

Michal Friedman



This is me. The photo was taken in 1929 in Kovel. I attended the Tarbut gymnasium at that time and here I am in the school uniform. In Kovel there were three gymnasiums and a school of commerce. All of the gymnasiums were coeducational. A private Polish-Jewish gymnasium, run by Klara Erlich, was established, with Polish as the language of instruction. Klara Erlich was a graduate of Kiev University and a very good mathematician. After the war I spoke with her again by telephone when I came to Moscow. Both of these gymnasiums were accredited to confer high-school diplomas. There was also a third gymnasium, a Jewish one with Hebrew as the language of

instruction; it was a Tarbut gymnasium, which didn't award the Polish high-school diploma. The Tarbut gymnasium had been established by Asher Frankfurt. There was no Yiddish at all, and instruction was in Hebrew. The school had two introductory grades: first and second, sort of pre-gymnasium grades, substituting for elementary school classes - that was the case in the early period, in my own time, but later children had to go to elementary school. Initially, I attended the cheder. I mean I studied in the cheder from the age of four to seven. There I learned the Bible almost by heart. I also remember that I translated the Bible into Polish. I went to the cheder for less than a year, and then the melamed started coming to our home. He had decided that I was head and shoulders above the others in terms of knowledge, but he was probably also after more money. I prepared for the gymnasium at home because what I had been able to gain from that melamed of mine wasn't enough. I passed the entrance exam for the introductory second grade and began to learn all the subjects in Hebrew. At first, Latin was translated into Polish but later we translated that already dead Latin into Hebrew. Instruction there was at a very high level. It was a large school; later on it had eight grades, with 40 pupils on average in each class. After 1918 the headmaster tried to polonize our Hebrew gymnasium in some sense.