
BESSIE

**"Bessie Gotsfeld
lit a torch and its
flame still blazes,
illuminating
the path she walked
and the road
she carved ahead
for others to tread."**





Bessie

Price: \$3.00

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Everybody who knew Bessie Gotsfeld, no matter how briefly, has a personal impression and a private memory. Though I hope they will read this little biography with pleasure, and that it may recall some facet of her that may have been forgotten, this writing is not particularly directed at them.

It is for those who know Bessie only second-hand, from stories told by others or from the things she wrote and said. For them, may these pages bring a little bit of life to what would otherwise be only a name.

As for myself, I was into my teens before I truly understood who Bessie was. You see, in my life there were two women. One was Aunt Bessie, my father's sister, distinguishable from my other aunts by the way she made me seem the most important individual in the world all the time she was talking to me. I only knew I loved her.

Then there was this "personage" named Mrs. Gotsfeld, who seemed to be so important in that entity called "Mizrachi Women"—the one whose every word was listened to and remembered as almost sacred by a most august group of ladies who claimed my mother's time either on the telephone or in some place called "the office."

In time I was fortunate enough to be able to put the two portraits together and come up with what I hope is a true picture of that exceptional woman who was Bessie Gotsfeld—my Aunt Bessie.

It is from this unique position that I have written the words that follow. And now, keeping that in mind, read on.

Leona M. Goldfeld

PREFACE

The successive stages in the life of the unique and unusual woman who was Bessie Gotsfeld are perhaps most clearly illustrated by the words of our great sage, Hillel:

Im ayn a-ni li, mi li?

אם אין אני לי, מי לי

U'ch'she-a-ni l'atz-mi, ma a-ni?

וכשאני לעצמי מה אני

V'im lo ach-shav, ay-ma-tai?

ואם לא עכשו אימתי

Loosely translated, this may be read:

If I care not for myself, who should care for me?

And if I care *only* for myself, what use am I?

And if not now, when?

It may help us to understand Bessie better if we divide the years of her life into the stages defined most clearly by these three principles.

I have attempted to do so in this short biographical monograph.

Leona M. Goldfeld

PROLOGUE

Bessie.

In Hebrew: *Batya*.

Translation: "daughter of G-d."

Years, later, viewing in retrospect her outstanding accomplishments and the exceptional personality that achieved them, many would stress that meaning. But on that early autumn day in 1888, when the young parents welcomed their new daughter, she was simply their eagerly awaited baby.

Bessie was the first-born of Leon and Raisel Goldstein. Her birthplace was Przemyśl, a Polish city which was then part of Austria. The day was Hoshana Rabba, in the midst of the celebration of the Festival of Succoth. She never observed the secular date, but it was on or about September 21, a time of seasonal change in a year and a decade that marked the rebirth to new activity of the long-dormant Zionist dream.

The blonde, blue-eyed girl did not remain an only child for long. In quick succession came a sister, three brothers and another sister. As the oldest, Bessie helped with the care of her five siblings, learning from her mother a deep understanding of children and their needs. It was a close-knit, loving family.

Leon Goldstein was a man of great charm, a Talmudic scholar who also possessed much secular knowledge. Recognizing in his daughter an intellectual potential on a high level, he spent much time with her, and there developed between father and daughter a unique relationship, a true and abiding friendship.

A similar bond existed between Bessie and her mother. Many long conversations were held between the two as they shared household tasks. A most common time for these was the Sunday morning mending hour, when Raisel, through stories and folklore, would explain and teach, with loving empathy in every stitch and word.

Those were happy years. The household was Chassidic and devout. Observance was joyous, ritual adhered to with love, Sabbaths and festivals glorified with a spotless house and a gleaming, laden table.

There were other facets, too, to the life of the Goldstein family. Although Przemyśl was an overwhelmingly Catholic city, the Poles at that time were liberally disposed toward the Jewish population, and the community thrived both culturally and economically. The city was referred to by Dr. Shmaryahu Levin as "the very seat of Jewish intellectualism."

Understandably, then, Leon's horizons were broad, encompassing deep concern and interest in world Jewish affairs. Zionism, as an organized movement, was only beginning, but many eager intellectuals were already planning for a national Jewish future in Eretz Israel. Such personalities were frequent, welcome visitors in the home of Bessie's parents, and the young girl drank in their words and aspirations, gradually shaping the dreams that would set the course of her own life.

In such a family, education would surely not be neglected. Daughters as well as sons received both religious and secular training. Bessie, a serious and dedicated pupil, soon became a brilliant student. Her natural aptitudes fed on the instruction of several well-known teachers of the time; even including lessons in science and literature. She completed both the elementary

and high school courses of study with exceptional rapidity, and was chosen valedictorian at her commencement. This honor testified not only to her scholarship, but also to her popularity with students and instructors alike. It was a rare occurrence for a Jewish girl.

Other personality traits endeared Bessie to her schoolmates. One of her greatest gifts was the ability to inspire and cultivate friendships with all kinds of people. Exposure to the conversation of visitors at home had made her aware of social problems at an early age. Their solution became a permanent concern for her, yet she was never too busy to listen to the personal problems of a friend or the troubles of a small child. To all of these she brought her own brand of attention and thought.

When school and new relationships outside her home were claiming more and more of Bessie's time, tragedy struck the family. Raisel Goldstein, not yet thirty, died. In their grief, the five younger children turned to their big sister, herself still a child, and Bessie grew to fill their need. With the strength she would display many times throughout her life, the bereaved eldest daughter put aside her own pain to comfort her father and the children, and to assume the responsibilities of housewife and surrogate mother. It was during that year of sorrow that the ties of affection and devotion linking the six brothers and sisters became the unbreakable bonds which sustained and strengthened Bessie all her life--ties of love that constantly expanded to embrace the spouses and children that each brought to the nuclear family.

In her attempts to be the woman of the house, Bessie now drew even closer to her father, in a new relationship of interdependence. But Leon Goldstein was mindful of his daughter's needs, too. The experience of normal young girlhood were not to be denied Bessie.

Many changes were near for the family. The year of mourning passed and a new mother came into the home, a gracious and friendly woman. Now Bessie again devoted herself to her studies, while Adela Goldstein began to rebuild and recreate the home life and atmosphere that had characterized the Goldstein home. But before the renewed sense of wholeness could enfold them, a second shadow threatened. Leon Goldstein, concerned for his young sons and the threat of military conscription that faced them, reached the conclusion that they must leave Przemyśl. In 1900 he emigrated to America to prepare a home for his wife and children.

Leon traveled widely in the United States before settling in New York. He went as far as California, where he met an interesting man approximately his own age, from Australia. The man's name was Shimshon Gotsfeld.

The years of separation were difficult for all, with long-traveling letters an inadequate bridge, but at last, in 1905, the new American home was ready. Bessie and her family sailed for New York.

Once transplanted in America, Leon and Adela wasted no time in establishing the same kind of home they had maintained in Przemyśl. It was an open household, gracious and warmly welcoming to friends and visiting strangers alike. Although the new life presented many problems and required long, arduous hours of work, it never occurred to any of the Goldsteins to lower their standards or debase the quality of the life they were creating for themselves. If material things came hard, it was all the more reason to keep spiritual, mental and cultural fires burning brightly.

Adela Goldstein regarded the family table as a symbol and a center of these intangibles. Not a holiday passed but the table expressed in its setting the particular historical or religious significance of the occasion. It was not surprising that it became a magnet, drawing numerous guests to celebrate, discuss and debate a wide range of topics.

The familiar home style was both a source of strength and a haven for Bessie. The teenage girl had left many dear friends behind, and the new life was not easy to adjust to. Much of her valiant struggle to find a proper niche will never be known, for Bessie, then as always, would not burden others with her problems—not even her own family.

The first three months were the worst. Then a new guest appeared on the Goldstein's doorstep. He presented himself as Mendel, son of the Mr. Gotsfeld from Australia with whom Leon had shared those pleasant hours in California.

Mendel was a well-read man, and before long he and Leon had come to an arrangement whereby the charming young Australian would tutor the Goldstein children in English. The lessons were quickly instituted, and now Bessie studied both American and English literature avidly.

The dedicated teacher and the eager student were a most congenial two-some, and ripening friendship culminated in marriage in 1909.

The union of Bessie and Mendel was a rare one. Aside from the love that existed between them, which was manifest in every area of their relationship, there was also a deep friendship, a mutual understanding, a sharing of intellectual values. In the Goldstein home, open to such a wide range of thought and opinion, these values had been nourished and shaped into the total philosophy of life and living that Mendel and Bessie now carried into their own household.

Only two years after their marriage, the young couple left New York and took up residence in Seattle, Washington. Now the mistress of her own home, Bessie began to translate into public action the ideals and training of her early years.

The Gotsfeld home in Seattle soon became a replica of the Goldstein household in its openness, its warmth, and its magnetism for people and ideas. Surrounded by a multiplicity of friends, adored by her husband, troubled by her lack of children, Bessie could easily have slipped into the role of a pampered, self-pitying wife whose home is a social center for dilettantes, all discussing social problems and intellectual theories most knowledgeably—and doing nothing. But this was not her way. It would have been false to her upbringing and to the core of her character. Instead, certain that the responsibility for helping Jews rests first and foremost with their fellow Jews, she concealed her personal sorrows and began to seek ways to live her beliefs.

Unlike those who feel that small actions are not worthy of their efforts and do not offer enough scope for their talents, Bessie knew that the whole must include even the most trivial part. Nothing was considered beneath her notice or attention—not then, and not during all her years, as countless recipients of her love and care can testify. Typically, Bessie began with whatever local need came to hand, working with other equally concerned Jewish men and women.

And soon the entire Seattle community was faced with a great and most urgent need. World War I had engulfed the European continent; upheavals in Russia foreshadowed the imminent birth of Communism. Thousands of young Jewish men and women were fleeing that tortured land, making their way across Siberia and the Pacific Ocean to see sanctuary in America—and pouring into the port of Seattle.

The city opened its doors to receive them, and no door opened wider, no heart more generously, no home more warmly than the Gotsfelds'. With her dear friends in that city, Bessie worked tirelessly to help these young people start anew in the United States. Many of them, today well-known and high-ranking in Jewish and Israeli circles, trace their first meeting with Bessie to those days in the State of Washington.

Though the refugee problem was perhaps the most dramatic during those years, it was not the only concern of the Jewish community. Zionism had gained a real foothold in the hearts and minds of Jews all over the world, and America was not to be left out. Orthodox groups—somewhat later than other segments of the Jewish community—were eager to organize their Zionist activities, and Bessie began to see a glimmer of the realization of her own dreams of Palestine, as it was then known.

It was in her home, around that familiar table, that Rabbi Meir Berlin met many of the people whose efforts were instrumental in helping to establish the first Mizrachi organization in Seattle.

Some of Bessie's deepest and most abiding friendships were forged at this time, friendships on which she could rely confidently, not only during the years in Seattle, but later, too, when she called upon them for support and cooperation in establishing the Mizrachi Women's Organization of America.

The years slipped by. Busy with husband, home, friends and work, Bessie might have remained in Washington. But late in 1919, after a serious illness, Bessie felt a longing for the physical closeness of her family that was more than she could bear. Mendel found an opportunity to dispose satisfactorily of his retail clothing establishment. An association with his brother-in-law Sol Goldman, Sarah's husband, in Sol's jewelry business, was available for him in the east. And so, with mixed feelings, the Gotsfelds parted from the friends they had made in Seattle and came back to New York. This was the first meeting Bessie had with her brother Samuel's wife, Belle Goldstein. Here are Belle's words:

"At the first meeting with Bessie on her arrival from Seattle with Mendel, eager anticipation mingled with awe—I had heard so much from each member of the family. As we waited at Grand Central, Bessie came down the ramp. With her happy smile she came toward me, and as she embraced me there was kindled the spark of sisterly love which burned as a bright and steady flame throughout the years."

Once again the temptation to become the pampered darling beckoned. Always idolized by her younger brothers and sisters, the focus of lingering

concern for her health, and very shortly surrounded by an infant nephew to dote on and play with, a woman might understandably lapse into that comfortable way of life. But in terms of Bessie, her character and beliefs, her attitudes and philosophy, this was unthinkable. After a short period of settling in and becoming acquainted with her brother-in-law Sol and her sister-in-law Belle, as well as her brother Izzie's wife, Ida, it was time to find some needed work to do. She did not have far to look.

