

Abram Gotlib (Israel)

To Commemorate Częstochowa Jewry **(Secretary of the [Organisation of] Częstochowa Jews in the State of Israel)**

Our city of Częstochowa belonged amongst Poland's big cities. There were larger cities in Poland - nevertheless, the city of Częstochowa played a significant role in Poland's economic and social life.

The development of commerce in town was greatly aided by the monastery on the Jasna Góra, of which legends were spread amongst the Poles throughout Poland and which, over the course of the years, acquired the nature of a hallowed spot, thus, every year, attracting to it tens of thousands of pious, Christian pilgrims from the most far-flung, remotest locations in Poland and also from other countries.

Jews played a significant [and] honoured role in this sacred city. Indeed, we remember the huge Jewish factories [and] the tiny, little ones which produced haberdashery and playthings, which were almost exclusively in Jewish hands, besides the social, cultural and workers' institutions [and] the study-halls and synagogues! We well remember those who stood at the top of the ebullient [Jewish] national [viz. Zionist] and cultural life. They were the pride of us all.

Not a trace has remained of this large, rich, active Jewish community of Częstochowa! Indeed, [even] today, a small number of Jews [still] live in Częstochowa - yet we have no precise information as to how large their numbers are and as to whether they conduct any Jewish communal work.

This is what the situation looks like in the current generation. What perspective can we already have for the future? Will it not be completely forgotten that there ever existed a Jewish community in Częstochowa? It is therefore the duty of every *Częstochower*, who still harbours some sentiments for his bygone hometown, to commemorate the memory of our community of old, its institutions [and] the social and labour public figures!

In Poland, which was the principal, bloodied location for the destruction of six million Jews, a monument to the annihilated Polish Jewry has been erected. However, a great blank has been left - the names of the individual communities have not been commemorated [and] also not the names of the Jews killed.

The State of Israel wishes to fill this blank. In Israel, a central institution named "*Yad Vashem*" [Monument^{*1} and Name] has been created to immortalise the memory of the destroyed communities and also that of the annihilated heroes and martyrs.

The activity of *Yad Vashem* bases itself on the law of Remembrance and Destruction^{*2}, which was passed by the *Knesset* on 8th Elul 5713, 19th August 1953.

The tasks of *Yad Vashem* are:

1. Registering the annihilated and fallen, their names, places of residence, occupations, the circumstances of their demises, etc., all to be recorded on special formularies (Pages of

^{*1} [TN: Although "yad" is "hand" in Hebrew, the name of the institution is taken from Isaiah 56:5 – "Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a **place and a name** better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.", in which case "yad" is interpreted as place/monument.]

^{*2} [TN: *Chok Zikaron Ha'Shoa ve'ha'Gvura*; Law of Remembrance of the Holocaust and the Heroism.]

Testimony) of *Yad Vashem*. The registration is carried out according to the testimony of relatives and acquaintances. The registration is completely free of charge, and it does not cost any money to commemorate one's relatives.

As the majority of the victims have no tombs, or their graves are unknown, this centralised remembrance, on part of the Jewish People, will be considered their headstone and their names will be immortalised in the *Yad Vashem* ledger.

By request of the relatives, the State of Israel will grant the annihilated and the fallen commemorative citizenship, which will symbolise and emphasize that their memory is [an integral] part of our lifelong union with our People and Land.

2. Erecting memorial buildings on *Har Ha'Zikaron* [Mount of Remembrance] - an area on the outskirts of Jerusalem, next to Mount Herzl.

According to the plan, a building for the Central Archive and for *Yad Vashem's* library, a Memorial Hall and a Hall of Heroism, commemorating the millions of martyrs and heroes, an artistic monument hewn from the rocks of our land [and] a synagogue commemorating the thousands of destroyed houses of prayer and synagogues will be built.

3. The Archive - a collection of historical materials regarding the period of Holocaust and Heroism - documents, notices, pictures, etc. with a bearing on the times of destruction.
4. *Yad Vashem* endeavours to ingrain in the people the tradition of the Memorial Day which the *Knesset* has been set on 26th Nisan. Memorial meetings are held on this day. Memories and articles on the period of Holocaust and Heroism are published in the press and at the children's schools lectures and mourning ceremonies are held for the pupils.

Apart from the aforementioned duties, *Yad Vashem* has set itself, as a goal, a series of other activities connected with the commemoration of our fallen martyrs.

It is beyond any doubt that the central institution for commemorating the martyrs has to be in the State of Israel. Despite the fact that, in the little country of Israel, today, there are 1.5 million Jews in total, compared to the 2 million living just in one city in New York - nevertheless, the attention of the entire world Jewry, as well as that of the Gentile world, is focused on the spot where a part of the Jewish People lives an independent, free life of self-government.

As we celebrate 50 years of community work of the courageous *Częstochower* worker, fighter and public activist Fellow Raphael Federman, it is our opinion that the sacred obligation, which lies upon all *Częstochower landsmannschaften* throughout the globe, to commemorate the martyrs of our city should also be mentioned.

The Organisation of *Częstochowa* Jews in Israel is now renewing registration here in the country and willingly assists all these *landsmannschaften*, as well as individuals who wish to contribute to this sacred endeavour.