

## Rabbis, Judges and *Shamoshim*<sup>1</sup>



### A) The First Rabbi

Just as the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Częstochowa and the manifestation of a communal life are shrouded in mist, so too is it difficult to determine who was the first Rabbi and Head of [the Rabbinical] Court in our city.

According to various historians, Jewish life started there in 5560 (1800, to *their* reckoning), although already some years prior to this, a few Jews were found living in the city and it is unknown whether they lived there illegally or under some kind of permit. A certain record has been preserved, by which it is possible to ascertain that, in 5568 (1808), a meeting was held at which a man named “Reb Yaakov, son of Reb Eliezer Ha’Lewi” was appointed trustee of the *Kehilla* and Head of Court, but there are no details on the man and his origins and it is very likely that, as the small community that existed then lacked the financial means to maintain a Rabbi and Head of Court, they sufficed with a learned Jew, who apparently also possessed organisational skills and he served both as the Halachic authority on matters of prohibition and permission and as “Head of the *Kehilla*” as one.

The book “*Bris Avrohom*” [Abraham’s Covenant], by Rabbi Avrohom Zvi-Hersch of Piotrków, contains a responsum to “Rabbi Moishe, member of the Rabbinical Court at the holy community of Częstochowa”, which dates from that period, but in the years 5574-5576 [1814-1816], we already find a Rabbi and Head of Court in the city. In the same book “*Beis Avrohom*”, there are several responsa to queries received from “the honourable, astute [and] superlative Rabbi, perfect in virtues and traits of character, the modest yet mighty Reb Duwid Icchok”. The reference is probably to the rabbi Reb Duwid Icchok, who compiled a commentary on the Pentateuch - “*Beis Duwid*”.

In the book “*Kadishes Icchok*” [Holiness of Isaac], by the *Rebbe* of Aleksander<sup>2</sup>, in the biography of the *Rebbe* Reb Icchok, the first *Rebbe* of Warka [*Vurke*, in Yiddish], it is recounted that, when the first Warka *Rebbe*’s father, Reb Szymon “*Ba’al Rachmunes*” [The Merciful] of Załusin, met at the fair in Częstochowa with a renowned merchant from Żarki named Reb Majer, and they were talking about their livelihoods and families, he told him, among other things, of his bachelor son Icchok, that he was a young prodigy and greatly assiduous in Torah studies. Then Reb Majer spoke favourably of his modest and god-fearing daughter, who was named Ruchel. And the fathers thought it good to arrange a marriage between their children and they agreed that, at the next fair, Reb Shimen would bring his son to Częstochowa, to be tested in his learning by the famous rabbi and prodigy, Reb Duwid, author of the book “*Beis Duwid*”, Head of Court in Częstochowa (and later Rabbi and Head of Court of Piotrków). Reb Shimen was concerned lest his modest and bashful son should become startled and not receive the approval of the prodigious Rabbi of Częstochowa, so he therefore travelled first to the *tzadik* [righteous man] *Rebbe* Duwid of Lelów, to ask his opinion on the match in general, and for him to pray that his son should have success in the examination. The *tzadik* granted

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<sup>1</sup> [Translator’s note: Plural form of the Hebrew word “*Shamash*”, or “*Shames*” in Yiddish, which is usually loosely translated as “*sacristan*”; this occupation entitles not only the physical maintenance of a specific synagogue or prayer-room, but also keeping accurate records of the congregation’s births, deaths etc., for which an official “*Shames*” was held responsible before the local authorities.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: *Rebbe Yide Moishe* (or *Yehuda Moshe*) Tyberg-Dancyger (1892 - 1973), 3<sup>rd</sup> *Rebbe* of Aleksander.]

his approval and gave his blessing to them, that his son should find favour in the prodigy's eyes and do well in the test.

I have not been able to discover the surname of our city's first rabbi – Rabbi Duwid Icchok z"l - because it is not mentioned even on the title page of his book "*Beis Duwid*". What we know about him is that he served as Rabbi of Częstochowa until 5581 [1821] and that, from there, he passed to serve as Rabbi and Head of Court in Piotrków.

