

Moshe Shlomo Ben-Meir, (Idel Treszczanski, changed to Idel Treshansky upon entering the United States), was born on October 26, 1895, in Goniondz (Bialystok District), Poland. At a very early age, he was recognized as a prodigy, who memorized the Old Testament and was able to quote passages in full from random prompts (a “parlor game” he used to play with his students). He was playing in major chess tournaments in Eastern Europe before the age of ten. At the time of his death, he was fluent in 13 languages.

He received his higher education in Warsaw, but it is likely that he never obtained the kinds of formal degrees that would be recognized outside of Eastern Europe, a condition which limited his ability to advance professionally within the education community in later years.

After World War I, he emigrated to Belgium (Antwerp), where he found work as a diamond cutter and teacher in the Jewish Community. He met his wife, Chana, in Belgium, and they married in 1929. Their first child, Frieda, was born in 1930. Very early during his time in Belgium, he became a member of the Zionist movement, and his writing and oratorical skills led to his becoming a leading figure in that organization. With the rise of Fascism, the Zionist Labor Organization in Antwerp felt the need to provide him with protection, as it’s intellectual leaders became targets of Nazi attacks. An apocryphal story has it that Menachim Begin was one of his security guards.

As Nazism grew during the 1930’s, it was apparent that it was no longer safe for him and his family in Belgium. Thus, in 1939, barely ahead of the invaders, he fled South, through France and Spain, to Lisbon, where some of his wife’s North American family were able to secure boat passage for the family out of Europe. They landed in Montreal, Canada in 1940, and, with the help of those same family members, entered the United States (New York)in September, 1943. Their second child, Nahum, was born later that year.

Moshe initially was unable to find work in the educational field in the U.S. because of his lack of credentials, so he again found employment as a diamond cutter and polisher, and taught private lessons in Hebrew. But his enormous writing talents and interests in Zionism soon found him writing essays and poetry regularly for Ha’Doar, a major publication of the time. He also commenced working on one of his favorite projects: the reintroduction of Hebrew as a modern language, and spent many years translating the works of the great Yiddish writers (Sholem Aleichem, Mendele Mocher Sforim, etc.) into Hebrew. He very soon was in the midst of the Hebrew and Yiddish intellectual circles of New York.

In the late 1940’s, despite his lack of credentials, he was finally able to secure a teaching position at Yeshiva University in New York, where he taught Hebrew, Bible and Literature. He retained that position until his death, on January 18, 1959, of heart failure. His heart condition had, sadly, prevented him from taking an offered Full Professorship at the University in Jerusalem, because of concerns about the altitude. His most important work, a book of poems entitled “Tzil Vatzel” (Sound and Shadow), was published shortly after his death, and earned much praise and prizes within Hebrew language circles.

Wife, Chana, preceded him in death, in August, 1957. Daughter Frieda died in 1996.

He passed away while indulging in his favorite hobby: kibitzing a chess match between masters at a Manhattan chess club.