The Balfour Declaration in 1917 had thrilled the Jewish world. Its ratification by the League of Nations two years later confirmed that joy. And when England was given the mandate over Palestine, many believed that the re-establishment of a national homeland for the Jews was actually here. A great delegation headed by Dr. Chaim Weizmann came to the United States, where together with Samuel Untermyer, Shmaryahu Levin, Dr. Ben-Zion Mossinsohn, and Louis Lipsky, they proclaimed the Keren Hayesod and began a gigantic fund-raising campaign to amass the monies required for the up-building of the homeland.

Bessie labored zealously in those days. Nothing, nothing was more important than the work for Palestine. She enlisted the help of all her friends and neighbors, inspired her family, and appealed herself to innumerable donors again and again. The sums she collected served to spur the efforts of those around her further.

The crowded days developed their own routine, and Bessie's thoughts turned more and more frequently to her same creed: If I care not for myself, who should care for me?

Keren Hayesod was a general fund which would provide land, reclaim the soil, attend to physical matters and secular concerns. And this was as it should be, but the religious Jew had more than these needs and concerns which he shared with all of his people. Someone must care for spiritual survival too.

Here was the unanswered cry that reached Bessie. If the religious Jew did not look to the welfare of those like him, how could he expect anyone else to do so?

The Mizrahi movement seemed to Bessie to have an answer. Like all other Zionist groups, Mizrahi was deeply involved in Keren Hayesod activities, but it was also attempting to establish and support synagogues, Talmud Torah schools and boys' schools in Palestine.

In many cities of the United States, whenever a visiting rabbi would come to organize a Mizrahi chapter, he would also organize a women's group to "hold the fort". These groups would collect money and turn it over to the visiting speaker. They performed yeoman services in running functions to supplement the funds raised by the men, often bringing in the lion's share of the money, albeit in small individual amounts.

Two such groups existed in New York, composed mostly of older women, who were content to assist in the men's established projects. But even at that early stage, a desire was surfacing to among the women "have a special project of our own". The men were willing, and turned over three of theirs. The New York group was given a synagogue in the Mizrahi-organized colony of N'vei Yaakov; the Brooklyn ladies received a Talmud Torah in Kfar Chittin, near Tiberias; and the women of the other existing groups were activated to work particularly for Tachkemuni, a boys' school then being built in Tel Aviv. They were promised tablets in the various rooms in recognition of their work.

Rabbi Berlin, a frequent visitor in both the Goldstein and Gotsfeld homes, urged Bessie to organize these women's groups into a loosely-federated Mizrahi Sisterhood. Bessie was reluctant. The members of these groups were older than she, and their ideas were mainly extensions of their husbands' thoughts on Palestine. Would they be ready to take such a step?

But something had to be done.

Bessie knew her arguments against forming some kind of Mizrahi Sisterhood were valid. In addition, she was envisioning ever more clearly a more independent group, one that would not be thought subservient in decision-making and in establishing either short or long-range goals.

Then there was the difficult task of convincing each group to yield its autonomy to a central authority. Could they see the broad horizon of a national movement? It was doubtful. But Bessie was convinced that the problem must be faced and solved. From that far, it was only one small step to the conclusion that she herself must do the job. After all, *Im ayn ani li, mi li?* But how could it be done?

For the present, she would not concentrate on the older women, in their already-established groups. But young women were hard to persuade, or they were too busy and involved in other aspects of their lives. By elimination, then, Bessie turned to women in their middle years, women active in communal affairs who had more modern tendencies than the typical Mizrahi woman of that time.

She started right at home with her mother. Adela Goldstein was at that time an active officer of a yeshiva in Brooklyn. Her friends, all active, intelligent women, were giving all of their time to local work. Bessie's heart ached—why couldn't they do something for Palestine?

The Goldstein house, quite naturally, was often the meeting place for various committees. There Bessie utilized the opportunity to speak to the women time after time. Although involved in her husband's business, where she handled bookkeeping chores and often served behind the counter as a saleswoman, she was never too busy to come and impress on her mother's co-workers the importance of the Zionist dream and the urgency of laboring for its fulfillment. Even in the early part of 1924, mourning the death of her so dearly beloved father, Bessie did not cease her efforts. Success in establishing the national organization she so longed to see would in a certain measure be a tribute to those visions and ideals her father had transmitted to her. There was no time to stop her work. Grief was a personal thing, to be held to oneself and never allowed to intrude on others.

The talking, the persuasion, continued and finally, on November 10, 1924, the carefully nurtured seeds bore fruit. In Mrs. Buchman's home in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, all these ladies so active in local charities, gathered to organize the Achios Mizrahi, the Sisters of Mizrahi. To cement their affiliation, dues of approximately seventy-four dollars were collected, not a small sum for that time.

Those whose vision went further planned to concentrate on educating the best women in the group in the goals of a national organization, on forming additional chapters and in this way achieving their broader aim. They were not disappointed. Many of the women were not educated formally, but they were highly intelligent. Bessie carefully guided their learning. During every meeting, time was devoted to a discussion of some subject that concerned religious women and their role in work for Palestine, and some aspect of

Palestine itself. Nobody called them cultural meetings, but there was always a planned program.

The concept of a national Mizrahi Women's movement, sparked by Bessie, claimed their imaginations. For too long their contributions had been limited to the "pushkes" which they all kept in their homes, and into which they put a few coins just before they lit the Sabbath candles. Now they were excited at the idea of something bigger, something more challenging, something over which they could have some direct influence and a measure of authority.

The day came when Adela Goldstein and her members told Bessie that they were not interested in remaining a group that would hand over all the money they raised to some other agency. They wanted the autonomy to plan and implement their own work. How thrilled Bessie was to hear them say, "Our hearts beat for Palestine, and we want to feel that we, ourselves, are doing the work."

Bessie's advice was clear-cut and simple. She told them to go to Rabbis Berlin and Fishman, who were in America at that time, and to inform them that Achios Mizrahi was ready to organize a Mizrahi Women's national movement—on two conditions. First, they were to have complete autonomy over their funds. Second, they were to have full jurisdiction over their own projects in Palestine.

Bessie envisioned the satisfaction of the two rabbis. In particular, she imagined Rabbi Berlin's pleasure, in view of the many times he had exhorted her to work for that very goal of national organization.

At a small committee meeting, it was decided that Mrs. Buchman and Mrs. Goldman would represent the women in a conference with the two rabbis.

All went well. They were warmly received, attentively listened to and then answered. The women must pay part of their dues to the Mizrahi Men's office in New York. Beyond that, they were free to collect money for specific projects in Palestine.

The ladies returned home jubilant. Mrs. Buchman was asked to call a large meeting, which took place in her home during the week of Chanukkah. About one hundred thirty women attended, an appeal was made, and a good deal of money was raised.

Rabbi Fishman was invited to speak, since he was so glad to see the women organized. He spoke very well—and then he threw his bombshell! Seeing how much money had been raised, he insisted that it all be turned over to him. The Mizrahi, he explained, had need of it for a number of various matters.

This demand paralyzed the meeting. At the outset of the gathering, the women had been informed on what basic principles they were organizing, and their excitement ran high. Now all their spirit was gone. Rabbi Fishman's stand left the entire assemblage speechless. For an eternity, it seemed—although the clock could not have registered more than three minutes—there was utter silence. Then Bessie got up.

She displayed none of her own churning emotions, none of the anger and disappointment she herself felt. In a carefully controlled voice she thanked Rabbi Fishman for his interesting talk, adding that the ladies would take his "request" into consideration at the next meeting and inform him of their decision.

Rabbi Fishman was furious. He demanded to know what Bessie meant, what right the women had to collect money for Palestine and not turn it over after all.

Again Bessie got up, once more tightly under control, and thanked him for his statement. However, she explained she was sorry he had misunderstood. The ladies had every intention of sending the money to Palestine, and would immediately appoint a committee of two to meet with him at his office the very next day to discuss the matter. On this note, Rabbi Fishman left.

The money was never given to Rabbi Fishman, not that first sum nor any other. There were other repercussions, though. When the story became known, many women sought to join the group, and many successful affairs were held.

To one of these affairs, a "Palestine Night," Mrs. Abraham (Jrena) Shapiro was invited. So convinced was she that the Achios were on the right track that she, too, joined and became very active, in time rising to the national presidency.

The following year, in May 1925, there was to be a Men's Mizrachi Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. Bessie contacted Rabbi Berlin. After discussion of various matters, she came to the point. Would it be practical to send a delegation of three or four women from the Achios Mizrachi to the convention? There would surely be other women there, women who would come with their husbands, women who might belong to "sisterhoods" of the men's chapters, women who might also be interested in getting together to form some kind of national movement. After a moment's thought, Rabbi Berlin said, "All right. Not a bad idea."

Bessie would always remember the night the ladies left for the convention. It was a Saturday night, and they had gathered at the home of her sister-in-law, Belle Goldstein, full of anticipation and excitement. They were going at their own expense. They were charged by the group to interest those other ladies they would meet in Cleveland in forming a national movement and then getting together on a single project all their own. The delegates were the four close friends who had first responded to Bessie's urging to form the Achios Mizrachi.

As they had hoped, they met their counterparts in Cleveland, women who also wanted something equivalent to a national organization. The foundation was laid. The national organization was becoming a reality.

Again it was time for rejoicing. The first faltering steps had been taken. But Bessie was not satisfied. Would she ever be? Her mind teemed with dreams and plans to make them come true. She had great courage. She was never afraid to look into the far future, to see the larger picture. She demanded that of herself. Still, she had great tolerance for the less-than-perfection of others, much as she required it of herself; she recognized that perhaps the women of the fledgling Mizrachi Women's Organization of America must go more slowly, lest they lose confidence in their ability to cope with their new undertaking. So they would begin with a single project.

But her mind was again possessed by the recurring theme of "*Im ayn ani li, me li?*" What was she? Why, she was a religious Jewish woman, grown from the seed of religious Jewish girlhood. Then that must be the concern for her and for others like her—the nourishing, education and preparation for womanhood of the religious girl in Palestine.

The solution was to build a vocational school for girls where religious and secular learning could go hand in hand with education for work, for a job to keep them while single and even when married, should the need or desire be there.

These are things that many people know about the creation of Mizrahi Women's Organization of America, later to become American Mizrahi Women. This was the public Bessie, the practical visionary.

There was another Bessie, too, the private one, the wife, daughter, sister, and aunt. During the years in New York, she lived in Williamsburg, in an apartment in the same building as her brother Samuel and, for a time, her sister Sarah. So close were the three families, so devoted to each other, that at times it seemed they were three brothers and three sisters, with no "in-law" added.

Though Bessie and Mendel had no children of their own, there were three little nephews and three even smaller nieces whose faces lit up every time Aunt Bessie came. More often than not the three "G families"—Goldman, Goldstein and Gotsfeld—would gather at one table for a Sabbath or holiday meal. The little ones loved to come to Aunt Bessie and Uncle Mendel's where a canary always sang and a special treat was hidden in an apron pocket. It was to Bessie that lost teeth would be brought, into her ear that many childish sorrows and triumphs would be whispered, and on her lap that comfort and wise suggestions would be given.

Other children, too, were always drawn to Bessie. Perhaps it was her way of listening, as if nothing else in the world mattered, as if no utterance by the greatest man or woman alive could compare in importance with the small story, as if there were no demands on her time and no claims on her attention. Perhaps it was her soft voice, her gentle hands, her special smile that little ones seemed able to bring forth. Whatever it was, children felt instinctively that Bessie was someone they could trust, confide in and count on for wise and sound advice.

Even with older people Bessie could inspire confidence. No one will ever know how many shy stories of first love she heard, how many newly-engaged couples shared their joy with her, how many problems of mature, middle-aged and old people were brought to her, how much comfort she dispensed, how much thoughtful counsel and sympathy she gave.

In contrast, how little she asked for herself. Three times daily, in the privacy of her room, she injected the insulin that kept her diabetes in check. Yet how few people knew of her illness. Carefully as she watched her food intake, meticulously as she measured her portions, most people never guessed that it was strict medical necessity and not a desire to maintain a slim figure that dictated her actions. She desired nobody's pity, her own least of all.

