

Unique Characteristics of the Lomza Yeshiva Students After WWI

by Ben-Tsion Klibansky

Many yeshivot, financially supported by local communities, existed throughout Lithuania in the middle of the 19th century. Two distinct ones, in Volozhin (Wilna gubernia) and in Mir (Minsk gubernia), had a different finance system, which relied on support from the entire Pale of Settlement. Their institutional format had served as a model for new yeshivot that were established in the eighties of that century in Telz and Kelm (in Kowno gubernia) and Slabodka/ aka Wiliampol (in Suwalki gubernia), and those, too, became very famous. The neighboring Congress Poland, on the contrary, lacked any yeshivot of this type, as their educational system was not favored by the Hasidic population. The Hasidim preferred their youngsters to study in *shtiblach* near their homes, closely supervised by their parents. Therefore, when Rabbi Leizer **Szulewicz** (1848–1931), born in Kolno and a Volozhin graduate, announced in 1883 the establishment of a yeshiva in Lomza, it surprised the local Hasidim and they naturally opposed this initiative.

The Jewish population of Lomza and its surroundings, however, having mostly a Lithuanian style orientation, supported Rabbi Szulewicz with his mission. To avoid unnecessary tension, he allowed new students of Hasidic origin to maintain their own customary appearance and clothes in his yeshiva, not imposing the Lithuanian dress style on them.

Approximately 100 students gathered in the new yeshiva during its first year of existence. In order to create a stable reservoir of pupils, Rabbi Szulewicz established

numerous preparatory yeshivot in the neighboring townships – Wizna, Jedwabne, Szczuczyn, Kolno, Nowogrod, Makow, Ostrow Mazowiecki, Ciechanowiec, Wysoki and Zambrow -- where 13 and 14 year old youngsters got a basic Talmudic study training. Their graduates entered the Lomza yeshiva, and within a few years the number of its students grew to about 400 hundred! The crowded conditions forced the management to find an appropriate space solution. In 1889, a large building with wide basements was erected. It served until World War II.

Also in a manner similar to the famous Lithuanian yeshivot, the Lomza yeshiva did not rely on support of the local community. It established a network of emissaries in the Pale of Settlement and in other countries, who brought in substantial financial support.

Nonetheless, the Lomza yeshiva lacked the spark of the Talmudic lessons that made the Lithuanian yeshivot so famous. But a change occurred after the marriage of the daughter of rabbi Szulewicz to Jechiel Mordechai **Gordon** (1882–1964) from Trok (Wilna gubernia), who had been one of the more talented students of the "Kneseth Israel" yeshiva in Slabodka (near Kowno). In 1907, he began to deliver Talmudic lectures, which, at last, provided Lomza with the known character of a regular Lithuanian senior yeshiva. Another son-in-law of Rabbi Szulewicz, Jehoszua Zelig **Ruch** (1880–1940's), from the township Rakishok (Kowno gubernia), also an excellent former Slabodka student, joined the Talmud teachers' staff of the Lomza yeshiva and added to its glory. Rabbi Szulewicz himself, being one of the

youngest disciples of Rabbi Israel **Lipkin** from Salant (1810–1883) -- the famous founder of the *musar* (ethical) movement in Lithuania -- educated his students in the spirit of *musar*. In 1906 he decided to nominate, as in some other Lithuanian yeshivot, a special *musar mashgiach* (spiritual mentor), whose tasks ranged from determining the spiritual character of the yeshiva to devoting individual attention to each of its students. The last Lomza *mashgiach*, Rabbi Mosze **Rozensztein**, from Uzhvent (Kowno gubernia), was nominated in 1912. Functioning in that capacity until the last months of the yeshiva's existence, he also created within its walls – by virtue of his outstanding personality – the atmosphere of a regular Lithuanian yeshiva.

At the onset of World War I, the Lomza yeshiva found itself 30 kilometers from the East Prussian border where German soldiers were amassing. In the early summer of 1915, the Russian troops began to flee hastily due to developments on the battlefield. The yeshiva management decided to split its student body in two: the older students, led by Rabbi Szulewicz, followed the Russian troops on their way to inner Russia and the Ukraine; while the younger ones, left under the patronage of Rabbis Gordon and Rozensztein, found a temporary shelter in Siemiatycze, a township located about 100 kilometers from Lomza. In a few months the latter group returned to Lomza, after the town was occupied by the Germans. Being one of the few yeshivot that remained in Lithuania and Poland under the yoke of the German occupation, it took in many youths who had stayed at their homes after their yeshivot closed or had gone into exile. In spite of the economic difficulties, the Lomza yeshiva succeeded in surviving until the end of the war and the establishment of the Republic of Poland.