His book "*Beis Duwid*" on the Pentateuch was printed about eighty years after his death (he died on Shvat 28, 5587 [Feb. 25, 1827], in Piotrków). In the title page, the publisher writes that:

*the author had been a friend of the Rebbe of Lublin<sup>3</sup> ztz"l; "And David executed judgment and charity [unto all his people]" [2 Samuel 8:15] – judgment to one and charity to another, in his wise trials; and the sermons he preached to the congregation on the year's Saturdays, words of uprightness to inspire the hearts of the Children of Israel to their Father in Heaven, all of which he later set in a book; and his practical Halachic teachings; and innovations on the Talmud and its commentators.*

And the publisher adds that he has, in his possession, another large composition on ritual slaughter and *treifos*<sup>4</sup> in theory and in practice, and a composition on the "*Choishen Mishpat*<sup>5</sup>", and innovations on the treatises of the Talmud. Also, in one of the author's manuscripts, is recorded his closeness with the Holy Rabbi Reb Jankew Icchok, the *Rebbe* of Lublin ztz"l: "My friend, Reb Itzik'l Łańcuter" - as the *Rebbe* of Lublin was known before assuming leadership – from which is seen that the rabbi Reb Duwid Icchok was a prodigy and an expert in all the facets of the Torah, and maintained a correspondence with contemporary exalted and prodigious [Torah] figures; besides the author of "*Bris Avrohom*", also with the prodigy, the author of "*Chemdas Shloime*" [Solomon's Desire] and the rabbi Reb Majer Cilig, Head of Court in Łask and author of "*Pesach HaBais*" [Opening of the House].

## **B) His Successor**

Who was his successor, [what was] his name and origin? It is unknown to us. We also lack information on the office of [Chief] Rabbi between the years 5581-5601 [1821-1841], although it cannot be that, over the course of twenty years, there was no Chief Rabbi in Częstochowa. It is possible that, during those years, one of the judges (whose name is also unknown to us) performed the duties of Chief Rabbi.

## **C) The Rabbi Reb Isachar [Zachariasz] Weingott ztz"l**

The rabbi Reb Isachar, son of the rabbi Reb Juda Leib Weingott, was appointed Rabbi of Częstochowa in 5601 [1841]. He was born in Kalisz in 5549 [1789]. His father and his mother, Szerel [given name], the daughter of the rabbi Reb Mojżesz Parnczewer, were [both] of great lineages, descendants of the illustrious *Maharsha*<sup>6</sup>, *Maharsha*<sup>7</sup>, *Maharam*<sup>8</sup> of Lublin and the *Shelah*<sup>9</sup>.

The rabbi Reb Isachar was a disciple of the prodigy, the author of "*Rishmei She'ela*" [Record of Queries] and the saintly prodigy Reb Yosef the *Tzadik ztz"l*, Head of Court in Poznań. When he was

<sup>3</sup> [TN: *Rebbe Jankew Icchok HaLewi Horowicz, also known as "The Seer of Lublin". He is considered one of the fathers of Chassidism.*]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: *Treifos or treifot are specific mortal injuries or physical defects that disqualify a member of a kosher species from being kosher.*]

<sup>5</sup> [TN: *Heb.; Breastplate of Judgement; the halachic laws pertaining to finance, torts, legal procedure, and loans and interest.*]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: *Hebrew acronym for: Our Teacher, Rabbi Solomon Luria.*]

<sup>7</sup> [TN: *Our Teacher, Rabbi Shmuel Eidels.*]

<sup>8</sup> [TN: *Our Teacher, Rabbi Meir (son of Gedalia).*]

<sup>9</sup> [TN: *Acronym for the name of the book "Shnei Luchos HaBris" (The Two Tablets of the Covenant), by Rabbi Isaiah HaLevi Horowitz, who is referred to by this acronym.*]

only a boy of twelve, he had the honour of appearing before the *Magid* of Kozienice<sup>10</sup> and holding forth a sharp analysis on one of the Talmudic treatises in his presence and, by his advice, his father sent him away to continue his studies with the renowned prodigy Reb Chaim, Head of Court in Łęczycza, where he remained and studied Torah intensively until the day of his marriage with a girl his age, Szifra Miriam, the daughter of the renowned prodigy and kabbalist Rabbi Efroim Ha'Lewi Segal *ztz"l*, the Rabbi of Koło.