One thing she did desire, though—the love and support of her husband in the work to which she devoted herself. And she got it in the fullest measure. Mendel was a fit husband for her. He became her sounding board, listening to her ideas and plans for each new project and for the expansion of each established one. His advice and suggestions were always practical, and his share in the work was larger by far than many people knew.

Back then, when the organization was newly-born, Bessie needed that help from Mendel. The cadre of women on whom she could rely, who understood her purposes, who dared to look where her farsighted vision led, was small

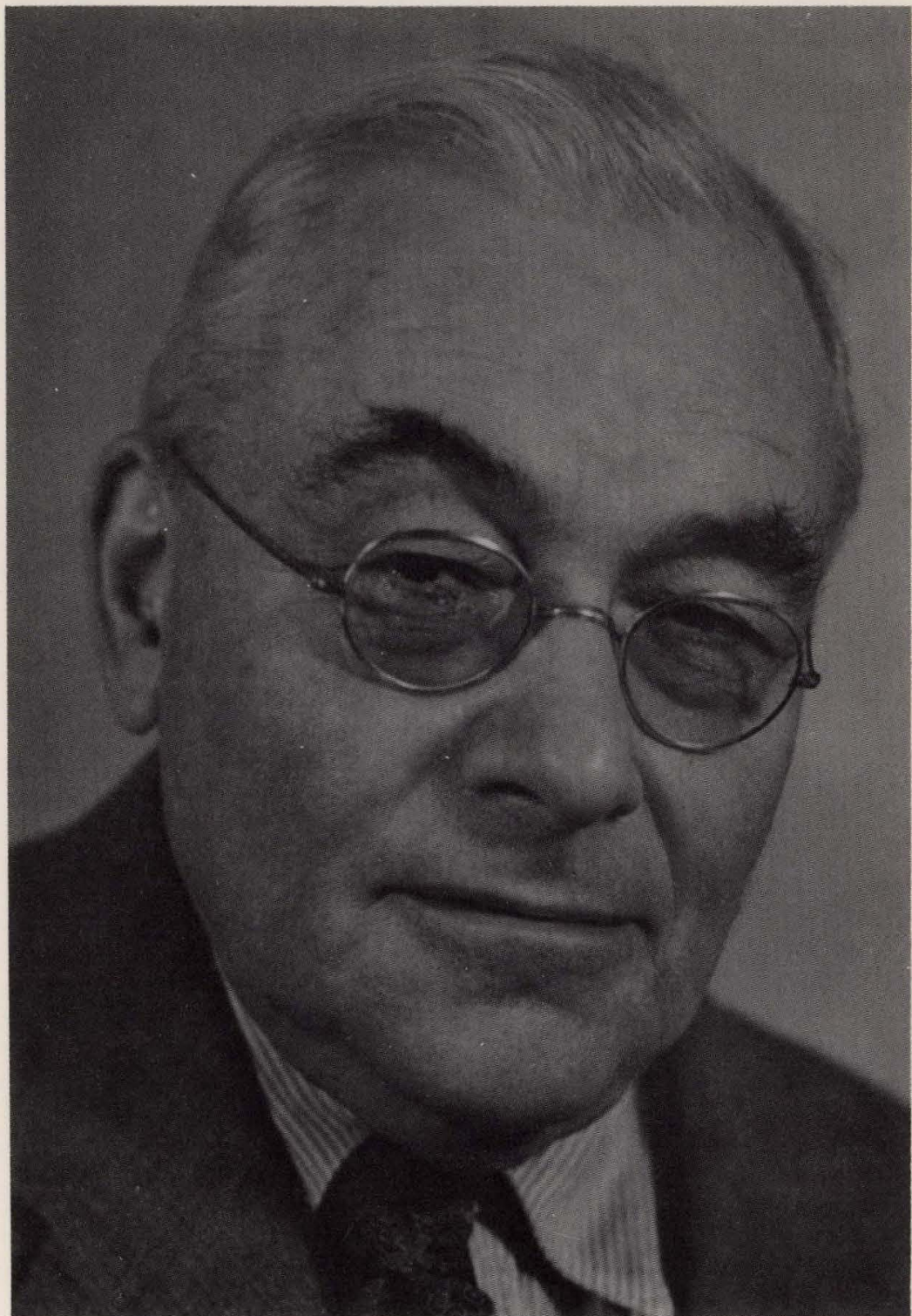
and sometimes irresolute. Not many could attempt an undertaking of the magnitude she proposed. Few had the courage to stand independently, to accept such responsibility, to say with Bessie, "we women can do it." Few were as liberated as she.

But Bessie was confident that others would follow where she led and, in time, become leaders themselves. She was not mistaken. Once the Women's Auxiliaries and the independent Women's Mizrachi groups became a national organization, the women insisted that one of their own go to Palestine and report on the possibilities of establishing their first project. No second-hand reports from the men, or even the rabbis who travelled back and forth for the Zionist groups—only one of their own women must go. They would rely on her reports.

At this time—was it coincidence, or something more?—Bessie was about to embark on a trip to Palestine, where Mendel's mother lived. She looked forward to a totally private time with the mother-in-law she had never met. But it was not to be.

Bessie was asked to make a survey. She, who constantly exhorted others to give, could not refuse. So, later in 1925, when she sailed on the President Arthur, she carried with her the great responsibility of recommending a project for the fledgling organization.

U'ch'sheani L'atzmi,
Ma Ani?



Mendel

As we look back from the vantage point of today, we realize that that first trip to Palestine initiated a new phase in Bessie's life. Until then she had been a housewife whose major outside interests were in helping others like herself. In Seattle it had been other Jews, in New York it became specifically Jewish women—to achieve more independence, and Jewish girls—to be educated and provided for.

Beginning in 1926, the emphasis began to shift subtly, until the two positions were reversed. Her primary purpose in life, her entire *raison d'être*, became Mizrachi Women, both the organization and the individual members. The proper development of both was her major, almost her only, concern. Though husband and home were not secondary, she would use them to help and support her in the furtherance of her goals.

Amazingly, throughout the years in Palestine and Israel, she managed to do her own home-making and to make that home a mecca for young and old. All kinds of people could be found at her Shabbat afternoon tea table—students, teachers, eventually even ministers of the State of Israel, and all manner of persons in between. The discussions ranged from school lessons to world affairs, and most often covered the many and varied problems of the infant State.

Mendel was her unwavering support. Recognizing the exceptional qualities and abilities of the woman he had married, he had the courage in those male chauvinist times, to shape his life to the needs of hers.

He was a short, rather pudgy man, with eyes always twinkling behind his glasses, a warmly welcoming host to all who came, his cheerful exterior giving no inkling of what cares might lie beneath.

As time went by, Mendel assumed a more and more supportive role in their joint lives. He increasingly managed the house, doing everything to lessen Bessie's duties there so that she might rest and be freer for her work. He took from her shoulders every burden he could, laying none of his own problems on hers, and he made his primary job that of being her chief mainstay and support.

Bessie told him *everything*, discussed everything with him, relied on his advice and made him her sounding-board. People say that behind every successful man there is a wonderful wife. Behind Bessie was a wonderful husband and a remarkable man. He cared for her as for a beloved child.

Bessie returned his love and devotion in full measure, holding him always first in their personal relationship, sharing her heart and her mind. There was no problem, no new plan, no possible solution of a difficulty, that he did not know of before anyone else. She relied on his guidance, his wisdom, his understanding. She had no secrets from him except one in his later years—the extent and incurability of the disease that would finally take his life. That she would bear alone.

The sailing on the President Arthur, then, marked the beginning of Bessie's total giving of her life to the service of others.

How excited she was on that day! After all her dreams of Palestine, she would see with her own eyes that beloved land.

But even in the midst of her preparations she had taken careful thought for the welfare of the infant Mizrachi Women's Organization. Before she left, she

entrusted the secretaryship to her sister-in-law, Belle—the presidency was already in the capable hands of Adela Goldstein—and from that time until Bessie's passing the flow of letters was uninterrupted. In them Bessie would pour forth all her thoughts, plans, concerns and worries about the projects and about the absolute necessity for clear and constant communication between the women in America and those in the Holy Land. Here she would reveal her feelings, her joys, her angers and her frustrations. Here she would counsel and insist, explain and advise.

That first time Bessie remained in Palestine for six months. The trip was made at her own expense, yet she did not hurry to return. She intended to accumulate all the information she could regarding a possible project. What was a most pressing and unfilled need that Mizrachi Women were equipped to undertake?

On her return to New York, Bessie made her report to the eagerly awaiting women. There were no opportunities for Orthodox adolescent girls to learn any skill or trade, to obtain practical training in a job that would be of value to themselves or to the country; there was nothing to teach them to be of use to the Jewish National Homeland. There was no compulsory education and certainly no vocational training for girls. Here was a need that Mizrachi Women could and should fill.

Bessie's ideas and plans for a girls' school, a Beth Zeiroth, were not new to the women, to whom she had outlined them in letters, and who gave her enthusiastic support.

Vividly, Bessie described what she hoped would be accomplished.

The school must be functional, but also beautiful, to instill in its students appreciation for the aesthetic and artistic together with vocational skills. These girls would eventually marry, and the atmosphere of their own homes should reflect a serene loveliness which must be part of their learning.

It was not enough, therefore, to sew well; the articles must be well-designed and attractive. Food must be prepared and served so that it pleased the eye as well as the palate. And so it should be for every phase of study, Bessie felt.

Neatness would be essential, from the care given to a written lesson to the cleaning of the students' quarters and the communal rooms, such as the classrooms, dining room and kitchen.

There must be a wholeness to the building, an integration of all its parts. To this end the furniture must be chosen with care, yet enough left undone to allow the girls self-expression in decorating their rooms. Even the gardens must be carefully laid out. The total effect should be one of unity, of having been planned, instead of "just growing".

Of course this dream did not come true overnight. There would still be years of work and many problems to solve before the Beth Zeiroth Mizrachi in Jerusalem would become a reality. It would be 1933 before its doors were opened officially.

In September of 1929 Bessie, who had been ill, was in Francesbod taking a course of mineral water baths and treatment. She planned to continue on her mission to Palestine, together with Mrs. Jrena Shapiro, once her health allowed. The two ladies had been commissioned officially to arrange the purchase of a building for the girls' school project. It was necessary to make some kind of a decision.

That decision was to acquire a building on Rashi Street in Jerusalem that would lend itself to renovation for a vocational boarding school for teenage girls.

Bessie had been fortunate, while previously in Palestine, in making the acquaintance of Mrs. Fradelle Haskell, whom she interested in her cherished plan. Mrs. Haskell devoted much time and effort, and even went to some expense, to investigate possibilities for a school site.

A problem for Bessie at this time was that the organization had not yet sent power of attorney. But arrangements had to be made to begin the alteration of the building on Rashi Street; contracts had to be signed; applications for permits had to be made. And meanwhile, it seemed that the American women simply assumed Bessie would remain in Palestine indefinitely.

This was something she was not prepared to do. On the day after Rosh Hashana she wrote that her health was being affected, and expense was becoming more than she could handle, since there was no reimbursement—not for travel to and from nor for her stay in Palestine.

Of loneliness for Mendel and the family and of homesickness there was no word, only one wistful sentence at the end of a letter to Belle: "Tell me a lot of details of how you spent Yom Tov."

It was still a number of weeks before Bessie felt able to leave. The enthusiastic cables and reports of the annual convention gave a great lift to her spirits. She and Mrs. Haskell began negotiating for a directress for the school, filed the necessary papers with the municipality of Jerusalem and completed the arrangements for buying the building. Decisions were made for the enlargement and renovation that must be done.

In the midst of all this, some of the women were being influenced by part of the Men's Mizrahi and wished to give their funds for other work.

This was exactly the sort of thing Bessie feared. Time and again she would say, "We must not scatter our efforts." "We cannot afford to disperse our talents."

In this instance she was adamant that funds raised by Mizrahi Women in the name of the organization could only be disbursed by it from the central office.

Eventually the matter was settled, though only over a long time period and with much difficulty. But the lesson of undivided allegiance had to be learned. Until the Beth Zeiroth was functioning, Mizrahi Women could not and would not accept other responsibilities.

At last Bessie sailed again for home, leaving a working committee behind.

The stay in New York was brief. Within six months Bessie left again, but this time Mendel went too.

