

[Dr Zvi Cohen]<sup>1</sup>

## **The Częstochower Rebbe, Reb Awigdor z"l** (a portrait of a "Good Jew", who was unlike all others)



*The Rebbe Reb Awigdor z"l*

Colourful, Jewish Częstochowa had a little of each classification in Poland's bygone Jewish world. All the branches of the Jewish bourgeoisie were to be found within its perimeter. All types of National [viz. Zionist] factions, as well as all divisions of the radical wing, there were Jews of all types there including, as is only natural, an assimilationist group. Thus, when a stranger came to Częstochowa and spent some time there, he could glean an accurate concept of all the factions and groups that the Jews had in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To complete this picture, Częstochowa had, apart from the *Chassidim* who travelled to other *Rebbes*, such as for instance, *Gerer Chassidim*, *Aleksander Chassidim*, etc., there were also followers of its own *Rebbe*, a *Rebbe* of Częstochowa, who came from a grand bloodline and who was, in his leadership, different from all the *Rebbes*.

This *Rebbe*, who lived in Częstochowa for many years, where his father and grandfather had also lived, was not named the "Częstochower *Rebbe*" (such as other *Rebbes*) after the city, and not because of the title of a book he had published (such as the *Sfas Emes* [Language of Truth\*]), but just with his own name, only slightly elongated. His name was Reb Awigdor Szapiro. The people called him "Reb Awigdor'l". He did take *kvitelech* [notes with petition prayers], but he only accepted redemptory donations from one who had the means. He refused to take one *grosz* from poor people and, to those who were very poor, he would even discreetly give a "redemption" himself.

This *Rebbe* had a noble countenance and he would pierce one with his penetrating eyes. Yet the *Rebbe* did not wish anyone to fear him, but quite the opposite, that they should be close to him. He had a crowd of craftsmen, tailors, cobblers, joiners and bakers. He used to say to them:

*I wish you to come to me like you leave work! You need not smarten up for my sake!  
To me, your clean souls are more important than the finest clothes.*

The *Rebbe* also used to scold those who sometimes came out with a malicious word against a Jew who was not very religious, or even a Gentile. He used to say:

*All humans were created by God! If we hate someone, we hate God's creation!*

---

<sup>1</sup> [TN: This is an abridged version of the biography published on pp. 115-118 of the book "Czenstochow" (1958).]

He particularly enjoyed keeping company with little children, whom he used to call *maluchimlech* [little angels]. He would have the children from the *cheder*, which he had established, called to him. He would tell the little children to sit around him and he would hand out sweets and other treats to them, spending time with them in a childlike manner. This was his greatest delight.

In this respect, he was likened to his great-grandfather, the great *tzadik* [righteous man] Reb Duwid of Lelów, who was famed as the great lover of the Jewish People.



Reb Duwid *Lelówer* was born in 1746 in the village Biała, near the town Lelów. His father, Reb Szlojme-Cwi, was a great scholar, but also extremely poor. Winter came and his Duwid'ł needed a warm garment. But he had no money to go to the tailor to have such a coat made for him. He therefore economised on his own sustenance, *grosz* by *grosz*, to be able to achieve this. Eventually, he took his Duwid'ł to the tailor, who took his measurements, and then fashioned such garment for him. When Duwid'ł came the following week to *cheder*, he saw a boy sitting there, dressed in rags. Without thinking too much, he took off the new garment and gave it away to that boy. When he came home, his mother asked him where he had put his new coat [and] Duwid'ł told his mother the truth.

At the age of thirteen, when he became *bar-mitzvah* [i.e., an adult according to Jewish religious law], his father married him off, as was the custom in those times, to the daughter of a Jew [who was] a scholar, but just as poor as himself. A grocery shop was set up for the young man, but Reb Duwid'ł was unwilling to sell each day more than he required for his sustenance, so as not to take away the clients of the other merchants of the *shtetl*.

But it was not long before it became known in the *shtetl* that the young Reb Duwid'ł was a holy Jew, a hidden *tzadik* and [people started] coming to him with requests to help [viz. intervene with God for] a sick one or regarding other troubles.

A very interesting legend circulates in Chassidic circles, regarding how the *Rebbe* Reb Duwid'ł *Lelówer*, with just one sentence, caused a great doctor, who was foreign to Judaism, to become a repentant sinner and, later, even a *Rebbe* among Jews.

Reb Duwid of Lelów passed away on 7th Shvat 5574 ([28th Jan.] 1814), at the age of 68. He left three sons - Reb Mojsze, Reb Nechemie, and Reb Awigdor. Reb Duwid'ł *Lelówer* arranged a match with the *Yid Ha'Kudesh* of Przysucha and his son Reb Mojsze became the *Yid's* son-in-law. Reb Mojsze "conducted a *tisch*" following Reb Duwid's death and, when he was 70 years old, he travelled to the Land of Israel, where he lived no more than 70 days. The *Chassidim* say that he was gifted with an extra day for every year of his life. Reb Nechemie, too, acted as *Rebbe* and had a following who travelled to him.

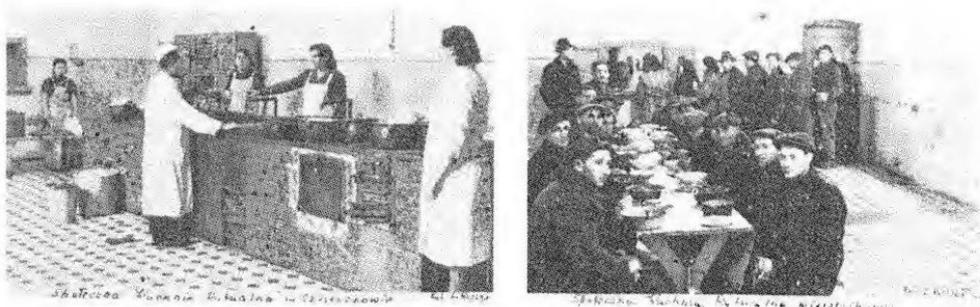
The public, however, was especially fond of his son Reb Awigdor, whom they called Reb Awigdor'ł. He acted as *Rebbe* for many years and a very large following travelled to him.

Reb Awigdor'l had a son whom he named after his father Reb Duwid, who was also *Rebbe*. Reb Duwid's son was the *Rebbe* Reb Awigdor'l, who was in Częstochowa and who was named after his grandfather.

Reb Awigdor'l passed away at the age of 52, in the year 5697 (1937). He left six offspring – three sons and three daughters - the eldest, Jossele (Josef-Burech), Reb Jakow-Icchok and Majlich. The daughters [were] Perele, Jochewed and Fajgele. The latter is married to the Satmar [Satmar Mare] *Rebbe*, [Reb] Joel Teitelbaum. The rest of the family were all annihilated in Treblinka. May God avenge their blood.



*The Jewish religious Kehilla in Częstochowa*  
 Sitting from the right: J. Landau, A. Zander, A. Dorfgang,  
 L. Rajcher, N. Edelist, M. Goldberg, Rabbi E. [u] Wajsler,  
 H. Rajzman, Sz. Granek, D. Koniempoler and B. Szybel



*The Jewish religious kitchen*