

KEN HASHOMER HAZAIR IN OUR CITY

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translated from the Hebrew by Sara Mages

In 1917, when I was ten years old, I entered *ken*¹ *HaShomer HaZair* in the city of Kutno. The *ken* already existed. It seems to me that it was founded by the Torunczik brothers of Łódź. The scouting performances of the *ken*'s members in the city streets, their uniforms and the scouting sticks in their hands, made a great impression on me. After putting a lot of pressure at home, my eldest sister, Rachel z"l, agreed to take me to the *ken* to register. The *ken* was in a large lot which, I believe, stored scrap iron. It was far from the city center, beyond the railway tracks and (I suppose) belonged to the Bromberg family. When we got to the lot the instructor was busy. He ran one of the members around the lot as "punishment" for some offense. When he was free, he registered me and I was accepted. Some time later, the *ken*'s flag was placed in my hand and I brought it to my father's house.

I remember wide scouting activity from my first period in the *ken*: extensive scouting games in the local park and nearby forests – bonfires, field kitchens, guard duty, signal training, knots, etc. We learned the theory of scouting from Polish scouting literature. We also fulfilled general "public" functions such as: honor guard next to the municipal synagogue on the occasion of installation of electricity in it, or an honor guard at a public meeting in which Dr. Yehoshua Gottlieb, member of the Central Committee of Polish Zionists, appeared. It seems to me

that I stood in two honor guards. Guardians, from among the parents, were also active in the *ken* and one of them was my father. They even participated in the questions during the "guard exams." I remember that one of the parents asked me during the exams: "in what knot was Haman hanged?" and "where, in the map of *Eretz Israel*, lies Shiloh?"

After the pogroms in Lwów we held a memorial evening in a hall that, I think, also belonged to the Bromberg family. There, I read my poem about these pogroms.

I delivered the guard's promise inside a dug valley, in the "gunpowder valley" (*prochownia*). Apparently, at one time, there were gunpowder warehouses there. In our time – in the vast valley – at night, facing a flag bent over us, around a burning bonfire – we gave the promise.

Great assistance to the *ken*'s scouting activities, its festive gatherings and night trips, was given to us by the agricultural farm (mainly the rose farm) of the Eizyk brothers near Kutno. Today, the farm and one of the brothers are probably the only remnant of Jewish life in Kutno. One of the brothers was one of Israel's chief defense commanders (Major General Eizyk). I remember the *ken*'s first newspaper that I was "responsible for publishing". It appeared in several hand-copied forms. The Polish section consisted of brief news items about *Eretz*



Arie group, Yehuda HaMaccabi Battalion in Kutno

¹ TN: Hebrew, "nest", local branch of a youth movement.

Israel or, as we said then, of "palestinographia"². The Hebrew section included a section of the poem, "*Zion Ha-Lo Tish'ali*"³, by Yehuda Halevi. My group believed that this newspaper could serve as a legitimate source of revenue for the group's coffers. And, indeed, one of the parents paid three zlotys for this newspaper, but we received a severe reprimand from the *ken's* leadership.

I remember very well the visit of M. Ya'ari⁴ in Kutno. He stayed at my parents' house. His visit took place on the opening day of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Ya'ari expressed doubts. He believed that this celebration symbolizes a turning point from the period of pioneering to the period of careerism. Until now I had known him only from his articles, and when I saw him face-to-face, it seemed to me that I was standing before a great living legend. However, the public meeting in his participation was not crowned with great success.

Part of the *ken's* activity was conducted through the district leadership, Kutno–Włocławek, and close ties formed between the two branches. It seems to me that the district

was managed by Betta Sznicer from Włocławek and by me.

There was also some friction with the main leadership, but I do not remember on what. In the city we were a serious public factor and everyone respected us, Jews and non-Jews. In the days of "Piłsudski rebellion" that, as we know, a large part of the working population in Poland believed that it was an advanced coup, representatives of P.P.S.⁵ youth approached me about revolutionary cooperation with our branch of *HaShomer HaZair*.

The members of *HaShomer HaZair*, in the Polish and Catholic gymnasium, fought bitterly for their right to carry the symbols of *HaShomer HaZair* at school. It was not easy for us to carry the insignia on the other side of the lapel while we were studying.

In 1926, we, several graduates, left for our first *Hachshara*⁶ in a Kisielnica farm near the city of Łomża. A short time later, I was drafted to work in the main leadership in Warsaw.

² TN: the study of Palestine.

³ TN: Hebrew, "Zion Don't You Ask".

⁴ TN: Israeli politician and *HaShomer HaZair* leader, 24 April 1897-21 February 1987.

⁵ TN: Socialist Party of Poland.

⁶ TN: Hebrew, "(pioneer) training".