He travelled directly to Palestine and went immediately to his mother in Tel Aviv, while Bessie stopped in Francesbod again for reasons of health. By September, though she was still not too well, she had joined him.

It was rapidly becoming apparent to both Bessie and Mendel that matters could not continue as they were. The long separations, the impermanent residences, the traveling back and forth were consuming health, energy and money. Yet Bessie had come to realize that those of the women who might be in a position to make such trips were not necessarily prepared to see the breadth of her dream. If it were to come to proper fruition, she felt she must take the responsibility of guiding and nurturing its growth.

She was convinced that there were enough able hands to do the American part of the work, and that she could suggest from a distance, but that the Palestine phase required her physical presence.

Mendel, always perceptive, had already recognized the dilemma and knew what must be done to solve it. As quickly as possible, he settled his business affairs and arranged for an apartment in one of his mother's houses in Tel Aviv. In 1932 they moved to Palestine—permanently.

When he and Bessie first moved to Palestine, Mendel began to care for his mother and a sister; he was to care for them as long as they lived. Among the responsibilities he assumed there was the supervision of the family property. He became the agent, seeing that the houses were occupied, the rents collected, repairs and renovations made and general maintenance provided.

It supplied an income for Mendel and Bessie, although as the years passed, the property dwindled to the one building in which they lived, the building known to so many as "The House on Yonah Street".

Even in those days Yonah Hanavi Street was not a fashionable address. It was on the "wrong" side of Allenby Road, nearer to Jaffa. The apartment in which they lived was on the second floor. One entered the inner courtyard from a small alleyway, climbed a narrow stair to an equally narrow, rather long terrace.

The door leading inward brought one to a small entry hall, a kitchen on the right and, directly ahead, the dining room, with a living room to the right of that.

There was no bedroom, only a bed that folded up under a mantel in the dining room and two others, which were couches by day, in the living room.

Outside the dining room was a small balcony. In August of the last year of his life, Mendel confided to me how grateful he was for that balcony: the small synagogue was directly across the street and the congregation, knowing he could no longer negotiate the stairs, kept the door and windows open, so that Mendel, sitting up there, could participate in prayers with a *minyán*.

The furnishings of the little home were simple and tasteful. Books abounded, among them Mendel's cherished copy of some of Shakespeare in Hebrew. Mendel, who had won a prestigious award for his declamations from the Bard in his native Melbourne, now delighted in the beauty of this translation. A large table dominated the dining room as if eagerly awaiting the guests who gathered regularly to nourish their minds, refresh their souls and feed their bodies.

Bessie prized simplicity as she loathed ostentation; she would not accept artificiality nor anything second-rate. Rather than that, she would do without. Accordingly the flatware which graced her table—and which now so beautifully adorns my own Seder table each year—was of sterling, and her dishes of fine china.

As he shared everything, so Mendel shared the housekeeping too. He was a good cook and enjoyed the compliments he received. On my first visit to the Yonah Hanavi house he delighted in describing the preparation of a special rice dish he had concocted in honor of my coming. I rarely saw him without that broad smile, his eyes twinkling behind rimless glasses.

Meanwhile the work progressed. While the women in America began to run affairs and appeals to raise the funds that were needed, Bessie started to prepare for their disbursement in her typically perfectionist way.

She familiarized herself with architects' plans, learned about builders' materials, and became knowledgeable about all the laws governing the erection of a school, from zoning to safety, from health to curriculum. Her daily reading became the stack of catalogues of supplies that kept growing in her home. What was the best bargain in wood, in tile, in stone? Who could do the plumbing and wiring at the lowest cost without sacrificing quality of fixtures and workmanship? Was it more economical to bring refrigerators from out of the country, and if so, from where? How about parts and service? What kind of import regulations governed their case?

There was no detail that Bessie overlooked. And once the decisions were made, while the money was not yet in hand, there was no stopping for Bessie, only a change of emphasis.

Now that keen, precise mind turned to staff and curriculum. What courses should be offered? What *must* be offered in order to gain accreditation from both secular and religious boards of education? What *could* be offered in the realm of vocational training which, after all, was to be the main aim of the school?

Once the studies were determined, where would the staff be found? What requirements were to be laid down for teachers? Did economic factors dictate that they be proficient in two or more areas? What of house mothers and office staff, administrators and janitorial workers?

Again there was no point too trivial to take Bessie's attention. Whatever question was raised, she had already thought of it and was prepared to provide an answer.

And all the time, in spite of the monumental task that she had set herself, Bessie was clarifying for the women the principles upon which their organization was founded, insisting, demanding that these be understood with no shadow of a doubt. In speeches, which she disliked making but whose importance she recognized, and in writings, she repeated these principles and explained their reason for being: unity of purpose and independence of outside obligations.

In later years she would speak, too, of a bridge between the Land of Israel and America, a two-way road over which Mizrahi Women must send material sustenance, and in turn receive the "rebirth of a tradition—the cultural and spiritual stability which can reinforce American Jewry's sense of security, pride and faith."

She would remind her listeners that for thousands of years the treasure preserved and transmitted by Judaism to the rest of the world has been the treasure of spiritual values. No practical or humanitarian work has true value unless we keep in mind its inner meaning—"the development of inner spiritual values in Israel's youth, which means the development of spiritual values for Israel as a whole in the future, and eventually the impression of these values on a world which has largely forgotten them or, at least, abandoned them in practice."

She constantly repeated that the institutions maintained by Mizrahi Women were not an end in themselves, but a means to the major end of increasing the spirituality of all people. Carrying this further, as she did increasingly—especially after the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel—Bessie pointed out the global attack on spiritual values, which we could recognize all over the world if we would only stop to look. Motivation everywhere was now almost totally materialistic, she said, and it was up to

the religious segment of Judaism to lead in the struggle to bring a rebirth of spirituality to our people.

Clarifying this, Bessie explained that Mizrachists, must realize that there is a basic difference between religious matters in *Galut* (the Diaspora) and those same matters in Israel.

In the Diaspora, she said, religious concerns relate to individuals and associations which seek to maintain a Torahtrue way of life. In a country such as America, and particularly in those large cities where most of the orthodox cluster, the means to do this are fairly clear, and not denied to us. Synagogues and religious schools, both yeshivot and Talmud Torah schools exist for their communities and are supported by them. In Israel, unfortunately, it is possible to live in a Jewish environment which is alien to Torah. It therefore becomes necessary for us to set up a counter-environment that will embrace almost every aspect of the existing one, where the religious individual will also have a place.

Following this discussion to its logical conclusion, Bessie told the women that they must regard their work as an integral contribution to the growth of Israel as a whole.

This appeal to the deep-rooted beliefs of the membership found a warm response. The women were greatly heartened in their efforts when they were made to see the significance of their work. It was time for Bessie to lead them a step further.

If the work of the organization was to be recognized as the vital portion of the rebuilding of Palestine that it must be, there must be concentration of effort. Scattered small contributions to this or that project would be worse than meaningless. Consequently, she said, all chapters must owe their only allegiance to the central office. The projects adopted by a national convention would be the only ones worked for. Above all, it was time that the women realized that they could not use their fund-raising energies for any other institution.

This was a difficult hurdle for many of the women. In the eyes of some, it even had an aspect of wives revolting against their husbands. It seemed a kind of betrayal. It was fine to have a national women's organization and do their own work—but not when it meant taking away from their husbands the financial effort that so many had been making for so many years.

Today we are probably shocked when we hear of such examples of women submissively accepting male chauvinistic domination. But it was never easy to bring women into full liberation. And these women were, for the most part, completely dependent on their husbands economically. The men were largely quite indulgent husbands, rather amused at their wives' little game of organizing. It was when it stopped being a game and became a serious effort, a breaking of the links that kept the women in a secondary, "auxiliary" status, that difficulties multiplied.

Bessie was far-sighted indeed, when she made sure that these basic ideas—the true aims of a religious movement and the necessity of absolute independence from any other body or organization—were made clear to the women as an obligation of their membership. And this, too, took a while to accomplish. Bessie suffered much anguish, heartache and frustration in those early years because some women paid only lip-service to these elementary principles.

And in spite of all obstacles, the work did progress. In spite of delays in receiving funds from the United States, in spite of beaurocratic red tape, in spite of continuing pressure from the men for the women to contribute to other projects, the work did progress. Money was solicited and received from Belgium and from Hamburg. Bessie was assured that once the school opened there would be substantial amounts from Germany.

Germany! When Beth Zeiroth Mizrahi in Jerusalem opened in 1933, the earliest stormclouds from that land already foreshadowed the Holocaust. Bessie's heart ached with unknown fear, but her mind was again racing far ahead. Plans had to be made to help—not haphazardly, but carefully, thoughtfully, to meet any contingency.

As a first priority, then, when Beth Zeiroth in Jerusalem actually began to function in October of 1933, about twenty-five of its students were girls from Germany, newly arrived, from religious homes. They were truly the first children of Youth Aliyah, a full half year before the official establishment of that movement in the spring of 1934.

The right person for the position of directress had not been found, but the school opened anyway. Prominent on the staff was Professor Nechama Leibowitz, who remained at Beth Zeiroth for its first twenty years. Not only did she teach Bible, the Prophets, liturgy, customs and ceremonies, but she was in charge of the entire cultural program while the school was without a headmistress.

It was not much later that Bessie's attention turned to the problem of women in kibbutzim. Without guidance, remote from the world of culture, they were a resource that was drying up. Soon they would no longer be able to give more than the most elementary physical care to their families, and they would fail to give mental and spiritual stimulation and sustenance to their children.

Bessie brought two such women from each of ten religious kibbutzim to Jerusalem for five months, where Nechama Leibowitz and several other teachers taught them daily. In 1947 I had the privilege, with two other Junior Mizrahi Women, of receiving a lesson in part of *B'reshith* (Genesis) from Professor Leibowitz, so I can well imagine the kindled excitement in learning with which those twenty women returned to their kibbutzim at the end of their stay. So eager were they to continue their studies that Professor Leibowitz agreed to send them questions on the weekly portion of the Torah. The young women answered these questions, returning them to their instructor for her corrections and comments, and eagerly studying them when they were again returned.

In this way, under the sponsorship of the American Mizrahi Women and as a direct result of Bessie's burning desire to increase the cultural values of Palestinian womanhood, an international project was born. Hundreds of people, both scholars and laymen, received and answered Nechama Leibowitz' questions, sent back their answers and were sent the corrected and annotated replies. For twenty years American Mizrahi Women subsidized and supported this adult education program until finally the funding was absorbed by the Jewish Agency.

This was the level of the teaching and the teachers at Beth Zeiroth Jerusalem. And it continued at Beth Zeiroth Tel Aviv, which opened five years later, as well as in all the institutions of American Mizrahi Women.

But what a difficult five years!

For the American women, Bessie voiced her concern about sources of membership. Few young girls were willing to join their mothers' groups, and in looking for association with their peers they were being drawn to other organizations. Where would our membership come from in ten, twenty or thirty years? It was time to establish Junior Mizrahi Women of America. And, coincidentally with the opening of the Tel Aviv school in 1938, the new organization came into being.

But Bessie, and many of the other women as well, remembered how they had wanted a project of their own. Therefore, at the beginning the Juniors were given the responsibility of erecting children's houses in religious kibbutzim. What a clever idea that was! It is always more exciting for young people to build than to maintain. In this way they could keep seeing new accomplishments, for the houses, once built, would be serviced by the kibbutzim themselves.

In Palestine, however, there were many problems, mostly financial for Bessie and her committee. Funds were slow in coming from America. With the growing threat in Europe, it was necessary to absorb more and more girls. Bessie, who was devoting herself totally to the work, was not salaried. In addition, she constantly laid out sums for obligations that simply could not wait. She even borrowed from her mother-in-law. Mrs. Haskel, too paid some salaries, because personnel had to be recompensed.

Meanwhile plans were going ahead for a new vocational high school for girls in Tel Aviv. Bessie plunged into the work.

She seemed to have forgotten that in 1933, just after the opening of Beth Zeiroth in Jerusalem, she had had to leave the work in the hands of the committee in Jerusalem while she took a much-needed rest for four weeks. The doctor had told her she needed a year. Her hearing was seriously impaired, her heart was not strong, and the diabetes took its unremitting toll. In September she had been referred to a specialist in Vienna but, Bessie being Bessie, she thought of herself last.

