

Cz. C.

## The Rabbi of Częstochowa Makes Peace<sup>\*</sup>

It is appropriate to recount episodes of the bygone reality of the Jewish communities, amongst them, our Częstochowa also:

In the years 1888-1891, Karl Ginsberg stood at the very top of our community - a Jew who, it seems, was a bit obstinate regarding his principles, from which he "would not or could not yield, even up to a "*kotso shel Yud*" [the tip of a *Yud*; i.e. not even the smallest part of the smallest letter]".

This community leader desired to "modernise" Jewish life in Częstochowa and he began with the following "reforms":

- He ordered that, from that day forward, those called to the Torah should not be called up "with the traditional "*Stand, Reb Yaakov ben Reb Boruch Ha'Cohen*", for example, but plainly and simply, short and sharp: "*Stand, Cohen*", "*Stand, Levi*", "*Stand, third*", and so on. The *shames* [sacristan] was to hand out "brass slabs" according to the portions of the weekly Torah *parsha* [section].
- The second decree was that at *cheder*, the Pentateuch should not be translated to the children in Yiddish, but in German - following Moses Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur* [Explanation].
- The third and last decree pertained not to the living, but to the dead. He ordered that, within a year at most, Jews should stop being buried in the cemetery in Kucelin, but that the *Chevra Kadisha*, together with the community council, should look for a new location for a cemetery, one to which there was better access.

All these decrees were planned by a certain Jew, Mojsze Rubin Tendler, a former *Chassid*, who had relinquished his faith and had become a great *maskil*, as well as being the highest religious authority for the Moderate Jews.

Understandably, the religious and Chassidic Jews protested vociferously and applied themselves to annulling these decrees.

The community leader Ginsberg bought the necessary brass plates, with the aforementioned inscriptions. The *Chassidim* mobilised and all came into the synagogue on *Shabbat* in order not to allow the annulling of the old Jewish custom of calling to the Torah by name and father's name.

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\* A remark from the editors:

This issue - of changing the old tradition at the calling up to the Torah - also found opposition with the great world-prodigy Reb Yehoshuale [Trunk] of Kutno z"l in his book of [halachic] questions-and-answers "*Yeshu'os Malko*" [Salvation for his King], which was printed in Piotrków in 5687 [1927], in the "*Orach Chaim*" [Way of Life; section of the *Shulchan Aruch*] section, answer 12 (from Nisan 12, 5643 [April 19, 1883]), [where] the prodigy from Kutno z"l appeals to the "dear distinguished ones and leaders" in Częstochowa, not to change the Jewish tradition of calling each one ascending to the Torah by his name and his father's name.

The city cantor, Londyński z''l, refused to call to the Torah according to the "German" rite and the task was fulfilled by the city *shames*, Reb Aba Pelc. But the *Chassidim* also did theirs and barricaded themselves in front of the "Cohen" and prevented him from ascending to the Torah, thus further delaying the reading.

This found favour with a certain section of the worshipers. The *gabayim*, with *dozór* Ginsberg in the lead, then left the synagogue angrily. They immediately rented an apartment at Aleja 10 and, there, arranged a prayer-house for the Moderate Jews and also, from there, they began to implement the aforementioned reforms in real life.

Meanwhile, new elections for the *dozores* were imminent. The *Chassidim* united with the "non-modern" *balebosim* [residents; heads of families], and, together, wrought a victory over the reformist people.

As new *dozores* were elected - from the *Chassidim* - Reb Daniel Bem; from the *balebosim* - Reb Icchok Kruk and the always "neutral" Michał Herc, who continued to pray at the synagogue, when the "moderates" had moved to the rented synagogue.

Over the course of time, it turned out that M. Herc thoroughly desired that those ascending to the Torah be not called by their names, but actually with the "brass plates" - the previous community leader's legacy.

A great conflict broke out in the synagogue amongst the worshipers and, especially, between the *dozores* - Herc and Bem.

At that time, in 1894, - the new rabbi, Rabbi Nachum Asz, came to Częstochowa.

It seems that the *dozores*, too, wished to put an end to the constant quarreling. So they came before our new rabbi and asked him to decide in all these matters according to his understanding. They thus relinquished their mandates as *dozores* to choose otherwise.

The rabbi called together a few dozen public figures and worshipers from all the factions and heard out all their arguments.

The spokesperson for the "moderates" was the already mentioned former *Chassid*, Mojsze Rubin Tendler, who argued that, in the Books of Moses, there are no prohibitions appertaining to the reforms planned for the synagogue and *cheder*. Nevertheless, he finally declared that the moderates would also be bound by the rabbi's ruling.

Our clever rabbi immediately explained the reason why, in certain synagogues in Western Europe, it is not accustomed to call up "so-and-so son of so-and-so" but "stand, Cohen" etc.

Jewish life there had modernised, the rabbi explained, and there may be sometimes a basis to suspect, as the Talmud says, "*perhaps [(the man that he struck)] is not [(actually)] his father*" [Chullin 11b]. Therefore, nobody is called to the Torah with his father's name. But, seeing as how the Jews of Częstochowa had always led a modest-kosher family life, such a concern, heaven forbid, was irrelevant and thus there was also no basis to change the tradition of generation upon generation.

Also, on the question about religious studies in the *cheder* in German, the rabbi was of the opinion that the study of the German language should also be introduced, but not at the expense of our mother tongue - Yiddish, which must be held dear by all Jews. He suggested having a one-year trial and afterwards it would be seen if this satisfies both sides, because the children would know Yiddish and German.

Regarding the cemetery question, the rabbi proposed appointing a commission with the participation of the *dozores*, the *Chevra Kadisha* and others interested, which would find an appropriate location for a new cemetery. However, until then, [the deceased] should continue to be buried in the old cemetery.

Both sides accepted the rabbi's ruling.

Afterwards, the representatives of the *Chassidim*, Reb Nutl-Nussen Pankowski and Reb Avrum-Szulim Weksler, declared that, in order to avoid conflict, they agreed that all three *dozores* be representatives of the moderates, on condition that all religious matters be decided upon exclusively by the rabbi.

The other side agreed to this and, at the next *dozór* elections, the following people were elected: lawyer Gliksman, Markus Henig and Markus Rotszyld, who gave over all religious affairs to the competence of the rabbi himself.

The new community leadership, with the rabbi's help, collected around twenty thousand rubles, with which a road was built to the old cemetery. Adjoining properties were also in order to enlarge the cemetery, so that it was no longer necessary to relocate to a new location.

(Sadly, Hitler with his gangs, may his name and memory be obliterated, later transformed the whole of Jewish Częstochowa into one cemetery!

May the details of how Rabbi Asz, thanks to his wisdom and tact, definitely put an end to a bitter conflict and made peace between Częstochowa public figures, be annotated for eternal memory in our "*Sefer Częstochowa*"!).

(Quoted from "*Częstochower Zeitung*" #20 from May 20, 1938)