In 1923 Rabbi Szulewicz decided to immigrate to Eretz Israel, and the Lomza yeshiva remained under the management of

his two sons-in-law. Laws requiring compulsory conscription into the local army led the deans of the yeshiva to seek a way to avoid this fate for their 20-year-old students. In 1924, the Slabodka yeshiva (now in Independent Lithuania) solved the conscription problem by establishing a branch in Hebron, a town in Eretz Israel, and sending about 100 adult students there. The deans of the Lomza yeshiva saw that as an appropriate solution for their students too, relying on their father-in-law who could help them in realization of their new plan. Indeed, a first group of 40 Lomza students immigrated to Eretz Israel in the summer of 1926 and established a branch of their yeshiva in Petah-Tikvah. Some other Lomza students got emigration certificates over the next few years in order to join this new yeshiva.

The following list of students, written in Hebrew by the secretary (and a student) of the yeshiva, Nechemia **Rabinowicz**, is from the summer of 1927 – after the above mentioned group of adult students had already left Lomza. Analysis of the data, which I found at the YIVO archives in New York, leads to the following conclusions:

- a) Two thirds of the students originated from the former Lomza gubernia --- more than 20% of those were from the town of Lomza. Taking into account that between the two world wars Lomza became part of the Bialystok Province of Poland, actually more than 70% of the students originated from that province.
- b) The modal (most frequent) age of the students was 15–16 years.

Analyzing the data in relation to similar data for other Lithuanian senior yeshivot, my preliminary results show that many of the Lomza students originated mainly from rather distant townships and their average age, around the year 1927, was 18–20 years! This comparative analysis leads to the conclusion that although the Lomza yeshiva became similar in many ways to its Lithuanian counterparts, it was unique in terms of the characteristics of its students. It mainly served youngsters from the town and its surroundings and functioned not only as a senior yeshiva but also as a preparatory one, in which there could be found 14-year-old youngsters studying together with older students of about 24 years of age.

No doubt another factor contributing to the lower age of the Lomza students is the above mentioned 1926 transfer of the older students to the Eretz-Israeli branch, which might have completely changed the age balance of the yeshiva's student body. Although we do not have such lists of Lomza students for later years, we can expect that their yeshiva underwent the same economic and social processes that affected all its counterparts, resulting in a constant rise in the ages of Polish and Lithuanian students during the 1930's.

Bibliography:

This introductory background is based on B. Klibansky, *The Lithuanian Yeshivot in Eastern Europe Between the Two World Wars* (in Hebrew), doctoral thesis, Tel-Aviv 2009.

The students list, translated from Hebrew by the author, is from N. Rabinowicz, 'Students list from Lomza Yeshiva, June 18, 1927, *YIVO Archives*, collection RG-25, fond 1136.

Lomza Yeshiva Students List: June 18, 1927

		surname		
1	Ayzik	LEWINSON	Tiktin (Tykocin)	21
2	Arie	TENENBOIM	Grajewo	23
3	Elchanan	MILER	Ostrow Mazowiecka	24
4	Elchanan	OSTROW	Zamosc	18
5	Aharon	LICHTENSZTEIN	Drogoczin	19
6	Gerszon	JAGODNIK	Ostrow Mazowiecka	24
7	Dawid Meir	SAPIR	Tiktin (Tykocin)	21
8	Dawid	BSZAZE	Wiszkow	19
9	Dawid	LIS	Ciechanowiec	24
10	Dawid Cwi	GRINSZPON	Pultusk	22
11	Dawid	FINKELSZTEIN	Sokoly	20
12	Dawid	EPSZTEIN	Szwencian	23 from Russia
13	Chaim Dawid	RATUSZEWICZ	Zambrow	20
14	Chaim Ichak	KRIMALOWSKI	Dlugosiodlo	20
15	Chaim Cwi	LEWIN	Szczuczyn	21
16	Chaim	ABOWICZ	Suwalki	20
17	Chaim Eliezer	SZEINTOG	L	21
18	Ichak	KORNIKS	L	21
19	Jakow	ROZENBLUM	L	23
20	Ichak	TOIBMAN	L	18
21	Jakow	KIMCHI	L	19
22	Jehoszua	ROZENSZTEIN	L	19
23	Josef	SZTURMELOWSKI	Szczuczyn	22

