

Rabbi Nachum¹ Asz z''l

For half a century, Rabbi Nachum Asz occupied the rabbinical throne² in Częstochowa. For half a century, he was the spiritual leader, judge and representative of Częstochowa Jewry.

He came [to Częstochowa] from Bielawy [sic Nieszawa³]. From his youngest years, he was known as an *illui* [Heb., young prodigy] and scholar and stood out for his prodigious memory. On *Shabbosim* [Saturdays] and holidays, he worshipped along with all the common folk in the city's [main] synagogue. Twice a year - on *Shabbes Ha'Godol* and on *Shabbes Shuva*⁴ – he delivered sermons [pertaining to the holiday] tied to different discourses and aphorisms of the sages from all the eras and generations. He also gave addresses for the redemption of the Land of Israel. He gave his first pro-Palestine lecture in 1920, with regard to the signing of the [League of Nations'] Mandate for the Land of Israel.

Straight after taking over the rabbinical throne, he founded an entire array of welfare institutions along with the great philanthropist Henryk Markusfeld. His pro-Palestine convictions provoked a little displeasure within the [non-Zionist ultraorthodox] Aguda circles, but they did not have the audacity to come out against the extremely popular Rabbi Nachum Asz.

During the First World War, when the Jewish populace was suffering hunger and need, the Aguda people found a "sin" to his detriment, namely - one *Shabbes*, the [German] provisioning authorities distributed potatoes for special [rations] cards⁵. On that day, the Jewish population went to receive the potatoes, and Rabbi Asz did not protest against it nor sermonise them⁶. The Aguda people, led by Reb Awigdor'l Szapiro, entered the synagogue on *Shemini Atzeres*⁷ and wanted to set upon the meritorious Rabbi Nachum Asz. A week later, the *Kehilla* representatives Dr Zaks, Symcha Dziubas and Majtlis came to the synagogue and gave speeches protesting against Aguda, warning them against introducing arbitrary methods in the communal life.

Rabbi Nachum Asz asked not to make any more fuss of the whole story and, with that, the entire matter quieted down. Since then, Rabbi Nachum Asz had no further contact with Reb Awigdor'l Szapiro.

Rabbi Nachum Asz took an interest in all communal issues, participating in the campaigns of Keren Ha'Yesod and Keren Kayemeth [Le'Israel]⁸, with which he aided the success of the undertakings. He also had a positive attitude towards the sports system. His son, the lawyer Dr [Leon] Asz, who was the chairman of the *Makabi* Sports Union, gave a talk rich in content

¹ [TN: *Nuchim* in the original records, as the name is pronounced in Polish Yiddish, and as he would have been known to his community.]

² [TN: "Rabbinical throne" is a flowery Hebrew expression traditionally used in this context, also in Yiddish.]

³ [TN: According to the official records, Rabbi Asz was born on 15th January 1858 in Wyszogród, near Warsaw. Before becoming Rabbi of Częstochowa, he served as Rabbi of Nieszawa.]

⁴ [TN: Heb., "The Great Saturday" (the *Shabbes* preceding Passover) and "Saturday of Return" (the *Shabbes* between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur), respectively.]

⁵ [TN: This is a form of commerce, which is strictly forbidden on the Sabbath.]

⁶ [TN: See a more detailed account of this in "Czenstochow" (1958), in the chapter "The Częstochower Rebbe, Reb Awigdor z''l" (p.118).]

⁷ [TN: Heb., "Eighth [Day of] Assembly"; holiday immediately following the festival of Sukkos.]

⁸ [TN: "The Foundation Fund" (nowadays called "United Israel Appeal") and "Jewish National Fund", respectively.]

every week at the *Oyneg Shabbes*⁹, which was held in the traditional manner. These talks were prepared by Dr. Asz, together with the Rabbi, and they were intertwined with many sayings of *Chazal*¹⁰ and *Aggadah*¹¹.

Rabbi Nachum Asz played a great role as a *dayan* [rabbinical judge]. He always defended those who were wronged and the poor, and also gave both parties satisfaction. The halachic judgements, that he passed, had such a reputation that, when Poles had conflicts with Jews, they summoned them to Rabbi Asz for trial.

He was also a fighter for the Jewish religion, faith and tradition, and conducted a tireless struggle against the [Sejm] deputy [Janina Amelia] Prystorowa, who proposed a bill in the Polish Sejm to ban Jewish ritual slaughter. To that purpose, he published a brochure about the basic principles of ritual slaughter, which made him popular throughout the globe.

On 13th May 1936, Rabbi Nachum Asz delivered his last speech, marking the first anniversary of the death of the Polish Marshal Józef Piłsudski. That same night, Rabbi Nachum Asz died of a heart attack, at the age of seventy-two.

Following his death, the municipal study-hall was named "*Ohel Nuchem*" [Tent of Nahum] in his honour. Rabbi Nachum Asz left two daughters and four sons. All his children played a large role in the communal life. The eldest was a rabbi in a town near Łódź. The second was a great Talmud scholar, who wrote treatises, each week, in the weekly *Częstochower Zeitung* newspaper. The third, Mendel Asz, was a journalist, and the fourth son, the lawyer Dr Leon Asz, was the legal counsellor of the Craftsmen's Union and the president of the *Makabi* Jewish Gymnastics-Sporting Association. One of his daughters is the headmistress of a secondary school in the Land of Israel.

⁹ [TN: Heb., "Delight of Sabbath"; a party with refreshments, song etc.]

¹⁰ [TN: Heb. acronym of "our Sages of blessed memory," and is used to refer to the sages of the Mishnah and Talmud.]

¹¹ [TN: Non-legal rabbinical literature, such as legends, parables etc.]