

Szmul Frank z''l

Around the New Study-Hall

(Reprint from an old copy of the "Częstochower Zeitung")

We should speak a little about the new study-hall, which has now become, as in olden days, a place of Torah.

I realise, up-front, that some readers will shrug their shoulders and think, "Why is he going on about some study-hall? Who cares how the study-hall looks, whether people study there or only pray?" But, I know that there are readers, in no small number, who will take an interest in the study-hall's affairs and I would, therefore, actually like to expand on them.

In the chronicles of the Częstochowa Jewish community, it is written that a hundred years ago, when Jewish Częstochowa had grown a little, the city's single synagogue became too small. So a study-hall was then also established which served, besides being avenue for prayer services, it was also for Torah study between *Minche* and *Ma'ariv*. None of us knows what the study-hall looked like a hundred years ago. My great-grandfather, perhaps, could have told us something of this, but he has been dead now for a few decades. We must, therefore, make do with what we, ourselves, remember from the later years.



Over thirty years ago, this study-hall, which was built according to the old standards, attracted many young men from various cities. Together with the local lads, they all studied in our study-hall fervently and enthusiastically. It is only a wonder how they managed in such a small place. They indeed fought over places and those, who came a little late, were forced to study standing or leaning on a lectern.

The voice of Torah could already be heard from 4:00 a.m. and it echoed late into the night. All kinds of youth studied there - *Chassidim* of *Ger*, Radomsko, Rozprza and Sochaczew and, even when it was so crowded that some went for a lesson to a Chassidic *shtiebel*, they also all studied for a few hours in the morning or evening at the study-hall.

The study-hall possessed a large treasury of books, which were under the custodianship of the lads themselves, who created a committee with *gaboim*, and also collected kopeks to rebind the books when necessary.

As I have already said above, the conditions were far from comfortable. The cooker, more often than not, smoked continuously and they did not always have the necessary heating materials. The lighting, too, consisted of darkened, sooty lamps and, when someone had a little farthing's-worth of light, he was happy.

Thus things were thirty years ago. How does it look now?

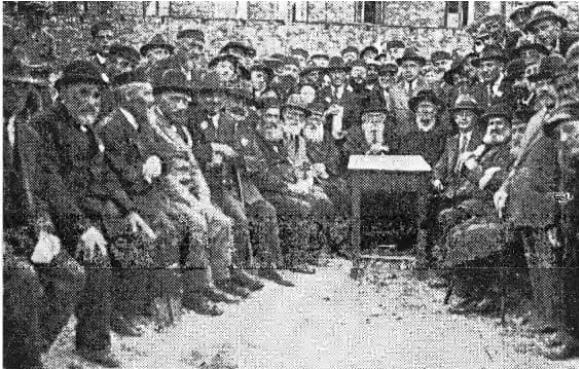


As is known, the study-hall was greatly neglected these last few years. It had become old and dilapidated and, not only did no one study there anymore, but even praying there was dangerous. The windows facing the street were caked with mud for days on end, until we reminded ourselves

that a hundred years had passed since its construction and the rallying-cry came forth from our Rabbi z"l: *"Rebuild the study-hall, to return it to its former glory, but in a manner that it should meet today's requirements - with comfort!"*

Among others, a certain study-hall youth, Henryk Szpaltyn, took an interest in this affair and dedicated himself to it with all his spirit of enterprise. He involved his brother Szlojme Szpaltyn, then Rabbi Mojsze Asz and other burghers and the construction of a new study-hall was set upon.

It would take up too much space to describe the birth-pains. I only wish to report on how it looks



Foundation stone ceremony for the new study-hall - Rabbi N. Asz with the committee and our burghers

now. In place of the little, old study-hall, a splendid building has been built - tall, wide, airy [and] hygienic. The gallery is also as it should be - up high. Mr Szaja Mientkewicz donated a magnificent Holy Ark. Furthermore, many electric lights were set up, as well as a modern cooker, the likes of which has not yet been seen in Częstochowa. It warms the entire large building.

Once the glorious building was finished, work was

started to implement the intention of the Rabbi z"l, that Torah study should be conducted there.

To this purpose, an inspection of the library, which

had been kept during the entire period by the *Chevra Kadisha*, was conducted and it was found that some books were missing, whilst others had been rendered unusable due to age. An appeal was made to the Jewish population - *"Donate books!"* Our Jews followed suit and gave and will surely continue giving!