The four weeks helped a little, but not enough, and after Pesach of 1934 she sailed for the States.

Back with her adoring family, Bessie was forbidden to do anything but be pampered. At first she submitted willingly, anxious to rest exhausted mind and body and get well. Fortunately for me, "enjoying the children" was always a major therapy for her, and although I do not recall the topics we discussed, I have a vivid picture of myself sitting on the floor, with my head on her knee, in earnest conversation. I was not yet ten, but my serious concerns—school? friends? I don't remember—seemed to be so important to her. What I do know is that I did not connect her then with the Bessie Gotsfeld who was of such stature in the Mizrahi Women. That had to be someone other than this smiling, gentle person, who had attention for nothing more than a little girl.

By June, Bessie was again in Francesbod and then to see the specialist in Vienna. His diagnosis was not encouraging. Perhaps she decided at that time to think less of her infirmities. If she said as much to Mendel, he kept it to himself, and no one else knew. At any rate, she was soon back in Palestine and totally involved in the work. Even though she was named as a delegate to the World Zionist Congress in Switzerland in 1935, she could not, or would not, leave.

During the summer of 1935, Bessie had interested the Tel Aviv municipality in allotting a choice parcel of land for the building of a new Beth Zeiroth in that city. However, not everyone in the municipality was pleased, and Bessie was informed she could only get the land if fifty percent of the building fund was already available. Since the women had written from America that the money would be available, Bessie entered into the agreement with the municipality.

By the end of the year two blows had fallen. The promised money was not yet forthcoming, and a large check from a philanthropic fund, which Bessie had accepted as a gift, was now being represented as a loan for a mortgage on the land and the not-yet constructed school.

In the midst of the worry and distress these complications caused, another heartache intruded. In January of 1936 Mrs. Haskel died. Bessie felt the loss keenly. Not only had she always depended on her for the work of Mizrahi Women, but the personal attachment was deep and strong. Some time would pass before she would get over the shock and sorrow of that bereavement.

There was little time for mourning. Still another problem had arisen. Women's organizations were going full scale into Youth Aliyah, planning to take over the German influx. Their emissaries were on their way to America to appeal for funds. Bessie wrote urgently to the women that many of our students were also Youth Aliyah girls, and only Mizrahi Women was providing religious education for the children they received. Therefore it was all the more important to publicize our own work and insure that Orthodox girls would be channeled to us.

It was more imperative than ever that Beth Zeiroth in Tel Aviv become a reality. Other religious women's groups were eager to take over, casting a girls school in a totally different mold from the one Bessie envisioned. "We cannot afford to be late in bringing this project into existence, as we were late with Youth Aliyah, which we actually had for two years, (from the very beginning) but failed to capitalize upon." Now the funds for the building must be forwarded quickly, or the whole opportunity in Tel Aviv could be lost.

Despite this urgency, there was still wavering among some of the women, who were being influenced by the Men's Mizrahi to make contributions to their movement. Bessie stated as clearly as she could that that organization raised money, none of which reached Mizrahi Women. Therefore we have no obligation to give any of our hard-earned funds, she concluded.

Eleven years after the chartering of the Women's Mizrahi, the lesson still had to be taught, the basic principle expounded again.

Broader problems, affecting all of Palestine, were becoming uglier too. Angered by the influx of German Jews and the increasing purchases of Arab lands by Jews, the Arab leaders were inciting their people to strike and riot. Curfews were established. A Royal commission was sent from England, but no Jew seriously expected any benefit from its presence or its report.

Still, there were bright moments. In June of 1936 sixteen girls were graduated from Beth Zeiroth in Jerusalem, including the first Youth Aliyah girls. Sixty-nine were registered for September.

And the municipality of Tel Aviv confirmed the lease of land for the new Beth Zeiroth.

Perhaps that was a turning point. In 1938 the new school was opened, functional and beautiful, a tourist attraction as well as a respected educa-

tional institution. It included a Beth Chalutzoth where working girls could live and even, when unemployed, work in the institution's cooperative to earn a small income.

Within a year, war erupted in Europe but there was no halting the work of Mizrahi Women. On the contrary, on every hand Bessie saw immediate and imminent needs. As she labored to fill the former, her busy mind planned for the latter. Her philosophy was simple and practical. Since her hands could not stretch to Europe, let them be occupied with what was at hand, preparing for those who might yet escape the German tide and reach a haven in Palestine.

In 1940, afternoon clubs were initiated in Jerusalem and in Shchunat Hatikvah in Tel Aviv, anticipating the expansion into settlement houses that would follow within the decade.

Annual scholarships were established for the Batei Zeiroth.

1941 saw day nurseries begin in Pardes Channa, Shchunat Shapiro and Shderoth Ben Zion, responding to the growing need of working mothers.

In Pardes Channa there was also a children's home for pre-schoolers who were orphaned or, because of illness at home or other problems, could not remain with their families.

Adult education was not neglected. The first such courses were started in 1942. These adult courses were in addition to the series of regular lectures and concerns which Bessie had always seen as a vital cultural supplemental element in the lives of the people of Palestine. Mizrahi Women sponsored these for many years, until the growing State of Israel began to provide enough such opportunities for enrichment on its own. Then, in order not to duplicate existing sources, which she always considered a waste of money, Bessie decided that the funds and effort could be better utilized for those projects which only Mizrahi Women provided.

The following year saw pre-vocational training for girls in Mizrahi elementary schools instituted with the approval of the Department of Education. It began with girls from the religious schools in the area who came twice weekly for craft lessons, with the ultimate goal of opening such courses to all Mizrahi schools in the country.

Once again Bessie revealed herself as a practical visionary. She saw the need for a womanhood in Palestine, in the dreamed-of, longed-for Jewish State, a womanhood capable of standing behind and beside its men, educated, trained equipped mentally and spiritually to do its part in the building of that state according to Torah principles. Such women must be capable of making a home, teaching their own children and classes of other people's children, providing for themselves and helping provide for others. They must know their past in order to create the future. They must be guided to a satisfactory career while still young, so that they will be able to live successfully for themselves as well as for others. They must be able to do the work of those decimated millions in Europe whose tasks in life were left unfinished.

It was by now apparent that when the war ended there would be a flood of homeless, orphaned children arriving on the shores of Palestine. Mizrahi Women had to be prepared to shoulder their share of this sacred responsibility, the care of these young remnants of our people.

And those preparations had to be made in advance.

In rapid succession, homes and villages were made ready:

1943-Motza Children's Home, where the first Teherah Youth Aliyah children were received.

1944-Mosad Aliyah Children's Village in Petach Tikvah.

1946-Annex of Beth Zeiroth Mizrachi in Jerusalem.

1946-Tel Raanan Children's Home for Youth Aliyah children in Bnei Brak, where I was privileged to work briefly.

1946-Mosad Techiyah in Petach Tikvah, for child survivors of Bergen-Belsen and other concentration camps, also through Youth Aliyah.

1947-Kfar Batya, the Bessie Gotsfeld Children's Village and Farm School.

And during those years, Junior Mizrachi Women erected children's houses in kibbutzim such as Yavneh, and Tirat Zvi, two in Sde Yaakov, in Kfar Aza, in Ein Hanatziv and an infants' house in Sde Eliyahu.

All this occurred under the restrictive rule of the British.

Until that explosive moment in 1948, the birth of the State of Israel

Now the gates of the country were opened wide, and wave after wave of immigrants began to arrive. And in response, together with the other Jewish organizations, the work of Mizrachi Women multiplied.

Beth Zeiroth in Tel Aviv added another story to accommodate its unprecedented increase in registration. There was also an added influx of Beth Chalutzoth girls above school age, who were housed, fed and given courses to help them qualify for employment and to assist their speedy adjustment to their new homeland.

Kfar Batya had well-established weaving and shoemaking shops. A new mosad, Chavat Hanoar, was established in Tel Arish, taking two hundred children from Europe, from Yemen and North Africa. The first settlement house and a youth center, sponsored by Junior Mizrachi Women, was opened in Bakka, Jerusalem, filling the pressing need of the new immigrants for orientation, as well as educational vocational and religious activities, not only for youth but for all ages. Courses for kindergarten teachers were started at Beth Zeiroth in Tel Aviv.

All this in the year following the establishment of Israel, a year when the country was at war with the entire Arab world.

In the early fifties, Kfar Batya expanded its farm school, added carpentry, locksmith and toolmaking shops, and opened the Bar Ilan High School.

In cooperation with World Mizrachi Women, a network of recreation rooms was opened, accelerating its activities in order to combat the encroachment of Christian missionaries who were busily spreading their gospel in their day care centers, among the children of confused new immigrants.

Techiyah was transformed into a sleep-in nursery for children from broken homes.

In continuing cooperation with Keren Kayemeth, the Jewish National Fund, the Bessie Gotsfeld Forest in the Jerusalem Corridor was dedicated, in addition to many other forests, parks, play areas and redemption projects throughout the years.

An infirmary was added in Kfar Batya.

Projects as diverse as a new dormitory and an infirmary in Mosad Aliyah, a library and a new high school building in Beit Zeiroth in Jerusalem, a synagogue in Kfar Batya and expansion of its farm, an accredited academic

high school and teachers' seminary in Beit Zeiroth Tel Aviv, expansions and additions to almost all the existing institutions, added synagogues, libraries and dormitories, a community center in Haifa, a swimming pool in Kfar Batya—the list is almost endless.

And in the year before Bessie's death, two more cherished dreams were fulfilled. The erection of a new school in Beersheva was begun. And a Teachers' Training Seminary in Mosad Aliyah was established. This was to be a pilot program for teachers who would specifically prepare to teach in border settlements and development areas. Today this is the outstanding seminary for music teachers in the religious schools.

All this Bessie labored for and saw, before her passing in July of 1962. And each one is a monument to this amazing woman.

V'im Lo Achshav, Aymatai?

It is possible to stop with the catalog of Mizrachi Women's work and say, "That was the life of Bessie Gotsfeld." And it would be true. But those details—a list of the projects and how they developed—are available elsewhere, and, in any event, they are only the shape, the statue, of Bessie. It is time to look at the human being, the flesh-and-blood woman who filled that outline and animated that shape.

Bessie could never procrastinate. That was the third part of Hillel's creed, and it dominated her whole life. From the death of her mother in Przemyśl, when Bessie tried to fill the empty place because then was when it was necessary, she never permitted anything to sway her from a first priority. When Adela Goldstein came, a year later, it would have been too late to fill the void of those first months.

Time and again Bessie would put aside her own sorrows because there was a job to be done.

In January of 1936, she gave two paragraphs of a letter to a personal grief, then did not mention it again. Perhaps part of that quote may be revelatory of her character.

"Three weeks ago today I came to Jerusalem to attend one of our regular meetings, when the most shocking news was delicately broken to me that death had claimed our dear Mrs. Haskel. Before even realizing the horror of this communication, I found myself in a machine where pupils and teachers were waiting for me and together we went to Haifa to pay the last respects to our friend and co-worker. Ever since I have been just a living mechanism broken in body and spirit.

"Like thunder out of a clear sky this terrible tragedy came to us. We knew Mrs. Haskel was sick with typhoid and were very anxious about her, but nobody for one moment thought it would be fatal. Helpless we stand before fate, not even being able to give ourselves completely to our sorrow because of the demands life makes on us."

The paragraph after tells of the matters taken up at the meeting and the necessity of choosing a new treasurer to replace Mrs. Haskel.

A greater blow was in store, little more than two years later. So severe was this shock that Bessie could not even write, and so we have one of the rare letters from Mendel to Belle, one which shows his total unselfishness. He writes only of Bessie's grief, not his own.

"The sudden news we received on April 17 of the terrible misfortune (he refers to the passing of Adela Goldstein) staggered and shocked Bessie so that she could hardly come to herself. The memories and association of close to forty years of life in various stages passing through her mind makes this sudden loss harder to bear—the heart attack, I am sure, did not come without her having suffered inwardly some great agony, which none of us knew of. She was one of those strong characters who could suffer blows and pains without showing it. But of course the heart cannot be fooled. The mind and heart are faithful to each other, and the suffering of one affects the other."

And even this was not concluded without the greater part of the message devoted to Mizrachi Women's matters and questions about the family. Just as Bessie would have done.

