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Aba Kaufman z''l (- a Brief Outline of His Personality)



Aba Kaufman

It is beyond my powers to present an evaluation of Aba in all the aspects of his life, because I only knew him from the time he lived in America - this means just ten years ago. This short interval of time is not enough, in my opinion, to discourse about him in a comprehensive manner. This type of dissertation would need to be presented by one of his friends - those who knew him and worked together with him, for a long time, in communal life. I shall, therefore, limit myself to a brief outline of Aba **as a *landsmann***, as I knew him and saw him.

In connection with this, we should mention the definition of the term "*landsmann*". According to accepted form, a *landsmann* is identified as an individual who belongs to a larger group of people who are outside their hometown. In other words, this means that this individual, the minute he left his hometown, had the opportunity to be among his own townspeople in his new place of residence. This also means that, through this group, he continued maintaining his ties - spiritual and social - with his birthplace.

And yet, there are limits to these ties. For one, they were looser [and] for the other, tighter = and they were expressed in different ways. By and large, this affiliation to the *Old Home* was expressed in material aid – in sending a few dollars home and that's it! As important as this was (and continues to be necessary for the survivors), the practice has shown diminishing aspects. More clearly, once the opportunities or the necessity for material aid had ended due to different reasons, the ties of these people with their hometown also ended. The foundation of their affinity was lost the minute the material aspect ceased to act as a binding factor.

With Aba, things were not thus. Aba, who lived more in the spiritual world than in the corporeal one - and even his physical build was a clear sign of this, never broke his ties with the *Old Home*.

I remember my first meeting with him and Jakub Ber Silver (long years may he live) at Alkona Chrobolovsky's house. We had come together then, and among us was the jubilee celebrant Raphael Federman, to discuss various matters concerning the book *Czenstochover Yidn*. It was a micro-scale gathering of *Czestochowers* – the purpose of the meeting was, after all, **Czestochowa**. In the course of minutes, I had presented an image of Czestochowa as I had seen it in the years of its resplendence and glory. Aba quite simply could not have enough of this corner of the city or that. He requested [me] to tell more and more of this or that individual, about this family or another. Aba's words were always - [even] when we had first met - "Have you heard anything from the home?" - with emphasis on the word "**home**". During these last years, when contact with the "home" had almost been cut off, I was, for him, the connecting thread between him and Czestochowa, because he knew that I held - as I still do today - an active correspondence with Czestochowa.

Aba was the classical type of *landsmann* who maintained, in addition to the physical one, a spiritual connection also with the *Old Home*. For him, in his lonely life, being a *landsmann* became an ideal which he quite literally practised at every opportunity day-to-day. He had his unique ways and manners of bringing the duty of *landsmann* from theory into practice. He never lost the foundation of maintaining his ties with his birthplace.

His plan to publish a collection of names of Częstochowa *landsleit* victims of Nazism serves as an example. Aba, peace be upon him, gave Jewish people back the names that the Germans had desired to erase from this earth (a few words about this booklet simply had to be written). By getting rid of the names of Jews, the Germans simply wanted to obliterate the memory of each Jewish victim who had once lived.

Through Aba, these victims, once more, found their names - Aba erected headstones for them. This *mitzvah* by Aba has yet to be properly appreciated.

People called him, and very often as a criticism, "Aba'le *Akshen*" [Obstinate Aba'le]. Is stubbornness, in fact, invariably a negative trait? Yes and no! It depends [upon] where and when - under which circumstances one employs this characteristic. In my view, Aba's obstinacy was only [manifest] when ideals or principles were being handled. This type of stubbornness is actually a positive streak in a man's personality. Of course, this streak surely also influenced other aspects of his life. But who in life can be a *mushlem* [consummate man], a perfect person with all the virtues? One needed to see the whole picture and not the details, as prominent as the latter may have been.

In closing, a few words about Aba, the man of enlightenment. In this vein, too, the influence of "the home" made itself noticeable. Aba's education - in *cheder*, in the study-hall, studying a lesson, etc. - was formed in Częstochowa. It is there that the foundations for his knowledge were laid. From there, he travelled into the world with his load of the wisdom he had accumulated in "the home". The study-hall had put its seal on Aba's path in life. The study-hall, as a place of Torah, had remained etched in Aba's mind. With what reverential awe he would speak about the Rabbi of Częstochowa, Reb Nachum Asz z''l, and of others with whom he had studied! We would spend time chatting about this topic quite frequently and I always marvelled at Aba's erudition and memory.

Many of us miss him - we feel this intensely. We knew his end was nearing. But we never wished to entertain the thought that this end would come so speedily. The severe illness, which had tormented him for years and which he fought so heroically, encouraged us that he would be with us for many years to come. The end, however, came much earlier than we had anticipated. But with time, as it is customary in the world, he will be forgotten. Yet his name deserves to be commemorated. Aba was one who earned himself an eternal memorial. May these few words serve both as a eulogy and, also, as a reminder to uphold Aba's memory, which needs to remain amid the congregation. May his soul be bound in the Bond of Life.