

A LETTER FROM MOSCOW

translated from the Yiddish par Shoulamit Auvé-Szlajfer

I was born in Kutno, on November 16, 1895. I remember well my grandparents: Moshe-Yosef Osowski, a native of Kutno and my grandmother Hinda. Grandfather died at the age of 82, grandmother a year later. My grandfather Moshe-Yosef grew up as an orphan and very early started working for a village tailor. He later became independent. After his marriage, he made tailor work for rich people. He used to take *tallit* and *tefillin* and two pans with him every Monday morning and go to the villages. In the pans he cooked himself oatmeal, potatoes, onions – so as not to need to eat any non-kosher food. Every Friday he used to come back to Kutno and on a wagon lay many products, even poultry, which he had earned for his work.

Grandmother Hinda then dragged the wheat to the windmill on her shoulders, to grind it. And back home – a small bag of flour... My grandmother used to sell half of all the products, everything measured accurately. With that money, she had to buy clothes and shoes for the children. They had five daughters and two sons – one of them my father.

If necessary, I will continue writing about the life in old Kutno for the book.

Lipshe Chana Osowski – October 17, 1963

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To the Society of Kutno's Book.

I'm not sure if you will be able to use the material that I am writing for Kutno's Book and most importantly, if that material won't arrive too late.

I was born in Kutno. At the age of five, my mother taught me Hebrew and at the age of six, I had read the *Sidra*, prayed and read "*Kav HaYashar*" and other books, which frightened my childish imagination and feelings. One book wrote that "A man sins step by step". That's why I wanted to die at the age of eight, without having sinned... After Shabbat, I would go to bed to die, because I had no time for that during the week.

My parents had a whole dozen children. I was the eldest. At the age of ten, I left to study vocational training with a seamstress and did not stop believing in the mighty God. At the age of fourteen, I became a heretic and anti-religious – to this day.

At age fifteen, I began writing poems. Very sad ones.

To this day, I belong to a literary circle in Moscow. I write poems for myself, prose. I cannot stop.

I knew the people whom Shalom Asz described, even living with them in the neighborhood. The Proszeks¹ of "God of Vengeance", the Szapszewicz, the *Dayan*², Mr. Leibish and others. Also, the Jewish porters who lived next door to my parents.

If you are interested, I will describe the sad life of the Kutno Jewish porters and of their children with their bloodshot trachoma eyes, who grew up in dirt, hungry. For a bar of soap, their earnings were not enough.

Lipshe Osowski – October 21, 1963

¹ TN: written "Pshorik" in the original.

² TN: rabbinic judge.