps are being erased. Abuse by confiscation and cursing, and abominations like malicious waters wash over us in wild torrents. Pushing and crowding in duties and property taxes until many go up onto their roofs to throw themselves over the edge. Or put an end to their lives by various deaths.

Merciful women throw away all their children for lack of means to let them live, Jewish women, your heads are turning white. Fire has devoured your young men [Psalms 78:63]. There is no end to disease and escapades. There is no way out, but we have to build our land! Among the Lord God's wondrous things is the Balfour Declaration and the



Zerchin – First Hebrew teacher in Kutno

San Remo Agreement (1920) where 60 nations were in agreement. I was among the organizers of "Mizrachi" [religious Zionist party] – perhaps our orthodox compatriots would consider joining in this great deed. I was disappointed by the *Mizrachi* delegation to the Gur chassidim [large Polish religious group] on which we had pinned great hopes, getting close to their hearts did not succeed. The Germans had sown hatred between brothers and split families. Therefore, at

the second meeting of the *Mizrachi* party I recommended that in their opinion, those who saw themselves as avenging heroes, with wide sashes and curly sidelocks, that is the "genuinely religious" and learnt the Law with Pharaoh, while Jewish daughters and infants are released from the commandments. And so, "Lies and more lies!" Moshe and Aharon would proclaim, and their admirers would reply: Not so! You men go, for this is what you are asking for, and they would be sent away. However, Moshe and Aharon were fighters in God's war, at home and away, they replied: We will go with our sons and daughters! This lesson is repeated and comes back again, false religious, like a deceitful vulture, frauds and deceivers causing destruction.

I did not succeed in seeing fruits from my efforts for the benefit of the union in Israel within the scope of the state. In the town where I had settled, I gave myself to non-party organizing "Israel Immigrants' Aid", to bring in a jolly crowd and by lots, to allow a number of families to immigrate to Israel from time to time. For reasons not dependent on myself, unfortunately my plans did not come to anything and to my regret my advice was not taken.

Then I came to an agreement to immigrate by myself and explore ways and means of realizing my innermost hopes. I immigrated to Israel in July 1925. Meanwhile I had hesitated for three years and once more I set sail and was successful, thank heaven, in participating in the building of Bnei Brak [currently, an orthodox suburb of Tel Aviv]. And I am still waiting, expecting with great hope, that my words did not fall on deaf ears, did not descend into nothingness and chaos. May my strength never fail!

On a day not far off I will say: I thank you God, your anger is turned away and you comfort me and allowed me to go up to Zion with joy and happiness, remembering peace and tranquility in the land of our desires! Amen! So may it be!!