

Dr Benjamin Orenstein

## Rafał Federman



The name Rafał Federman has grown to be conceptualised as an institution, a synonym of the representation of Częstochowa Jewry and an ideal of the term “believer”, which is manifested in his absolute faith regarding the viability of different plans which, to others, seemed a fantasy.

Rafał Federman is a man of deeds and he does everything, which he undertakes, to carry out, with love, devotion, conviction and faith.

He was born on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1892 in Częstochowa, in the heart of Jewish poverty. There, dearth and need reigned supreme. The events in Częstochowa lay a spiritual seal on Rafał Federman’s childhood years.

There was a fire in a factory in which six Jewish worker girls perished. This incident simply shook the entire Jewish community and, obviously, the ten-year-old Rafał Federman also.

Częstochowa was, and still is, a staunchly Catholic city. Thousands of pilgrims would come to Jasna Góra to beg for miracles. At the same time, the city was not filled solely with Catholic prayers, but also with a generations-long hatred of Jews, which exploded in excesses and pogroms.

Rafał Federman grew up in an environment of workers and folk masses and was elected, by those same masses, to the Jewish Community Council [*Kehilla*], holding the office of Secretary, and to the City Council. On the City Council, he was always at the centre of all the attacks due to his alertness against the anti-Jewish elements and always stood guard to defend Jewish interests. Rafał Federman’s respect and reputation grew continuously. He held various offices in the municipal, communal, political and cultural life of Częstochowa. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, Rafał Federman was a central figure in communal and political life.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, when the Nazi hangmen were preparing for the massacre of European Jewry and the ground was already burning under one’s feet, Federman managed to leave Warsaw<sup>1</sup> in time and avoid the approaching tempest of slaughter. Thanks to Federman’s broad connections, he managed to receive United States papers [i.e. visa] in Wilno and, from there, [he travelled] by various routes and roundabout ways, such as Minsk,

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: According to R. Federman’s detailed autobiography titled “From My Life” in *Czenstochover Yidn*, Federman left Warsaw for Pinsk (Vilnius) on 6th September 1939 along with other Bundist leaders, and he left Pinsk for Wilno (Vilnius) on 14th October 1939, arriving there the following day.]

Moscow, Sverdlovsk [Yekaterinburg], Krasnoyarsk, [Lake] Baikal, Irkutsk, Chita, Kuybyshev<sup>2</sup>, Birobidzhan, and through a whole series of other roundabout ways due to the war operations, [until] arriving in the United States on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1940<sup>3</sup>.

In the American continent, Rafał Federman became the address of *Częstochower landsleit* around the world. If, during the period between the two World Wars, he was the representative of Częstochowa Jewry who fought for their rights in the hometown of Częstochowa, after the Second World War he felt a moral obligation and duty, towards the masses annihilated by the Nazi cruelties, to say *Kaddish* and *Yizkor*<sup>4</sup>.

With a sense of extremely great responsibility, he did very great things in this area. He activated the *landsmannschaften* in the United States and Canada, kept in touch with all the *Częstochower landsmannschaften* around the globe, as well as with the miraculously saved *landsleit*. He published two extremely important books - *Czenstochover Yidn* and *Czenstochov*. The general opinion - and it is factually so - is that, without his efforts, output and responsibility-laden devotion, these books would not have appeared.

Zvi Rosenvein states that "Federman is much to be thanked for the publication of the books *Czenstochover Yidn* and *Czenstochov*." (*Czenstochov*, p. 229)

Ben-Mordechai, in his general characterisation of Federman, writes:

*"As soon as he arrives in the United States<sup>5</sup>, he throws himself into the work for his Częstochower landsleit. He is unable to rest during the days of destruction. He waits until the end of the War, when the liberated, [surviving] Jews in the German DP camps begin seeking aid. Federman's office, in which he worked, became the de facto address of thousands of Jewish refugees in Germany. He helps, he gathers funds, food packages [and] clothes and does everything to rescue his countrymen from the DP camps."*

(*Czenstochov*, p. 227)

Dr Wolf Gliksman writes that both books, *Czenstochover Yidn* and *Czenstochov*, are a result of the fact that Rafał Federman was the living spirit of the undertaking.

Dr Gliksman describes Rafał Federman, in a general manner, with the following words:

*"He came to the Jewish street and to his man at the morning light of Polish Jewry, and stood by him to his demise. He had the merit to have stood at the very beginning, and it was also his tragedy to witness the bitter and tragic end. Rafał Federman embodies the best traditions of glorious and tragically annihilated Polish Jewry."*

(*Kultur un Dertziung [Culture and Education]*, New York, № 6, November 1962, p. 8)

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: Probably ref. to the town by this name in the Novosibirsk Oblast in eastern Russia, although this would mean that, unlike all the other towns, this one is listed out of the geographical sequence, as it is to the west of Krasnoyarsk.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Federman sailed from Vladivostok, Russia, through Japan, and arrived in Seattle, Washington.]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Prayers for the deceased; it would appear the author writes this figuratively, in ref. to the two books commemorating the Częstochowa Jewry which Federman published, as follows.]

<sup>5</sup> [TN: The precise wording in the original article is "As soon as he arrives, the instant he treads upon the free American soil..."]

Rafał Federman is also the author of *Bei di Taichen Warte un East River* [*From the Warta River to the East River*<sup>6</sup>], which is, in fact, the author's autobiography. He has also released a memorial recording, which includes the song *Czenstochow*, a memorial speech by Rafał Federman and Z. Segalowicz's *Kaddish*. Both songs – *Czenstochow* and *Kaddish* – are sung by the singer and artiste Majer Sztajnwurcel. The music to both songs was created by the composer M. Gelbart, who played the piano in the recording of the songs.

Regarding this record, Chonon Kiel writes the following:

*“In this Yizkor recording, our Jewish Częstochowa arises like a distant dream. The quiet alleyways, the Old Market, the long, green Aleje [Avenues] and parks, the synagogues and study-halls; our pious, studious grandfathers, our worried and overworked fathers; the prayers of our sacred mothers upon blessing the candles on Friday at sundown; the singing of the new generation, its fight for a just and peaceful world; the singing of the chalutzim [Zionist pioneers], filled with hope and faith in a secure home.”*

The *Tog* [*Day*], dated 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1960, writes, of the recording as a whole and of Rafał Federman's speech in particular, that *“These words tear at the heart – Oh! What has become of the Jewish community in Poland!”*

[The composer] Sholom Secunda, in the *Forverts*, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1960, analyses the recording from a musical standpoint and, at the same time, characterises Rafał Federman's speech:

*“The speech is deeply touching and it is delivered with the pathos of a man for whom the city has left pathetic and, at the same time, shining memories.”*

With his activities, Rafał Federman has sanctified the life, creation and destruction of Częstochowa Jewry.

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<sup>6</sup> [TN: Although this is the book's original title in English, it is also known as *“On the Shores of the Warta and East River”*.]