

OUR SERIES ON LEADERS WHO HAVE SHAPED RELIGIOUS ZIONISM OVER THE LAST 150 YEARS

Rabbi Shmuel Chaim Landau

Shmuel Chaim Landau remains unique among the leaders and originators of Religious Zionism. The impact he had on the Mizrachi Movement far surpassed his shortened life span of 36 years. But more so, he is one of the very few whose roots lie within the Chassidic community. He remained a devout follower of Mezritch Chassidism (from the Kotzker Rebbe) all his life. Indeed, it was from there that he inherited his love for *Eretz Yisrael*. The treatise *Shalom Yerushalayim*, written by Rebbe Yisrael MiPhilov, on the subject of Israel and the Redemption, was part of Kotzker education and an important influence on Landau.

World War I caught up with Rabbi Landau in Poland. He was first taken hostage by the Germans and accused, convicted and sentenced to death on the grounds he was an English spy. Managing to escape, he was taken captive by the returning Polish army and then accused of being a Bolshevik, but somehow managed to get some resident Poles to testify on his behalf, thereby assuring his freedom.

The rise of virulent antisemitism with the emergence of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 influenced him deeply and he immediately joined the Polish Mizrachi Movement set up after World War I. In 1919, he attended the Second Polish Mizrachi Congress and was invited to Warsaw in 1921 for the Mizrachi Convention.

It was at this Congress he formulated and laid the foundations for the Mizrachi Youth Movement – *Tzeirei Mizrachi*, and was elected to the Central Committee. He became Editor of the Movement's paper – *HaKedem* and went on to participate in the 12th Zionist Congress. At the 13th Congress, he was elected to the Zionist General Council.



Not only did Rabbi Landau almost single-handedly bring the Mizrachi Youth Movement into existence, he kept it responsive to its members. Through it, he was able to bring much-needed changes into the burgeoning Mizrachi so it would stay attuned to the emerging second generation of Religious Zionists, whose priority became the settling of *Eretz Yisrael* by a significant religious

population. To this end, he coined the phrase *Torah VeAvoda*, a phrase which became a byword for HaPoel HaMizrachi and later the Bnei Akiva Youth Movement. *Torah VeAvoda* signified the synthesis of three ideological factors: Torah, Zionism and Socialism.

From 1922 onward, Rabbi Landau ran the Mizrachi Movement in Poland. He participated in many Zionist organizations but devoted most of his energies to encouraging *aliyah* and establishing youth training programs, to teach them modern agricultural methods for their eventual settlement on *kibbutzim* in *Eretz Yisrael*. At Mizrachi's International Congress in 1925 in Vienna, he was elected as a member of the board of the Pioneer Youth HaPoel HaMizrachi. To fulfill his obligations, he and his family made *aliyah* the same year, settling in Jerusalem. He quickly established himself as the leader of HaPoel HaMizrachi and published many articles explaining the goals of the Movement. However, the first two years of his directorship were mostly devoted to bringing together two opposing factions in the party. Without his dedication to the principle of *shalom bayit*, the Movement could well have split in two. In 1928, Rabbi Landau suddenly took ill as the result of exhaustion and died at the young age of 36. The Landau Forest near Sde Ya'akov and Kiryat Shmuel, a suburb of Haifa, are named in his memory. ■