

Dr Benjamin Orenstein

## Reb Szlojme Lerner RIP



On 20<sup>th</sup> March 1965, Reb Szlojme, son of Reb Daniel Lerner z”l departed to eternity, leaving behind, in grief, his wife, two sons, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, *landsleit* and all those who knew him.

The late Reb Szlojme Lerner was a man who unified two concepts within himself - Torah and labour<sup>1</sup>. All his years, to the outbreak of the Second World War, he was in the timber business, working hard and, whenever he was free, he engaged in Torah [study] and good deeds. This led him to be a close acquaintance and friend of Reb Awigdor’l<sup>2</sup> ztz”l. He regularly frequented the study-hall in Horowicz’s building.

Reb Szlojme Lerner was born in Częstochowa and lived at ul. Warszawska 72-74. It is in Częstochowa that he was raised, married, raised his children and hoped and dreamt of Jewish redemption and liberation.

When the Second World War broke out and, with the greatest cruelty, the Nazis set upon the lives and property of Częstochowa Jewry, the spark of confidence glowing in Reb Szlojme’s soul was never extinguished.

In the times of the mass slaughters in Częstochowa, his brother Szmul with his whole family and his sister Ester, with all the family, perished in the Nazi inferno in sanctification of the Name [of God] and the People [of Israel].

With absolute faith, Reb Szlojme Lerner believed that the Jewish people had, in various times and epochs, been put before tests and had always overcome them. This time, too, in the Nazi era, the Jewish people had been put before the greatest test in history, and they must fight with superhuman strengths for the existence of the nation and for the Jewish soul, for “*The Strength of Israel will not lie*<sup>3</sup>.”

Reb Szlojme Lerner lived through all the troubles and tribulations during the Nazi epoch. He was in the “Big Ghetto”, the “Small Ghetto” and was barracked in the HASAG-Pelcery camp. And as if the cup of troubles and suffering had not been filled, a few days before liberation, he was deported to Buchenwald and, from there, sent on to Theresienstadt.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: See Pirkei Avot (or Uves), chapter 2, mishnah 2: “Rabban Gamaliel the son of R. Judah the Patriarch said: Excellent is study of the Law together with worldly occupation, for toil in them both puts sin out of mind. But all study of the Law without [worldly] labour comes to naught at the last and brings sin in its train.”]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: See the biography of this Chassidic Rebbe who lived in Częstochowa in “Sefer Częstochowa,” Vol. I, chapter “The Rebbe Reb Awigdor Szapira ztz”l.”]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Said of God, in 1 Samuel 15:29: “And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.”]

When Reb Szlojme Lerner was, physically, utterly spent and lay in bed in the hospital, liberation came as a miracle, by way of the Allied army at the beginning of May 1945. After spending three weeks in hospital, together with his son Szaja, he travelled to Poland, to their town of birth, Częstochowa.

As a city, Częstochowa already had a completely different appearance. The once vibrant town, with Jewish life, no longer existed. The study-halls and the numerous Jewish institutions and buildings were burnt and in ruins. The cemetery was destroyed and many of the headstones had been robbed by the Nazis and shipped away for commercial purposes.

Reb Szlojme Lerner could no longer hold up in this city. He spent several months there, occupying himself with religious matters, and then travelled to Germany, to the Landsberg DP camp, where he stayed with his two sons, Szaja and Daniel.

In 1949, Reb Szlojme Lerner left Landsberg and emigrated to America, where he lived in Chicago until 1955. In 1955, he settled in Montreal. He was active in the *Landsmannschaft*, representing the religious sector of Częstochowa Jewry. He had the *chazuke*<sup>4</sup> to say Kaddish at the yearly memorial services for the martyrs and heroes, who perished in sanctification of the Name [of God] and the People [of Israel].

Besides the *Landsmannschaft*, Reb Szlojme Lerner belonged to an entire array of institutions, such as the *Beth Ha'Medrash Ha'Godol* [Heb., The Large Study-Hall], and a whole range of *yeshivas* and old age clubs. Wherever he was a member, he added to the prestige of the institution and also supported it financially.



**Cantor Efraim-Nechemje Trombkowski RIP<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> [TN: In Halachic terms, a "chazuke", aka "chazokeh" (Heb., חֲזָקָה, "presumption"), is presumptive status of permanence that is established when an event repeats itself three times.]

<sup>5</sup> [TN: There is no connection between this photo and the article above. See Trombkowski's biography above, in the chapter "High Holidays 1943-44 at the HASAG-Pelcery Concentration Camp and the Biographies of Two Young Częstochowa Cantors".]