		surname			
24	Jechezkiel	SOKOLOWICZ	Sokoly	24	
25	Juda	SAPIR	Tiktin (Tykocin)	23	
26	Jsrael	OLSZA	Zambrow	19	
27	Ichak Benjamin	SZPEWAK	Pawianic	24	
28	Juda	LEW	Zambrow	19	
29	Jechiel	WILENSKI	Wiszkow	18	
30	Juda	FERSZTENBERG	Ciechanowiec	18	
31	Juda	NEJMARK	Komorowo	17	
32	Juda	SZUJKE	Kulisz	18	
33	Jakow	SZAPIRO	Janow	20	
34	Jechezkiel	SZNAIDER	Nowogrod	23	
35	Jsrael	HONIGBOIM	Wieski	23	
36	Jakow	ADELFIANG	Warszawa	23	
37	Ichak	LOPATE	Telechan	24	
38	Menasze	WASERCUG	Ostrow Mazowiecka	18	from Russia
39	Menachem	KICKOWSKI	Sadowne	19	aka Tickowski
40	Mosze [Benj.]	CECHNOWSKI	Kadzidlo	19	
41	Menachem	BELFER	Luck	22	
42	Mosze	LAZEWNIK	Luck	19	
43	Mord. Mosze	ROZIN	L	22	
44	Mosze	FRAIMAN	Rozan (Różan)	21	
45	Meir	TENENBOIM	Rozan (Różan)	22	
46	Naftali	SZAPIRO	Brisk (Brześć Litewski)	24	
47	Nachman	BERGMAN	Malkin	23	
48	Nechemia	RABINOWICZ	Iwie	21	from Russia
49	Pinchas	SAPIR	Stawiski	21	

surname

50	Reuwen	GELCZINSKI	Rozan (Różan)	19	
51	Refael	FRIDMAN	Pultusk	21	
52	Szalom	ALPERN	Nowogrod	24	
53	Szlomo	AINSZTEIN	Warszawa	20	
54	Szmuel	KOTLOWICZ	Braynsk (Brańsk)	17	
55	Szachne	ROZENBLUM	Warszawa	25	
56	Szmuel	GNIAZDOWICZ	Szniadowo	22	
57	Szmuel	LETWINSI	Brisk (Brześć Litewski)	23	
58	Szlomo	BACAN	Rozan (Różan)	19	
59	Szlomo	ZIMNI	L	19	
60	Eliezer	EGULSKI	L	19	
61	Awraham [Arie]	MILER	L	16	
62	Awraham	GRADOWSKI	Suwalki	20	
63	Bunem	HERSZ	Drilcz (Iłża)	20	
64	Benjamin	RITENBERG	L	20	
65	Gawriel	AKUN	L	21	
66	Awraham	JANKELEWICZ	Bialystok	17	from Russia
67	Heszal	KLEPFISZ	Szniadowo	18	
68	Dawid	MICNER	Zambrow	17	from Russia
69	Chaim	POIZNER	Drilcz (Iłża)	19	
70	Chaim Meir	HURWIC	Kolno	18	
71	Chaim Dow	KSYANSKEWICZ	L	19	
72	Jerachmiel	KAHANOWICZ	Suwalki	20	
73	Jehoasz	ZABOZNICKI	Suwalki	20	
74	Jakow Dawid	BLUMBERG	Kacanes [Kaciner]	18	
75	Ichak Jakow	CECHNOWSKI	Ostrolenka	19	

