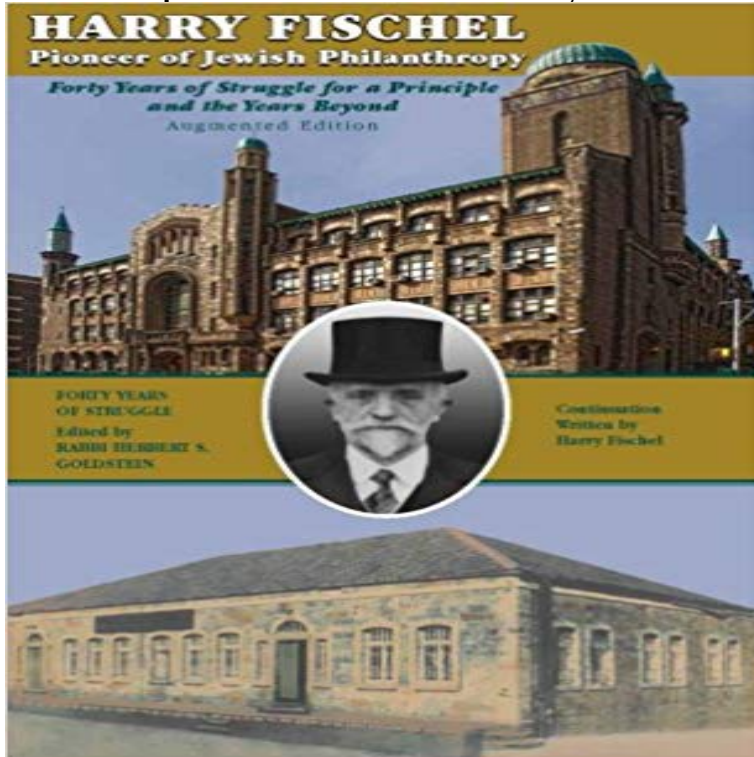


# Harry Fischel Pioneer of Jewish Philanthropy Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle and the Years Beyond



Harry Fischel was a household name in Jewish communities throughout the world during the first half of the previous century, but his impact on Jewish life today is even greater, in some respects, than it was at the time his biography was first published, in 1928. When *Forty Years of Struggle for a Principle* was originally published, Fischel was already holding his own as a philanthropist with the major Jewish captains of industry, co-founding even such general national charitable organizations as HIAS, which he served as Treasurer from its inception and for over the next half a century. But what set him apart from virtually all the other philanthropists of his era was the percentage of his time and the amount of his fortune that he devoted to Jewish education in America and in Israel, and his roles in both founding and funding many charitable and educational institutions that changed the face of Jewish life for the better. It was only after his original biography was published, however, that Fischel founded the three institutions that bear his name to this day, in America and in Israel, where a street in Jerusalem also bears his name on the corner of the great educational institution that he founded, the Machon Harry Fischel, which produced more than half of the judges in the entire religious court system in Israel, for decades, and which continues to serve the Torah community with distinction to this day. It was only after the original edition of the biography was published that he single-handedly saved Yeshiva College from certain dissolution and oblivion during the Great Depression, and that the building he had single-handedly built for the chief rabbi in Israel became the site of the Merkaz Harav Yeshiva for 40 years, which set the religious and educational tone of the religious Zionist movement in Israel. This is a rags to riches story that rises above all others, in some ways, since, as *The New*

York Times put it when the first edition was published, The volume which is beautifully made, preserves [the story] of a man's rise in America from poverty and obscurity to eminence and material success, a story which has in this case an unusual and distinctive flavor because of its subject's devotion to his religious faith. Fischel in his lifetime made a positive impact on notables ranging from the President of the United States whom he convinced to allow HIAS to set up a kosher kitchen on Ellis Island to allow starving immigrants to regain their health and avoid deportation to Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis who obtained a letter for him that protected him on his foreign travels. Fischel's impact on rabbinic leaders ranged from his close relationship with Chief Rabbi Kook who considered him America's top Orthodox philanthropist to his more limited but also impressive relationship with the rabbi known as the Chofetz Chaim in Europe, who went out of his way to host Fischel on one of the latter's trips to Europe. Fischel's impact is still very much felt to this day. The current unanimously elected Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Columbia University Professor Richard B. Stone, is quoted on a flap of the book to have said, Harry Fischel was a model philanthropist who left a profound and lasting legacy to the Jewish world in general and to the world of Torah education in particular. His biography should inspire our generation.

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