

## The Luminous Personality of the Częstochowa Holy Martyr, Bencel RIP

For many years, a Jew by the name of Bencel (I do not recall his given name) lived in Częstochowa. He was small of stature, a modest and quiet man. He spoke with a strong Lithuanian accent - it seems that he came from Lithuania, or perhaps Russia.

Reb Bencel ran a wholesale egg and butter business, along with Reb Icchok Zomper RIP. The shop was in front of the building at ul. Ogrodowa 27, where my late parents lived.

Reb Bencel lived in the Spadek area and, later, on ul. Garibaldiego. I know of an episode, that when a pogrom took place upon the Jews in Częstochowa, that same Reb Bencel snatched up an iron bar and said goodbye to his wife and children, saying to them that who knew whether they would see him alive again. With that iron bar, he went out onto the street to defend Jewish lives and Jewish national honour. There is absolutely no doubt that, on that occasion, he saved many Jewish lives and [much] Jewish property and goods from the hands of the attacking *pogromczykes*<sup>1</sup>.

When I was on a visit to the State of Israel, my *landsleit* told me a story about Reb Bence from I during the Nazi period, which amounts to an act of holiness and heroism:

Reb Bencel was working in HASAG in Częstochowa. A selection was held at the time and he was chosen to be amongst those to be sent away to be annihilated - to die. Once those selected had been encircled by the Nazi murderers to be sent away, the German head foreman arrived and demanded that Bencel be pulled out, because he was one of the best workers, and had been taken out without his knowledge and by mistake.

The German murderers yielded to the head foreman's request. Then Reb Bencel elevated himself to the highest level of heroism and holiness that a human being may achieve. Reb Bencel demanded of the Nazi killers that they promise him, that if he went back to work, no one else would be taken to his death in his place.

The bloodthirsty, evil beasts - the Nazis - did not agree to this. They wanted the full number of Jews, which had been set, to be destroyed - and so Reb Bencel went off to his death.

All expressions of the terms sanctity, fortitude, heroism, self-sacrifice and valour are too pale to describe Reb Bencel's comportment.

Reb Bencel faced the greatest test - the test of deciding upon his own life or death. In this most painful moment of his life, he did not know who would be chosen to die in his place - whether a young, healthy person, or a frail, old man; whether a Jew with national pride and

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: *Yid., perpetrators of pogrom.*]

profound faith, or not. Reb Bencel, the great Jew, a man of deep faith, put every other Jewish life above his own. He did not wish to be saved at anyone's expense, and sacrificed his own life, which was a life of sanctity, martyrdom and heroism.

Let it be allowed for me to count the holy martyr Reb Bencel RIP among the greatest martyrs and heroes of all the times and generations of Jewish history.

Honoured be his memory!

### *In Memory of Częstochowa<sup>2</sup>*



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<sup>2</sup> [TN: This plaque commemorating the destroyed Jewish community of Częstochowa, along with others in memory of the nearby communities (Radomsko, Będzin, Pilica, Sosnowiec, Krzepice and others) is – or at least was in the 1960s – displayed at the Chamber of the Holocaust Museum on Mount Zion, Jerusalem. The man pointing at the plaque is most likely the author of this article, Szmul Prokosz, during his visit in Israel, as mentioned above.]