On this sad occasion, the separation from her family was greatly eased by the flood of consolation that came from all sides—by telephone, by mail, in

the press and in person. A great measure of comfort came, too, with the arrival of her oldest nephew, Sarah's son Eliezer, who came to study for a year at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and remained to make his home in Palestine. In time he became a member of Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu, married and raised three children.

Eliezer was a brilliant young man, a graduate magna cum laude in mathematics from Yeshiva College, now Yeshiva University in New York. Bessie and Mendel looked upon him as a son. What joy to have a close family member with them. What stimulation and response he brought to the discussions around the table. The Yonah Hanavi Street house became his home, and even later, married and living in Sde Eliyahu, he still regarded it as his home and stayed there whenever he was in Tel Aviv.

Bessie would surely have accepted Eliezer simply because he was a relative, but it was his intellect and religious attitudes that drew her most. And it was those same qualities, which she could always sense in other people, that made her so astute in choosing the personnel of the various Mizrahi Women's projects.

Dr. Joseph Burg, Minister of the Interior, was such a person. Bessie met him on a visit to Berlin, while he was still a student at the University. As chairman of the Young Mizrahi there, he arranged an Oneg Shabbat at which Bessie was invited to speak.

When Dr. Burg arrived in Palestine, he lived in the same neighborhood as the Gotsfelds. Mendel helped him polish his English and the two studied Talmud together. Then he accepted a position at Beth Zeiroth Tel Aviv. With Bessie's approval and encouragement he taught a course in citizenship, something she recognized as vital for girls as provincial as many of the Beth Zeiroth students were.

Dr. Burg was also Bessie's choice to organize the weekly lectures, monthly concerts and adult education classes, which were called the Institute for Jewish and General Learning, mentioned earlier in this writing.

It is a tribute to Bessie's clarity of vision and astuteness of judgment that the young man she selected as a teacher rose to a minister's portfolio.

He was not the only unerring choice she made. Another was Dr. Jenny Thaustein, a physician who came to Beth Zeiroth as a counselor, but then was asked to become its director, a position she held from 1940 to 1948.

One problem with Bessie's insistence on a high standard for staff was that their excellence was recognized by others as well. So it was with Dr. Thaustein. She left to become Director of Mother and Child Care Services in the Ministry of Health for all Israel.

Dr. Thaustein spoke later of Bessie, of her tremendous desire to help that led to her knowing each girl personally, even those who were under Mizrahi Women's care for just a short time. Not only did she know them by name, she also understood their natures and their characters and could analyze their problems, helping them to find appropriate solutions.

In line with this, Dr. Thaustein recalled, she knew how to make each visitor to her home feel important and wanted. Part of her way of showing her esteem for each guest, even the least of them, was the table she set. Not only was the food tasty and well-prepared, but the manner of serving was in perfect taste, in elegant simplicity.

This was accomplished because Bessie was meticulous in her attention to every detail. Similarly, she was concerned with every smallest aspect of anything she undertook for Mizrahi Women.

Nobody would question certain basics in the educational policy for Beth Zeiroth, or for any school: curriculum, classrooms, dormitories, kitchens and dining rooms, all the required facilities for living.

Bessie wasted no time discussing the matters which everyone agreed upon. Her energies were given to explaining the need for an aesthetic environment, for beauty as well as function, compromising where necessary but never sacrificing one for the other.

In even more subtle ways, Bessie guided the students. Making a place at Beth Zeiroth for Bnei Akiva to hold its "minyan" marked her recognition of the importance of being involved with religious youth in general. It also expanded the social contacts of the girls within the Orthodox milieu. It wasn't really matchmaking, but she would say, "If we don't guide our girls, they will leave us."

Bessie was never sly, but she was subtle. She understood human nature and could gain her ends by indirection when more open means did not serve.

Dr. Thaustein tells of the Teheran children, originally in the WIZO Baby House in Jerusalem. When they became too old for that home, the WIZO people asked Bessie for help. She knew the objections that would be made, that Beth Zeiroth was a place for teen-age girls and nothing could be done there.

Dr. Thaustein writes of Bessie's action in this matter: "She knew that once I had seen these children—and it was a very pitiful sight—that I would make the only decision we could make, a decision she had made but hadn't inflicted on me until I had seen the situation for myself."

The thirty-five children were taken in, counselors and all, and housed on the top floor. They attended school nearby, but lived in Beth Zeiroth for a year.

It was in connection with these children that another of Bessie's traits can be well illustrated. Though she insisted on full value for every dollar spent, as she insisted on the full devotion and loyalty which was given to the work, she also knew when an expenditure was not a wasteful extravagance.

One of the Teheran children, a boy of six, was most difficult and unhappy. The psychologist who examined him said he must leave the group and be in a family circle. Bessie found a family and paid for his care. It was a "necessary expenditure".

She had the attitude that when something needed doing now, it had to be done—now. As for the money, "There is always money if a thing *must* be done." And somehow she would find it.

Similarly, with the outbreak of the War of Independence in 1948, when Kfar Etzion in the Jerusalem hills was destroyed, Bessie arranged for Beth Zeiroth to take some of the women of that kibbutz, and the prisoners when they were released. They were put into the sewing rooms, cooked for, cared for and helped through that terrible time. The emergency was there, it was real, and it had to be handled now, so it was.

Professor Jacob Katz, who became Rector of the Hebrew University, was the first principal of the Talpiot Teachers Seminary. He greatly admired Bessie's goal of providing a practical education for real life while retaining spiritual values, a goal she felt Youth Aliyah as a whole was not concerned with.

Professor Katz first met Bessie when she invited him to her home after reading an article he wrote on education. He stressed that teacher's

seminaries concerned themselves only with academic training and therefore a vocational high school was excellent preparation for would-be teachers, filling a void in the seminary curriculum. He specifically cited Beth Zeiroth Mizrahi as stressing the values and inculcating the work habits needed by teachers.

The meeting initiated a lifetime association. Professor Katz recalled how Bessie studied him over a period of time and a number of other meetings, and then brought him into the work. "Like a Jewish mother," he said, "who would carefully choose a *chatan* (bridegroom) for her daughter, she used every means to get a person once she had decided that he was the right one for a particular position."

And, one might add, choosing a bride for a beloved son.

Professor Katz eulogized Bessie, calling her "one of the most impressive personalities I have ever met."

Impressive she was, but hardly in appearance. True, she had an innate dignity, a graciousness, but that could more correctly be termed charm, not impressiveness of stature or bearing.

She was short, with pale blue eyes, reddish-blond graying hair cut short to minimize the time and expense of caring for it, and the slightly questioning look all hard-of-hearing people seem to wear—this last despite her hearing-aid. Her clothing was impeccably neat and in quiet good taste, but was simple, functional and never attuned to passing fads. Her movements were brisk and efficient, yet without the disorganization of haste. Her face, was lined and the girlish loveliness which her sister Sarah had praised was gone, replaced by the untarnishable beauty of the spirit within. Her voice was as gentle as her hands, yet within it was a ring of determination and authority that held everyone's attention when she spoke.

She was the soul of tact. It was permissible, sometimes even mandatory, to oppose the views of another. It was never permissible to hurt his feelings. No wonder leaders of the community and of the government, even when their attitudes and Bessie's were unreconcilable, could still be found at her tea table on Shabbat afternoons.

And who knows how many flies she caught, with the honey of that graciousness, who might have been alienated by a more undiplomatic opposition.

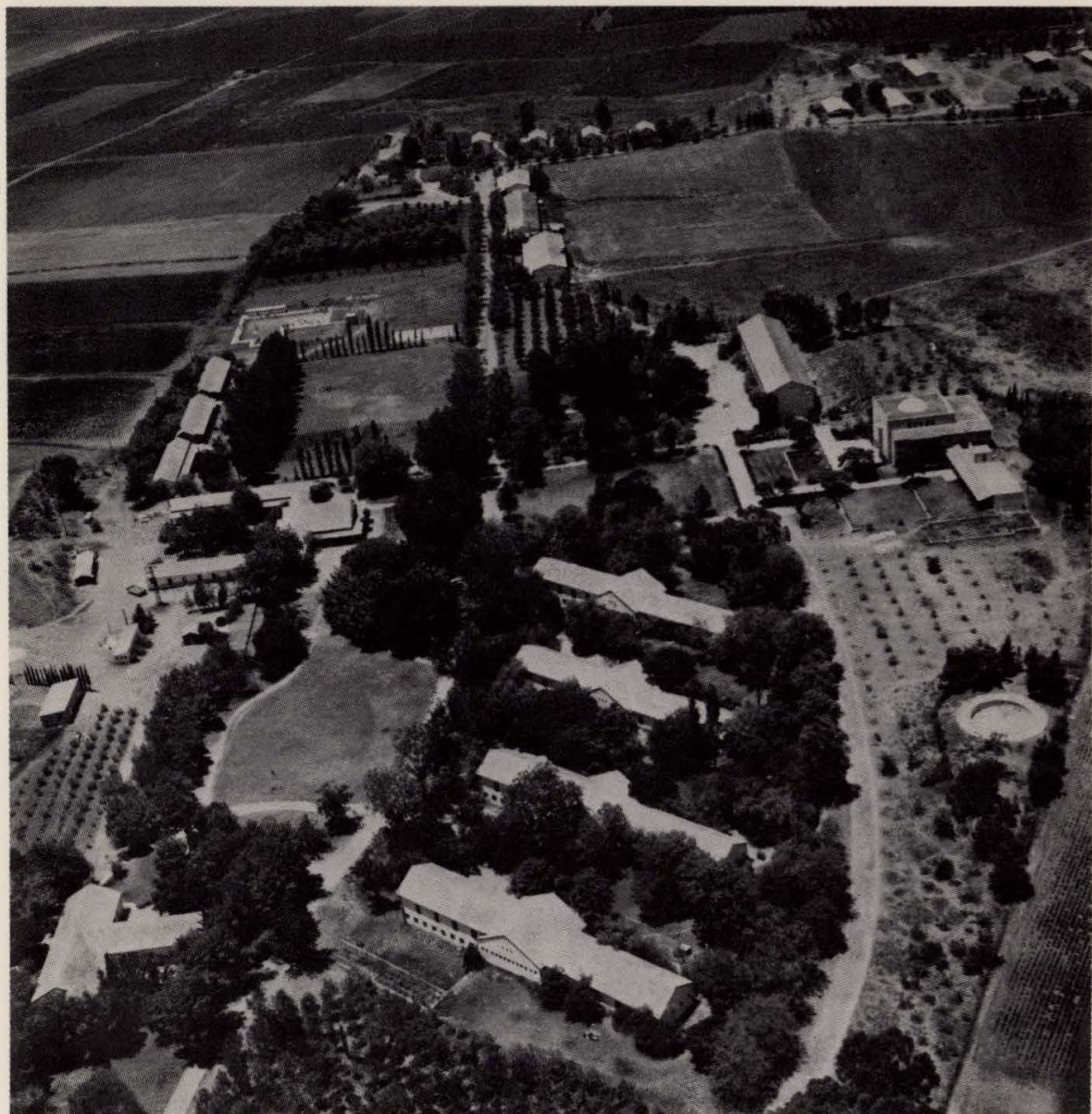
Modesty was also integral to Bessie's character. It was overcome only when she saw it was important for the work that she take the limelight.

She disliked public speaking, yet made speeches so that there would be no doubt about the aims and the principles, nor about the future she projected for Mizrahi Women.

She refused honors for herself, accepting only those she felt were in reality recognition of Mizrahi Women.

She offered the Beth Zeiroth Tel Aviv as a meeting place for the Actions Committee of the World Zionist Organization, and it was there that the resolution was adopted that upon the departure of the mandatory power the State of Israel should be declared.

She accepted the Woman of Achievement Medallion bestowed by the Women's International Exposition in New York City, citing her as the Outstanding Woman of Israel, only because of the need to further publicize the work of Mizrahi Women.



Kfar Batya—

The Bessie Gotsfeld Children's Village and Farm School, Raanana.

She opposed the naming of the Children's Village in Raanana until it was impressed upon her that it would be most meaningful and helpful in furthering the work, then she said reluctantly, "If that is so, then I suppose it could be allowed." And consented to the appellation of "Kfar Batya."

