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The *Aleje* [Avenues] of Częstochowa (Reflections)

Any Jew, who was born and bred in Częstochowa, recalls its *Aleje* with a holy tremor inside. Memories of a bygone life arise - the lives of one's parents, relatives and friends and of the entire area. There is a forever-gnawing, unquenchable longing for the rich, entertaining, pulsating Jewish life which is associated with the memory of the Częstochowa *Aleje*.



Two large cloisters were encompassed within the area of Częstochowa's *Aleje* - one in the Nowy Rynek [New Market] (in the heart of the former Jewish quarter) and the other being the world-famous Jasna Góra. The former is at the beginning of the *Aleje*, while the latter is located at the end. Wherever one stood, the tall monastery's spires loomed, with their glittering, menacing crosses.

Chassidic Jews would avert their glance to the ground in avoidance, so as not to see the "filth" with their own eyes.

Small, religious, Chassidic boys from the poor, dusky little streets, who had once desired to see the beautiful Avenues with their trees in bloom, would cross over to the other side of the pavement on the alley that connects the Stary Rynek [Old Market] to the Nowy Rynek [New Market], where the monastery is located, so as not to catch a glimpse, heaven forbid, of the "impurity".

Jewish labourers, after a full week of hard work and no little hunger and cold, would emerge on Saturday afternoons from their dwellings in the cellars and attics, from the low, stooping little houses of the Kozia backstreets and make their way to the *Aleje*.

Other Jews just went to breathe in a bit of fresh air and admire the stately, majestic *Aleje*. Some went to their Union and others to their Party, to meet with fellow-workers and share troubling thoughts and also to hear, occasionally, words of commiseration and encouragement of a better and more beautiful world to come.

Jewish youngsters went to their youth organisations, which were on the *Aleje*, to dream their youthful dreams. Other youths, dressed in their best clothes, caroused in the *Aleje*, expressing their spirited youthfulness.

Revolutionary songs of mankind's progress blended with the hum of Talmud study emerging from the Chassidic *shtieblech*, and both were drowned by the laughter and singing of the children and youngsters which, together, created a resounding, unforgettable heavenly symphony.



Evil, terrifying winds began to blow, which promised nothing good. As hatred of Jews and terrorism increased, people began confining themselves, concentrating in a tighter area. They went no further than Pazderski's clock, up to the end of the second *Aleje*. Then the tightness became even worse. On a Saturday evening, or just any regular summer evening, it literally became impossible to pass through there.

If a young, dreamy couple felt the urge to escape the crowdedness and attempted strolling on to the third *Aleja*, nearer to the sacred monastery, or if they wished to sit down in a peaceful corner of the park at the end of the *Aleje*, they would instantly get a taste of the Polish hooligans' cudgels, to remind them that Jews were not allowed to enjoy the park.



Later, in the times of "*Owszem*¹", Polish rioters drowned the *Aleje* with loud yelling to boycott the Jews, shouting the basest insults at them. The Jews witnessed this in pain and in grief, but were compelled to remain silent. One by one, the Jewish shops on the *Aleje* closed down, where there had formerly been almost exclusively Jewish shops. Polish shops began to open, changing the *Aleje's* appearance. Furthermore, one saw shops open on *Shabbes*, creating a dissonance with what had once been. It had been, after all, the Jewish pulse that had forged the character and aspect of the *Aleje*!

¹ [TN: Reference to a declaration made by PM Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski, stating that whilst violence to Jews was deplorable, boycotting and shunning them - *Owszem!* (Of course!)]