surname

76	Meir	OPENHAIM	Suwalki	20	
77	Menachem	CAPNIK	Grajewo	19	
78	Meir	BERGSZTEIN	Kolno	18	
79	Mordechai	FARBSZTEIN	Kamienczyk	19	
80	Mosze Noach	SZULC	L	18	
81	Mordechai	ZIMNOWICZ	Ostrolenka	17	
82	Sender	MILERMAN	Kosowa	18	
83	Cwi	PRAWDA	Zambrow	18	
84	Simcha	FRIDMAN	Długosiodło	21	
85	Szlomo	RUCKI	L	17	
86	Szmuel Meir	GOLOMBEK	Kolno	18	
87	Arie	SAPIR	Stoczek	17	
88	Awraham	GRODNER	Nowogrod	16	
89	Awraham	KATORICKI	Nowogrod	17	
90	Aharon	WENGROWICZ	Stawiski	19	
91	Awraham Ichak	KAPLAN	Wysoki Mazowieckie	17	from Russia
92	Awraham Juda	ALACHOWSKI	Myszyniec	17	
93	Zeew	SOLOWEIJCZIK	Brisk (Brześć Litewski)	19	
94	Zeew	BURSZTEIN	Rozan (Różan)	17	
95	Jerachmiel	WILENSKI	Wiszkow	15	
96	Jisrael	KATZBOROWSKI	Szczuczyn	16	
97	Jakow	LEWINSKI	Ostrolenka	15	
98	Jakow	SZLESER	Białystok	16	from Russia
99	Jakow	LIPSZIC	L	16	
10	Josef	GELJUDA	Tarnow	19	
101	Jakow	KUPIECK	Czyzew	19	

surname

102	Mordechai	KOHEN	Wiszkow	16	
103	Mosze Azriel	SEGAL	Pultusk	19	
104	Mosze Arie	MERIN	Bendin (Będzin)	17	
105	Mosze	JABLONKI	Czyzew	17	
106	Mosze	RUZSZA	Szczuczyn	16	
107	Mosze	SZAPIRO	Wolkowisk	18	
108	Meir Arie	KOCZAK	Kulisz	17	
109	Nathan Mord.	GRINSZPUN	Pultusk	16	
110	Azriel	PODBIELSKI	L	16	
111	Cwi	WRAUBEL	Kulisz	17	aka: Wrubel
112	Fiszel	MILER	Długosiodło	19	
113	Reuwen	ZDANOWICZ	L	16	
114	Szraga	WIERZSZBA	L	15	
115	Szraga	BUKUWSKI	Tarnow	16	
116	Szmuel	SZUJKE	Kulisz	16	
117	Szlomo	RADWANOWICZ	Ostrolenka	17	from Russia
118	Szmuel Mord.	RADWANOWICZ	Ostrolenka	18	from Russia
119	Szimon	BLUMSZTEIN	Zambrow	18	
120	Szmul	SZLIFSZTEIN	L	18	from Russia
121	Awraham	GRINWALD	Nowogrod	16	
122	Mosze	CUKER	Ostrolenka	15	
123	Arie	FURMANSKI	Makow Mazowiecki	16	
124	Awraham Ichak	ROCHMAN	Szniadowo	14	
125	Baruch	PERELSZTEIN	Wizna	16	
126	Becalel	BLUMOWICZ	Nowogrod	15	
127	Awraham	TENENBOIM	Wysoki Mazowieckie	16	

surname

128	Awraham Mord.	BLUMBERG	Kacanes	16
129	Zelig	BOGDUSZ	Nowogrod	17
130	Zalman	SREBROWICZ	L	16
131	Jeszaja	LICHTENSZTEIN	Szczuczyn	16
132	Jakow	FABRICKI	Kolno	16
133	Ichak Szlomo	BORSZCZ	Dzwonek	16
134	Juda	CERWONIEC	Rutki	15
135	Juda	KRONZSZEK	L	15
136	Ichak	JANOWICZ	Piatnica	15
137	Ichak Zeew	MALINOWICZ	Radzilow	16
138	Jakow	RIBOK	L	16
139	Jona	ZIBERT	Ostrolenka	16
140	Jakow	MARKEWICZ	Piesk	15
141	Jisrael Meir	GOTLIB	Kolno	15
142	Jisrael Jehoszua	BURSZTEIN	Wysoki Mazowieckie	14
143	Jakow Nisan	SZWARBORD	Rutki	17
144	Lipman Chaim	REGENSBERG	Zambrow	15
145	Mosze	BLUMERT	Wizna	16
146	Mosze Elia	NADBORNI	Wolomin	15
147	Mosze	KEIDANSKI	Kolno	16
148	Menachem	PANDRIK	Kolno	16
149	Mosze Jehuda	WAISBORD	Wasewo	15
150	Mosze Meir	SZTERN	Makow Mazowiecki	17
151	Note	TIKOCZINSKI	Zambrow	16
152	Azriel	LIPSZIC	L	15
153	Pinchas	JANOWICZ	Kolno	16

