

Michal Friedman's Matriculation Diploma, Page 2



This is my matriculation diploma. I got my matriculation in 1933. I graduated from the gymnasium at the age of 17; it was 1930. Afterwards I became a private tutor in Kovel. I taught Polish, History, and Hebrew. At that time, Hebrew was a gold mine since in order to get into Palestine, some sum of money stipulated by the English had to be paid and the prospective emigre needed to

demonstrate his command of Hebrew. Hebrew examinations took place in Brest, where students from throughout Poland came. I had a friend; Josele Szpak was his name. I already told you about his father. But Szpak didn't know Hebrew. So I went to Brest pretending to be Szpak and naturally wrote a composition there, on the basis of which he got his certificate, his departure paper. In the 1980s I called on him in Israel. Perhaps he is still alive? Szpak was the owner of a bakery then. I had dinner at his place. Introducing me to his wife, he said: 'This is the man who saved my life.' Each year, the two Jewish gymnasiums in Kovel produced several dozen graduates who couldn't get accepted to the university departments of their choice. In Kovel there was only a surveyors' school and a road-construction school. Many Jews couldn't get into a university in Poland; to gain admittance to a medical school or a technical university was the most difficult as there was the numerus clauses. If you wanted to study medicine, you had to go to Lwow, to Warsaw, Prague or Vilnius. Dozens of medicine graduates returned after their graduation to Kovel, where they were unable to have their diploma recognized since the attitude of the chambers of physicians was such that Jews found it very difficult to get through the recognition process. So what is the Jewish intelligentsia supposed to do? My parents pondered over what field of study I should choose. I wanted to study French literature, but my father said: 'that's not a trade; you can't make a living out of that. You will go to a technical university!' But I was very poor in maths. Well, I didn't want to oppose my father too much. I thought of going to Palestine subsequently, to the university in Jerusalem. I had studied for three months with one Mrs. Chodorow, whose son was later to become a famous sea-dog in Israel. And I went to Grenoble; in Grenoble I didn't need a high-school diploma. That was in November 1930.