Kfar Batya was a dream come true. She planned its construction so lovingly, laid out its geography with the greatest care. She directed the placement of the synagogue on the highest elevation, so that the entire village would lie in its protection shadow as our lives are in the shade of spiritual values.

Children were to live in small groups, in a cottage system, in groups of varying ages within each, as in families; they would create the feelings and attitudes of older and younger siblings, giving them the family experience that had been stolen from them by the years of the Holocaust. Though, there would be large assembly halls, for dining or recreation, there would also be smaller places in each home to permit gathering by "families". All this was planned for the comfort and best interest of the children.

Belle Goldstein wrote of Bessie, "This special concern for children stands out in the tapestry of her life. I remember so clearly an incident on my first visit to Palestine in the summer of 1946, when a curfew was imposed on all of Tel Aviv by the British Mandatory government. For four days all activity stopped, stores were closed, and no one was allowed outdoors. A group of about thirty of our refugees, Youth Aliyah Children, from our Motza home, were housed in Beth Zeiroth Tel Aviv for a few weeks of vacation. For them the sight of soldiers patrolling the streets and loudspeakers shouting orders to the population was a most frightening thing, reminiscent of the horrors of Hitler Europe.

"Suddenly, on the second morning of the curfew, Bessie appeared, accompanied by a police officer. Her first question was, 'How are the children? I must see them'".

"It was touching to see how the children gathered around their 'Doda' and how their fears disappeared at her touch and her smile. Somehow she was not so much concerned, for me and the other adults, who were also staying in the building. What was important to her was that these children who had experienced tragedy, homelessness and desolation, should be reassured that no harm would befall them, that they belonged and were loved. It was only through special intervention and persistence that she obtained permission to leave her home that morning, and though the officers kept insisting she must leave, it was only after she was satisfied that we were supplied with enough funds for food and other necessities for the children, and convinced there was nothing more she could do, she agreed to go."

Kfar Batya opened in 1947, to Bessie's great joy, but the year before had brought personal happiness. Her niece Raisel, daughter of Samuel and Belle, had made aliyah with her husband, Leon Rauchwerger, who had come on the G.I. Bill of Rights to study at the Hebrew University. In time Leon became administrator of Kfar Batya for a while, but at first they lived in Jerusalem. Now Bessie and Mendel could again feel like parents, and, in May 1947, like grandparents, when Ora was born to Raisel and Leon.

Another niece had come too. In March 1947, together with three other Junior Mizrahi Women, I arrived for a year of work and study in Palestine. And there was plenty of work.

The British, while detaining most refugee would-be immigrants to Palestine on Cyprus, were permitting some children to come into the country. Mizrahi Women received their share of these and their individual sagas would fill volumes. But many as there were, they did not fill Bessie's heart. There was always room for one more. And still one more.

On November 29, 1947, everyone in Palestine hung over radios counting, while partition was voted in the United Nations. Immediately sporadic fighting broke out, as the Arabs vented their anger and demonstrated their refusal to accept the decision. I was working in Kvutzat Yavne at that time, and whenever possible I came to Tel Aviv for several days.

I saw little of Bessie during that time. Early each day she was on her way to her office in Beth Zeiroth, trudging wearily home in the late afternoon, with the stack of insulated containers that held the evening meal. Her philosophy permitted this since, by accepting the food prepared in the Beth Zeiroth kitchens, she cleared many more hours, which she would have spent in marketing and cooking, for the work of Mizrahi Women.

Mendel was very ill. He knew it, and during the quiet days, as we sat together and talked, he told me openly he did not know how much longer he

could survive. "Why doesn't G-d take me now?" he asked. I shuddered. Was he in so much pain? I asked if I could give him anything.

"No," he said. "I'll wait a while longer."

Then, in a burst of vehemence, "I hate those pills. Every time I take one it's like eating money. Money I should leave for my Bessie, to provide for her.

He was sleeping in the living room in those days, on one of the two couches. Bessie used the bed in the dining room. In this way, neither disturbed the other's rest, since Bessie's worries and Mendel's pain made each a fitful sleeper. But Bessie had a loud bell installed on the wall beside her pillow, so that if Mendel needed her, he could ring and she would come.

I remember that that night Mendel hallucinated. He had been in great pain, but refused any medication. I slept in the living room too, on the other couch, feeling almost as if I were the nurse he pretended not to need. When he woke, imagining himself in some scene from his earlier years, I could not control or calm him and was forced to get Bessie. I hated the thought of waking her with that bell, so went into the next room. How still and sorrowful her face was, the mask of serenity gone. I shook her gently and she was instantly awake, fumbling for her hearing-aid, questioning me fearfully as she hurried to her beloved husband.

Astonishingly he responded at the first touch of her hand, dutifully swallowed his medication, and fell asleep finally, clasping her fingers. I still find it hard to believe such love and harmony, though I witnessed it myself.

The next time I left Yavne, it was the final good-bye. I arrived in Tel Aviv on a Wednesday morning, intending to stay with Bessie and Mendel until Friday and then go to Jerusalem to say good-bye to my sister Raisel and her family.

I was met by Yosef, a young member of Hagana, who was in charge of a squad of Hagana fighters stationed on Yavne since an "incident" almost at the gates of our kvutza some weeks before. When I told him my intentions, he said, "You don't travel to Jerusalem on Friday. There are always attacks and incidents on Fridays."

"But it's too late to get a ticket for tomorrow's convoy."

He didn't answer. He seated me in a cafe, told me to call Bessie and tell her I would be at Beth Zeiroth shortly and to wait for him, and disappeared. A waiter came with coffee and pastry. I said I hadn't ordered and he told me, "The soldier did."

So I sat drinking and wondering. There was only one convoy each way between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Those days the buses were totally sheathed in armor-plate and accompanied by a truck load of armed Hagana fighters. In the front seat of each bus sat an armed guard, with his sten gun on his knees. The convoys left at different times each day in order to foil any Arab plans to attack, and tickets had to be purchased by nine in the morning the day before one wanted to go.

I don't know whom Yosef knew, but he came back with a ticket for Thursday's convoy. I could have only a few hours with Mendel and Bessie. And none with Yosef.

The time passed quickly. Mendel spoke of three young boys from Mosad Aliya who had been coming to him to study. They had all been bar-mitzva the past Channukah and Mendel looked upon them as his sons. He spoke again of his concern for Bessie "Something's bothering her," he said, "and she hasn't told me about it. She's never done that before."

Neither of us knew that the doctor had shown Bessie Mendel's last xrays, pictures that showed the ruin cancer had made of the bone structure, pictures that had made the doctor himself weep. But Bessie insisted on knowing exactly how things stood, and her will could not be overborne. It was her will, too, that Mendel not be told. Enough the physical pain, she had said, but not the psychological torment. So she bore that alone.

G-d must have been with me on that last trip to Jerusalem. I was to be allowed to do some small service for Bessie.

My ship was due to sail on March 7, 1948, a Sunday. But somehow I could not get a place on the convoy out of Jerusalem. I had spent a happy time with my sister and brother-in-law and baby Ora was a delight. Now the time came to leave. Every morning I went down to the bus depot and every day I came back before noon. Some Hagana friends even tried to smuggle me out on the floor of their truck. I tried to get on a supply convoy. One afternoon I met Yaacov Herzog, son of the chief rabbi of Palestine, who told me he could have gotten me on that morning's convoy in one of the official cars, but there was no place for the next day. Nothing worked. On Friday, as I went back to Raisel's house, I knew I couldn't possibly get to Haifa for the sailing Sunday morning.

Sunday I arranged for an airplane ticket to New York and finally, now the urgency was gone, I got on the convoy for Wednesday, March 10.

It was a six-hour trip. We had to detour around all the trouble spots we could on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road. When we arrived, weary and aching, the first thing I saw was Yosef's face. He was on leave and had been meeting every convoy for a week. (I think I knew then that I would marry him.)

He told me Mendel was in the hospital, in a coma, and took me directly there. I could not see him, but Bessie came out and sent me on an errand. When I got back, it was over.

Eliezer Goldman stayed on watch, and later I took a message to some of his kibbutz friends who were in Tel Aviv, to join him. But first I took Bessie home. There were some close friends there, too—my own memories of who or what are unclear, because all my attention was on Bessie.

It was decided Bessie must try to sleep and we were soon left alone. She would not undress, now even remove her girdle, but finally I prevailed upon her to lie down by telling her I needed some rest, and would not go to bed as long as she was still sitting up. She would not let her grief deprive me, and so consented, but I know she never closed her eyes. I listened all night, waiting for the sobbing, the tears, but they did not come, not till later.

When morning came I went to her and she clung to me as if seeking the support that was no longer there. Then she cried—and then apologized, while all I could do was hold her.

When we were calmer, I proposed breakfast. I knew she needed all her strength, but she was adamant. She would not take her insulin and would not eat before the funeral. She was quiet but immovable. I felt helpless.

At this impasse, her doctor arrived. He himself injected her, sat with her as she ate, took her in his own car and remained with her until she was home again after the burial.

The hearse was in front of Beth Zeiroth, its doors opened, and the eulogies were delivered there, outdoors, while throngs of people blocked the streets. From all the *mosdot* (projects) of Mizrahi Women they came, grieving children crying for their "father", reaching to touch and comfort their "mother".

The big, black-bordered obituary notices were also addressed to "our bereaved mother." And the three boys from Mosad Aliyah, Mendel's last students, vied for the sad honor of saying Kaddish for the full year.

Bessie never referred to that and to what had passed between us. Her weeping at the graveside was restrained and during the whole week of the *shiva* she was her gentle, gracious self. Only the smile was missing. On every hand people murmured about her courage, her self-control.

Eliezer Goldman remained all week, but then had to return to Sde Eliyahu. Raisel was unable to get out of Jerusalem, but Leon managed to get a ticket on a convoy, pleading business. But he, too, could not stay long.

The morning after the *shiva* I rose early and found Bessie already dressed. To my astonished questions she responded matter-of-factly, "I'm going to Beth Zeiroth, of course. The work has been piling up all this week, and I have a great deal to do."

The days were good for her, the constant clamor for attention distracted her, but the evenings were hard. There were always friends, and I did what I could, but it became obvious that Bessie needed someone closer.

It was after Purim, on March 29, that I finally flew home. I convinced my parents that there was no possible alternative, and my mother, Belle Goldstein, flew to Palestine, returning literally Erev Pesach. She was what Bessie needed most, family.

Bessie survived Mendel by fourteen years. They were years that saw the children who called her "mother" return from their various homes to visit her, with their husbands and wives and the children they had taught to call her *savta*—grandmother.

What joy that was! And how she relished taking the little ones on her lap and telling the escapades of their parents' youth, truly like a grandmother.

She still asked no more of anyone than she would do herself. As she had sorted boxes of donated clothing from America in the early years, so she continued to find no task beneath her.

The rewards were beginning to come now. Students and children from our various projects were living the ideals she labored to instill, were becoming teachers—some even in those places where they had been students—were succeeding in various careers. Many of them gave their lives to Israel in a sadder way, falling in the battles of the young state against its Arab enemies.

In America the Mizrahi Women was growing, second and third generations becoming involved. Tours to Israel were organized, children came for a summer of camping, teen-agers for study. The bridge between the two countries, the bridge of Bessie's visions, was becoming a reality.

But Bessie herself was becoming more frail. Other women had come on aliyah, and still others, trained in the principles Bessie never permitted them to forsake, were able to come for extended periods. Some of these were past presidents of Mizrahi Women, and Bessie had greater confidence in their abilities to take on some of her responsibilities. She herself turned away from physical labors and more toward mental ones. Outlines of what should come next must be prepared. Just as, in the beginning, she had espoused Maot Chittim, the special donations to the needy for Pesach, just as she had championed a totally-rounded curriculum, just as she had initiated training for vocational teachers, just as she had stressed cultural and aesthetic environment, so she now wished to assure the proper integration of Falasha North

African and Yemenite children into Mizrachi schools and programs, and into the life of the country as a whole.

Her seventieth birthday was marked by special articles in the newspapers, notable among them the *Jerusalem Post*. And, most fittingly, a special scholarship fund for gifted children was established in her honor.

She accepted the plaudits of all with the same modest, self-effacing manner she always wore. It was the ladies, she would insist, the ladies of Mizrachi Women who made it all possible, the praise should be for them.

