

Kalman Szczekacz

Kalman Szczekacz, [the *shames*] at the municipal Study-Hall, was [also] one of the interesting characters amongst the in Częstochowa *shamoshim*. Nobody in town knew how old he was. The most elderly Jews remembered him from back in their childhoods already as an old man with a long, snow-white beard. He took upon himself the mission of teaching orphans to say the *Kaddish* [prayer for the dead], and carried this out over the course of four weeks. He considered this an honour, without money, and took no payment for it. Shortly before the war, he taught the *Kaddish* to the 150th orphan.

Kalman *Shames* was the soul of the Study-Hall and a distinguished *balebus*. In the winter, during the long, freezing nights, the cooker was already kindled at five o'clock and all could come in and warm themselves. Kalman already stood and recited Psalms. For anyone who needed to say *Kaddish* on a *yuhrzeit*, Kalman would organise a *minyán*, at any hour. Services were held continuously. When one *minyán* concluded the prayer, immediately another would begin. Kalman saw to it that the *balebatim* [burghers; working men] should not waste any time – that they should finish praying and go to their work or commerce.

In the old days, when there was a *yeshiva* in the Study-Hall and the *yeshiva* lads became infected with the revolutionary spirit and brought in different proclamations and books, Kalman *Shames* was not pleased. But, when there was an incident in the revolutionary years of 1905 and Cossacks entered the Study-Hall to look [for dissidents], Kalman shielded his *yeshiva* lads.

Kalman *Shames* was well-liked by the poor people [seeking alms]. He would organise them at the door, each one according to his importance, so as to maintain peace, order and unity.

Before the establishment of the *Hachnuses Orchim* [Hospitality for Wayfarers] institution, there was a *Beis Hekdesh* [Sacred House, viz. poorhouse] next to the Study-Hall, where homeless people spent the night. The *Hekdesh* was under Kalman *Shames'* custodianship.