When he lived in Koło, provided with room and board by his father-in-law, he embraced the yeshiva and constituted many disciples. After some years, he was appointed Rabbi of the town of Sompolno, and was liked by his congregation, who greatly respected him. In Sompolno, too, he taught the community's young men Torah. There, he also published his first book, "*Pitzei She'arim*" [Gate Openings] Volume 1, on the "*Eizehu Neshech*" [Which is Interest] chapter of the tractate *Bava Metziah* [of the Talmud]. With this book, his genius and deep Torah wisdom were revealed and he became famous as one of the great scholars of his generation.

After he realised that his preoccupation with local affairs disturbed his Torah study, he relinquished his position as rabbi and returned to Koło to dedicate himself to studying Torah with young men, as his custom had been in his first days of settling in this town. Before long, the rabbi Reb Issachar, whose financial situation was deplorable, was forced to take the rabbinical yoke (of which he was not very fond) upon himself again and, for some years, he served as Rabbi and Head of Court in the communities of Płońsk, Kowale [?] and Stryków. As mentioned already, in 5601 [1841], he was appointed Rabbi of Częstochowa. In 5611 [1851], he published the second part of his book "*Pitzei She'arim*" (Innovations and Annotations on the Talmud) and, in 5692 [1932], his grandson, the rabbi Reb Issachar, Head of Court in Dobry, honoured him by printing the third volume of his book "*Pitzei She'arim*", with annotations on the Hebrew Bible.

Rabbi Weingott served as Rabbi of Częstochowa to the end of 5612 [1852], the year in which he was struck by a serious eye disease. He travelled to Breslau [Wrocław] for treatment and died there on Elul 8, 5612 [23<sup>rd</sup> Aug. 1852].

#### **D) The Years 5613-5619 [1853-1859]**

We again encounter ignorance regarding if and who served as Rabbi of Częstochowa during these years, in the period between the death of Rabbi Weingott *ztz"l* and the appointment of the rabbi Reb Icchok Rabinowicz as rabbi of the community. We may hardly say that Częstochowa remained without a rabbi then, but due to the destruction of all the city's Jewish archives, we must leave this question unanswered!

#### **E) Rabbi Icchok Rabinowicz *ztz"l***

Rabbi Rabinowicz has left us a reliable source by which we may determine the exact date of his being appointed Rabbi of Częstochowa.

In his book "*Nidvoys Pi*" [Offerings of My Mouth], which was published in Berlin in 5623 [1863], the rabbi marked one of his sermons as "*the sermon I delivered standing in evaluation before the congregation, on the Holy Sabbath, weekly reading of [Ki] Teitzei* [Deut. 21:10–25:19; read in Aug. or Sep.], 5619 [1859<sup>11</sup>]".

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<sup>10</sup> [TN: Rabbi Yisruel Hopsztajn, one of the most important early Chassidic leaders in Poland.]

<sup>11</sup> [TN: See above, p.41, where the date of his appointment is given as 1850.]

He was born in Warsaw in 5583 [1823]. In his youth, he studied with the rabbi and prodigy Reb Elyohu [Eliasz] Rogaler of Kalisz and, later, with the rabbi and prodigy Reb Berisz Aszkenazy, Head of Court of Lublin. When he was only seventeen years old, he was ordained rabbi by these prodigies. Besides his greatness in Torah, he was also learned and enlightened. He corresponded with his generation's distinct Jewish scholars, Michael Sachs and Y.L. Zunz, and he was also an excellent preacher. The Rabbi of Warsaw, the prodigy Reb Dov-Berisz Meisels wrote of him that *"for, besides his strength in Torah and logic, he is also able to teach the crowd knowledge."* The rabbi Reb Szyia of Skatów wrote of him that *"he hits the true mark with the arrows of his rationality, by cleverly illustrating the teachings of the sages."* The famous prodigy Reb Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin wrote of him *"a Biblical scholar and a Mishnah student, he seizes souls with wisdom and knowledge"*. And the Rabbi of Łódź, the prodigy Rabbi Elyohu Chaim Majzel, praised him particularly extensively and referred to him as *"a light of understanding in Halachic casuistry, a light of knowledge for all seekers of Truth enveloped in enlightened tales, who breathes a spirit of purity into the hearts of those searching for God."*

And, indeed, this rabbi of ours distinguished himself with his welcome activities. He did not isolate himself in his personal space of Torah and Wisdom, but was an assiduous public figure and concerned himself with public necessities, as is seen from his sermons, which he published in his book *"Nidvoys Pi"*, the first volume of which was printed during his lifetime, in 5623 [1863] in Berlin. The second part of the book was published, after his death, by his son Juda Rabinowicz. The deceased was the brother and son-in-law of the rabbi Reb Benjamin Dawid Rabinowicz, a preacher in Warsaw, and was Rabbi of Częstochowa for a little over ten years, and died in 5629 [1869].

