

## **Professor Leibl Bayon**

by Federico Penhas (Colegio Hebrew Sefaradi, Mexico)

My great-grandfather was born in Ratno, Poland, on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1907. His parents were Yacov Bayon and Meite Kahan, Leibl was the youngest of nine siblings.

Leibl has memories of his youth which affected significantly his later life as the "Bellis case", an innocent Jew being accused of murdering a gentile boy to use his blood for Pesach. In 1914, at the age of 8, seeing people gathered in the streets to read news about the outbreak of the First World War.

Jews in Ratno joined the socialist organizations of which he was also a member: the Poalei Zion, Hechalutz, Hashomer. A Hebrew school is founded with Hebrew as the language of instruction and strong Zionist ideology starts to influence the youth.

Leibl moved later to Vilnius, which was the center that attracted students and studied in the Teachers' Seminar. He had many interests as geography, natural sciences, mathematics, physics and pedagogy, subjects he read in Yiddish as well as Jewish History and literature. His eyes weakened for studying so much and some of his friends took turns to help him with his Polish literature and other courses, since he had to be examined by the Polish Educational Examiner Commission to receive his graduate title after studying for five years.

Later, he taught for several years in Poland. In 1935, he received a letter from his brother in Mexico, saying that teachers were needed at the Colegio Israelita. He decided to leave his family and immigrated to Mexico.

His work in Mexico was successful and his students were very fond of him, he taught Yiddish, literature and grammar and Hebrew.

In September 3rd, 1939 he got married to Lina Josefina and had three children, Elena, my grandmother, Esther and Jacobo. His children and learning were his priorities, he always made sure his children read and learned. The atmosphere at home was ver "Yiddish" and the language spoken. He knew and spoke perfect Hebrew.

My great-grandfather became a significant personality among the literature world. He was a literary critic, and writers from different parts of the world used to send their books to be reviewed by him. He was invited to all literary events. He wrote a Yiddish grammar book, a book of Bible Passages in Hebrew and in Yiddish, and brief biographies of Jewish Russian writers that were murdered.

A few of his articles were: "Dos Eibique und Acuale in Tevye der Mikhiker" about the book "Cholem in Vor" (Dream and Reality) by Bialostoski; "A buch fun groil, koshmar un gvure" about the book "Hoiz fun di lalke"s by K-Tzatnik; "Der Golem", "Di guile comedie" and "In times of masiach" about the writer H.Leivik.

In his article "Nostalgia for social justice" he emphasized the problem of the search of justice by man to his fellow men. This was the foundation for the education he wanted to give his students: the importance of respect to others.

Due to changes in the ideology of the Colegio Israelita, many teachers leave to the new school, founded in 1954, Nuevo Colegio I.L. Peretz. The same year, the Ashkenazi Kehila Teachers' Seminar was created, where he taught until 1972, when he fell ill.

In 1974, he was awarded with the Zalman Shazar Prize for outstanding work as a Jewish Educator in the Diaspora he was already sick, and unable to attend the ceremony, and his wife received the prize on his behalf.

He helped the artist Fanny Rabel with ideas for the mural painting at the Jewish Community Center in Mexico City.

Unfortunately his last 13 years were very difficult for him and his family. Reading and writing, his great passions, were taken away from him by a brain tumor.

He died in October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1986 at the age of 79.

His work also includes:

- "A children's Haggadah" in Yiddish and Hebrew.
- The workbook: "Arbetsbuch far Yiddish in Folkshul"
- "A refue shelma" (In memory of his father) and "Gemzene Shtil" (In memory of his mother).

- "Folk dertziung un moral"
- "Der shpraj limad der Yiddisher shul"
- "I.L.Peretz der vegvaizer"
- "Vegn Yiddish un Yiddishkait in Amerique"
- "Der sefer a sformim"
- "Arum dem velt"
- "Dos buch fun un"



Profesor Leibl Bayon (left) with a work partner