In 1959 she made a last visit to the United States. We who had not seen her day after day, recognized immediately that her strength was less. She needed rest, but that could not halt the worsening of her general health. The loss of Mendel had deprived her of a well of strength, and something was gone.

Still, as always, children were her best therapy. She eagerly welcomed the little grandnieces and grandnephews and they, like all children, responded shyly at first, and then with increasing warmth.

The family would still supply new energy for Bessie, and her strength began to return. Now she looked forward to going home, to Israel.

The family there had grown also. Eliezer Goldman had three children, the second, a son, born one month after Mendel's death and named for him.

In September of 1961 Raisel's fourth child was also given the name, and for this birth Samuel and Belle had come to Israel and stayed through the holidays. It had been a joyous reunion indeed.

Raisel and Leon now had their home in Ramat Gan, and Bessie was often delighted by visits from the children. She was still surrounded by friends and co-workers, and her Shabbat tea table had never ceased to be crowded with young and old each week.

But by spring no one could doubt that her health was failing, and before summer began she was hospitalized. The abdominal pain had been diagnosed as a malignancy, and it was inoperable.

Bessie knew. Even if the doctor had not told her, she could not have failed to know. The decision was taken out of her hands and a message went to New York: someone must come. Sarah's husband was ailing, and so it was Belle who flew to Israel.

For those four weeks of July, Raisel, Leon and Eliezer were seldom absent from Bessie's bedside, and Belle was always there. Though she could not take any food, and the intravenous nourishment was not sustaining her, somehow Bessie still mustered strength to speak. In her gentle voice, now so terribly weakened she repeatedly reminded Belle that we must never forget what we stand for, what activated our beginnings, what has influenced every aspect of Mizrachi Women's work: to nourish and vitalize the religious spirit of the Jewish State.

On Wednesday, July 25, she sank into a coma, from which she never regained consciousness. She lingered still for four days and on Sunday Eliezer, Raisel and Belle were with her when the nurse and doctor advised them to leave. It was two minutes later, at 4:15 P.M. on Sunday, July 29, 1962, that she breathed her last.

The funeral took place from Beth Zeiroth. Three ministers of the State of Israel spoke, eulogizing her: Mr. Moshe Shapiro, Dr. Joseph Burg and Dr. Warhaftig. Mourners came from all over Israel, children and counselors and

teachers from our *mosdot*, former students with their families, co-workers in Mizrahi Women, officials of the government, representatives of other organizations and just people of no particular affiliation, friends, neighbors, and those whose lives had touched hers in one way or another. For all of them, as for those closest to Bessie, an era had come to an end.

How hard to know that the tea-table on Shabbat would no longer await, with Bessie graciously presiding in her welcoming way. How hard never again to see that gentle smile, hear those carefully-chosen words, those uncompromising principles from her lips.

How does one pay tribute to the memory of such a woman? One puts aside personal grief, as she did herself, and goes on to do the job at hand. The dreams she dreamed have become reality—some of them. It remains for those who follow to bring the rest to fruition.

It was said of Eleanor Roosevelt that she would rather light a candle than curse the darkness.

Bessie Gotsfeld lit a torch and its flame still blazes, illuminating the path she walked and the road she carved ahead for others to tread.

APPENDIX

SELECTIVE CHRONOLOGY

- 1925** - Formation of Mizrahi Women's Organization of America (MWOA) at Cleveland Convention, federating previously existing Women's Auxiliaries and independent Mizrahi Women's groups.
- 1927** - Mrs. Bessie Gotsfeld returns from Israel and recommends to the administrative board of MWOA, vocational training for religious girls in Israel as its primary project.
- 1930** - Plan for Beth Zeiroth Mizrahi, Jerusalem, adopted by New York Convention.
- 1933** - Beth Zeiroth Mizrahi, Jerusalem opened.
- 1935** - Organization adopts Beth Zeiroth Mizrahi, Tel Aviv, as second major project.
- 1938** - Junior Mizrahi Women of America is formed.
- 1938** - Beth Zeiroth Mizrahi, Tel Aviv opened.
- 1942** - First Adult Education courses established in BZM Tel Aviv.
- 1943** - Children's Home established in Motza (with the local Mizrahi Women of Israel (OMEN)).
- 1944** - Mosad Aliyah Children's Village established at Petach Tikvah.
- 1946** - Children's Home opened for Youth Aliyah children at Tel Raanan, Bnai Brak, subsequently to become a sleep-in nursery.
- 1946** - Mosad Techiyah Children's Home is established in Petach Tikvah for child survivors of the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, (Later to become sleep-in nursery).
- 1947** - Bessie Gotsfeld Children's Village and Farm School, Kfar Batya, formally opened at Raanana.
- 1948** - ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL
- 1949** - Expansion of BZM Tel Aviv. Third story added to BZM Tel Aviv to meet the unprecedented increase in registration.
- 1949** - Courses for kindergarten teachers opened up in BZM Tel Aviv.
- 1949** - Establishment of the First Jewish Settlement House as well as a Youth Center (Beth Hanoar) in the Bakka quarter of Jerusalem to fill a pressing need in the orientation of the newly arrived immigrants who settled there.
- 1950** - Development and expansion of the Agricultural and Farm School in Kfar Batya.
- 1951** - Bar Ilan High School opened up in Kfar Batya.
- 1951** - Harry S. Truman Forest dedicated in the Jerusalem Corridor.
- 1952** - Carpentry Shop and School added on to the existing Industrial Training Center in Kfar Batya.
- 1952** - Dedication of the Rosa and Max Gold Infirmary in Kfar Batya.
- 1952** - Dedication of the dormitory building gifted to MWOA for Mosad Aliyah by Mizrahi Women of Canada.
- 1952** - Dedication of the Eichler Library in Beth Zeiroth Mizrahi, Jerusalem.
- 1952** - Esther and David Shapiro High School in Beth Zeiroth Mizrahi, Jerusalem opened during Chanukah.
- 1953** - Goldie Kraushaar Synagogue in Kfar Batya completed and dedicated.
- 1953** - Infirmary gifted to MWOA by Mizrahi Women of Mexico, opened in Mosad Aliyah.
- 1955** - Dedication of Bessie Gotsfeld Forest in the Jerusalem Corridor.
- 1956** - Dedication of a new dormitory building and Beth Hanoar in Mosad Aliyah.

- 1957** - Wurzweiler School and laboratories dedicated in Mosad Aliyah.
- 1957** - Beth Hatarbut Cultural Center, gifted by Northwest Child Rescue Women of Detroit to MWOA, opened in Mosad Aliyah.
- 1958** - Dedication of the Joseph Zev and Miriam Bracha Schreiber Synagogue in Mosad Aliyah.
- 1958** - A Community Center (a partnership project with the Mizrachi Women of Canada), completed and opened in Haifa.
- 1959** - Completion and dedication of Morris Bienenfeld Library in Kfar Batya.
- 1959** - Dedication of the Student House gifted by MWOA to Bar Ilan University.
- 1960** - Transfer of Beth Hayeled Sleep-in Nursery from Tel Raanan, Bnai Brak to our Settlement House Building in Bakka, Jerusalem.
- 1961** - Groundbreaking for Beersheva Vocational High School (a partnership project with Mizrachi Women of Canada.)
- 1962** - Mrs. Bessie Gotsfeld, founder and mentor of the Mizrachi Women's Organization of America and head of the Israeli Executive, passed away in Israel in July.

AMW CHRONOLOGY

SINCE THE PASSING OF BESSIE GOTSFELD

- 1963** - Beersheva Vocational High School for Girls completed and opened (in partnership with the Mizrachi Women of Canada).
- 1963** - Decision made with Municipality of Jerusalem to establish the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library in building adjacent to Beth Hanoar Bakka.
- 1964** - Enlarged dining-room compound in Kfar Batya.
- 1965** - Addition of third story to Esther and David Shapiro Vocational High School, BZM Jerusalem completed.
- 1965** - Expansion of kitchen and food serving facilities in Kfar Batya.
- 1965** - Construction of additional industrial training facilities begun in Kfar Batya.
- 1965** - Dedication of the transferred interior of the reconstructed synagogue of Leeuwarden, Holland to the Goldie Kraushaar Synagogue in Kfar Batya.
- 1966** - Completion of Yetty and Solomon Silberberg Seminary and Annex in Mosad Aliyah.
- 1966** - Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid of the Agency for International Development (AID) of the U.S. Department of State, accepts MWOA as qualified agency.
- 1967** - MWOA Film—THE SCROLLS OF LEEUWARDEN, won coveted Cine Award of U.S. Government agency and was later sold to the U.S. Army, Navy and Marine Chaplaincies.
- 1968** - First Convention of MWOA in Israel.
- 1970** - Mary Schreiber Library completed and dedicated in Mosad Aliyah.
- 1973** - Teachers Seminary in Beersheva opened.
- 1973** - Oscar and Regina Gruss Comprehensive High School completed at Kfar Batya.
- 1973** - Change of name from Mizrachi Women's Organization of America to American Mizrachi Women.
- 1975** - BZM Tel Aviv transferred to the newly completed Wolf and Julia Eisenberg Comprehensive High School located in Tachnit Lamed, North Tel Aviv, in September.
- 1976-1977** School Year—Computer courses started at BZM Jerusalem.
- 1977** - Plans revealed for future construction of major new sleep-in nursery in Gilo, Jerusalem, to which the present Beth Hayeled and Motza Children's Homes will be transferred.

- 1977** - Expansion completed for the Morris Bienenfeld Library in Kfar Batya.
- 1978** - A \$500,000 grant made to American Mizrachi Women by the U.S. Agency for International Development (A.I.D.), to expand and improve the school and its facilities at BZM Jerusalem.
- 1978** - The Gush Dan Religious Technological High School (presently located on the Bar Ilan campus), established for religiously oriented boys who are seeking a technological education.
- 1978** - Lucy Bohm Shay Gymnasium completed in Kfar Batya.
- 1981** - AMW is declared on official Reshet (network) for religious technological secondary education.

OTHER OUTSTANDING PROGRAMS

Sophisticated Electronics Courses including advanced computer training in all AMW schools.

Psychological Counseling Program in all AMW schools.

AMW Chugim functioning in Israel.

AMW COOPERATES WITH JEWISH NATIONAL FUND

AMW/JNF Projects in Israel

- 1 - The Bessie Gotsfeld Forest at Harel
- 2 - The Yocheved Shapiro Forest at Mevo Betar
- 3 - The Harry S. Truman Forest at Tzora
- 4 - AMW Forest at Biryia
- 5 - AMW Forest at Netiv HaLamed Heh
- 6 - AMW Forest at Mevo Betar
- 7 - AMW Forest on the Road to Adullam
- 8 - AMW Forest in the John F. Kennedy Forest
- 9 - American Mizrachi Women BaGilboa
- 10 - Geulat Har Hazon BaGalil
- 11 - Geulat Svivot Yerushalayim
- 12 - American Mizrachi Women in Kiryat Malachi
- 13 - Park HaYovel in Bet Shean
- 14 - Mt. Ya'ala Plaza in the American Bicentennial Park
- 15 - Beit Rimom Project in the Galilee

PROJECTS OF AMERICAN MIZRACHI WOMEN 1981

HIGH SCHOOLS FOR GIRLS

The Beth Zeiroth Mizrachi—Jerusalem

The Beth Zeiroth Mizrachi—Tel Aviv (Wolf and Julia Eisenberg Comprehensive High School)

The Beersheva Vocational High School for Girls—Beersheva (in partnership with Mizrachi Women of Canada)

YOUTH VILLAGES

Kfar Batya—(The Bessie Gotsfeld Children's Village and Farm School)—Raanana

Kfar Hanoar Aliyah—(formerly known as Mosad Aliyah)—Petach Tikvah

COMMUNITY CENTERS

The Bakka Settlement House and Youth Center—Jerusalem

The Haifa Community Center—Haifa (in partnership with Mizrachi Women of Canada)

TECHNOLOGICAL HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS

The Gush Dan Religious Technological High School—Ramat Gan

CHILDREN'S HOMES

The Beth Hayeled Sleep-in Nursery—Bakka, Jerusalem

The Motza Children's Home—Jerusalem

Soon to be known as Beth Hayeled—Childhaven, Gilo, Jerusalem

