

# G.W.<sup>1</sup>



**Contest year: 1939**

**Language: Yiddish**

**Year of birth: 1919**

**Age 20**

**Male**

I am sure that you will find my work very useful, although the language is perhaps not very good. But this isn't my fault, as I never attended a Yiddish school, and therefore my writing is full of mistakes – please take this into account. If you can, please send me some material that will teach me how to write Yiddish well. That would be a great thing for me to have, and I would be forever grateful to you. – from the author's cover letter accompanying his autobiography

## My First Entry into a Youth Movement and What It Gave Me

Of course, I didn't join the movement by accident. For a long time I had been looking to become involved in an organization that represented my interests. When I was still in school, I learned of the existence of these organisations, because many of my friends there belonged to various Zionist groups. Even then I wondered what these organisations were doing, as the people in them were always feuding. When my friends invited me to join one of the four different Zionist groups that were around at the time, I replied that I didn't see eye-to-eye with organized movements that all strive towards the same goal and yet aren't united but are divided and fight among themselves. Therefore, I couldn't join them. At the time it didn't even occur to me that there was an organisation that was opposed to all forms of Zionism. Later I took night classes, where I met friends from my childhood who had become tailors or carpenters or were employed in other trades, and who had already joined Tsukunft, the Bund's youth movement. [...]

The Youth movement drew me in, and I became a part of it. I felt at home there. I started to understand my world and how best to live in it. I began to devote my free time to the organisation and became an active member. I started to think independently about everything around me, my material existence, my poor living conditions both private and communal. I had to think about whether things had to stay the way they were or whether they might be different. I had to think about my station in life, which I had only partially attained, and about why I didn't even have the possibility of living better and enjoying life, nature and everything created by humankind. In today's hard times it's very difficult for me to find answers. One person lives at the expense of another, and that person lives at the expense of a third; the world trudges on in its crooked way, and we can't attain our goals.[...]

There are different kinds of young men and women in the organisation. Some are class-conscious and others aren't, but each one is full of energy and possesses a spirit that demands this energy be expended somehow. At this time, young people are full of aspirations. They are seeking their way in all areas of life, both social and personal. Young men and women meet in the youth movement, and they start to feel comfortable with each other. They are attracted to one another, and when their passions erupt they find themselves in a very bad situation. As it will take years until they have the means to live independently, their spirits reach the breaking point. They suffer physically and emotionally, because it is clear that not every young person is mature enough in the early stage of puberty to engage in intimate activities. They possess neither the material nor the emotional resources to solve the difficult problems they face. [...]

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How my future Looks in light of my great ideal

A person's life must have substance – that is to say, support from society. Like every other young person, I had to seek out this society from among the many options that currently exist. As a member of the proletariat, I had to come to the labor movement, to the Jewish working-class youth, to the Bund's youth movement, to socialism. [...] I am deeply convinced that thanks to the Bund, which is now more than forty years old, Jewish life has emerged from the dark alleys of the medieval ghetto. Thanks to the Bund, we have Yiddish schools and [...] we have the YIVO institute for Jewish Research, which elevated Yiddish culture to a high level, placed it on an equal footing with other world cultures. [...] Young people live with hope and faith in a bright future. [...] I believe that the day of true brotherhood among nations will come, the day of our ultimate belief in a completely classless society will arrive, and people throughout the world will be free.

[1] Excerpt from "Awakenings Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland before the Holocaust - Jeffrey Shandler, pp 296 - 320

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