#### **F) The Years 5630-5647 [1870-1887]**

We, again, come upon an empty space due to a lack of information regarding the post of Rabbi of Częstochowa during these years. There are no reliable sources concerning this period and we must trace a line over it.

#### **G) Rabbi Gerszon Rawinson ztz"l**

In those days, it seems that quarrels broke out between the *Chassidim* and the progressive circles in the city and, this time, the latter had the upper hand and succeeded in their efforts that, as Chief Rabbi of our city, this time a Lithuanian<sup>12</sup> and *Misnaged* rabbi was chosen. Despite his greatness in Torah, he was disliked in the Chassidic circles.

The rabbi Reb Gerszon Rawinson also had a broad general education, which was rare amongst the rabbis of Poland. He was born in 5609 (1849) to his father the rabbi Reb Yosef, who was the rabbi of the small town Krasław (Witebsk region), of what is now Latvia.

Rabbi G. Rawinson was descended from the prodigy Rabbi Moishe Kremer z"l, one of the rabbinical judges in Wilna. Following the death of his father, the rabbi Reb Yosef z"l, his son was appointed his successor and gained renown as a talented Halachic authority, a brilliant preacher and a distinct public figure. After some time, he served as Rabbi of Sarpa and Połaga and, in 5647 (1887), he was appointed, as mentioned above, Rabbi of Częstochowa.

Rabbi Rawinson also distinguished himself in his Talmudic and Halachic research, which was published in the books *"Oilas Icchok"* [Isaac's Sacrifice] by his brother-in-law Rabbi Icchok Tzioni, the Rabbi of Rzeszyca (Witebsk region) and that of the prodigy Reb Aharon Zelig of Lucyn. He was also

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<sup>12</sup> [TN: Not necessarily born in Lithuania, as seen subsequently. "Lithuanian" is (in the ultra-orthodox world) synonymous with "Misnaged", i.e., an enemy of Chassidism.]

fluent in Russian and his speeches in this language, which he delivered on celebratory events in the presence of the representatives of the government and the army, were published in several pamphlets. In his speeches in Yiddish, too, in which he preached the love of Zion, he gained respect and affection from his many listeners who enjoyed listening to his words. Rabbi Rawinson also occasionally published his articles in the "*Ha'Melitz*" [The Intercessor] and "*Ha'Tzfira*" [The Siren]. His eulogy for the Rabbi of Kowno [Kaunas] and beacon to the Russian Jewry, Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Spektor *ztz''l*, which he delivered at the "*Ohel Moishe*" [Tent of Moses] synagogue (which was popularly called "*Faktor's Shul*"), made a great impression and was also published in "*Ha'Melitz*".

His inflexibility and his fierce war against any kind of fanatics caused his term as Rabbi of Częstochowa to last only about ten years and, in 5657 [1897], he left Częstochowa, after which he served as the Rabbi of Płock, Włocławek and Mczislaw. He eventually left Russian Poland and settled in England, where he served as rabbi of the *kolel* [yeshiva for married men] in Liverpool.

Towards the end of his life, he emigrated to the United States and served as Rabbi of Cleveland, where he died in 5668 (1908).

#### **H) The last Rabbi of Częstochowa, the Prodigy Reb Nuchem Asz *ztz''l***

On the noble personality of this great man and his great contribution to Częstochowa's spiritual uplifting, both religiously and socially as one, much has been written in our book. A special segment – of which Rabbi Asz *ztz''l* was worthy - has been dedicated to him in the "Personalities" section, for this dear man was, first and foremost, renowned among all men for his greatness in Torah and his exemplary commitment to the public and to individuals.