surname

154	Cwi Elchanan	ALENBERG	Jedwabne	16	
155	Szmuel	BURAKIEWICZ	Zambrow	16	
156	Szalom Ichak	GUZKEWICZ	Wizna	16	
157	Szmuel	FRIDMAN	Jedwabne	15	
158	Szlomo	ZABLUDOWICZ	Kolno	15	
159	Szlomo	KRELNSZTEIN	Kolno	16	
160	Szlomo	EIDELBERG	Makow (Mazowiecki)	16	
161	Szraga	ABRAMSON	Ciechanowiec	13	
162	Szimon	SZTERN	Kolno	15	
163	Szraga	REWINZON	Zambrow	15	
164	Szlomo	HIRSZFELD	Wysoki	15	
165	Simcha	SZEPS	Szepietowo	15	from Russia
166	Szmuel	GOLDWASER	L	16	
167	Chaim Zeew	SZENIAK	L	15	
168	Chaim Dawid	CHACEK	Jenrzewe	15	
169	Chaim Reuwen	MALINOWICZ	Szniadowo	16	
170	Arie	RUZSZA	Szczuczyn	14	
171	Awraham	GRAZSZIMOWSKI	Szczuczyn	14	
172	Awraham	SREBROWICZ	Nowogrod	15	
173	Awraham Josef	TOIBMAN	L	15	
174	Gecyl	JANKELEWICZ	Mohilow	15	from Russia
175	Dow	ZAGRABOWICZ	Piatnica	15	
176	Chaim	SZENIAK	Wengrow	15	
177	Chaim Arie	CHMILEWSKI	Nowogrod	15	
178	Chaim Hilel	LICHTENSZTEIN	Grajewo	15	
179	Chaim	KOSOWSKI	Grajewo	14	

surname

180	Chaim	BLUMERT	Wizna	14	
181	Juda	BUCHBINDER	Wizna	14	
182	Jehoszua Zeew	ABRAMCZIK	Pultusk	15	
183	Josef Menachem	WRANE	Stawiski	16	aka: Wrana
184	Jakow	FINKELSZTEIN	Sokoly	15	
185	Jakow Cwi	LEW	Sokoly	15	
186	Joel Mosze	ZABOZNICKI	Suwalki	14	
187	Jona	BROMBERG	Janow	15	
188	Ichak Becalel	ZAJEWSKI	L	15	
189	Jeszaja	MALINOWICZ	Stawiski	15	
190	Jisrael Mord.	BROMBERG	L	15	
191	Joel	CECHANOWICZ	Stawiski	15	
192	Jakow	HOLCMAN	Nowogrod	15	
193	Jekutiel	MALINOWICZ	Stawiski	15	
194	Jakow	FRIDMAN	Lomazy	15	
195	Jeszaja	KOHEN	Nowogrod	15	
196	Mosze	GRODOWSKI	Suwalki	14	
197	Menachem Dow	GEZUNDHAJT	Grajewo	15	
198	Meir	MLINARZEWICZ	Szczuczyn	15	
199	Mordechai	BAJKOWSKI	Jedwabne	15	
200	Mordechai	KOHEN	Czerwony-Bor	15	
201	Mosze	WAISBORD	L	15	
202	Nachum	ZAJEWSKI	Konstantin	15	
203	Nisan	HOLCMAN	Kacanes	15	
204	Nachman	RAP	Grajewo	15	
205	Cwi Ichak	GRICBERG	L	15	

surname

206	Szlomo	TOIB	Wiszkow	15
207	Szimon	PANUSZ	Reiwec	15
208	Szalom Mosze	SZWIDKOWSKI	Nowogrod	15
209	Szalom	GALANT	Szczuczyn	14
210	Szachne	KOLEDICKI	Brooklyn (U.S.A.)	16
211	Chaim Josef	CAPNICKI	Wizna	15
212	Cwi	KOGAN	Stawiski	15