

## Reb Chanoch Henech Gad Justman *hy''d* – the *Rebbe* of Pilica



*The Rebbe Reb Chanoch Henech  
Gad Justman hy''d*

### A: His Roots

Reb Chanoch Henech was born in 5644 [1883] in Ger [Góra Kalwaria], to his father Reb Pinches Eluzor Justman *ztz''l*, the *Rebbe* of Pilica and author of the book "*Sifsei Tzadik*" on the Pentateuch, the grandson of the "*Chidushei Ha'Rim*" and brother-in-law of the *Gerer Rebbe*, author of the book "*Sfas Emes*", and to his mother the *Rebbetzin* Hendel Lea, daughter of the Rabbi Reb Awrum Mordche *z''l*, the "*Chidushei Ha'Rim's*" only son.

Reb Chanoch Henech Gad was his parents' favourite child. From his infancy and until after his wedding, they always lived together. Already in childhood, outstanding talents were discovered in him. He had a wonderful memory, a quick perception and a comprehension of matters at an adult level. His steadfastness and diligence [in study] were wondrous. He studied day and night. He always huddled in his father the *Rebbe's* shade and learned much from him. Likewise, he also drew from the source of saintly inspiration of the "*Sfas Emes*" *ztz''l* and the tens of thousands of *Chassidim* who thronged and streamed to Ger - the largest Chassidic centre in the history of Chassidism - among whom were the most distinguished and acclaimed rabbis, prodigies, Torah scholars and pious men in Poland.

In this atmosphere of Torah, Chassidism and sanctity, Reb Henech was raised and, in it, he put all his might in Torah.

At the age of sixteen, he married the daughter of Reb Mojsze Chaim Halperin *z''l*, who was a grandson of the "*Chidushei Ha'Rim's*" brother. After his wedding, he received room and board from his father-in-law and, there, he continued persevering in Torah [study] and the service [of God] and was considered one of the most illustrious young married men in Łódź.

### B: As Rabbi and Also *Rebbe*

Following the death of the "*Sfas Emes*", when his father Reb Pinches Menachem Eluzor *ztz''l* accepted the position of Rabbi of Pilica, in place of the Rabbi and prodigy Rabbi Pinches Rotenberg *ztz''l*, and also became a Chassidic *Rebbe*, his son also moved there and, by his father's demand, they both performed the rabbinical duties. He dedicated himself fully to carrying the rabbinical yoke together with his father. At the same time, he also studied and served [God]. He literally never stopped studying the Talmud and Halacha and his persistence was boundless. When his father moved to Wieruszów in 5675 [1915] and acted there as *Rebbe*, despite the entreaties of the Pilica townspeople not to leave them, his son also moved there and was accepted as Rabbi of Wieruszów.

Three years later, the First World War end and the righteous *Rebbetzin* Mrs Hendel Lea *z''l* died. When the town of Wieruszów became the front-line in the War and the Jews suffered greatly, and the *Rebbe* Reb Pinches Menachem *ztz''l* had been literally miraculously saved from the Poles who had been searching for him specifically and wanted to hurt him, his father the *Rebbe* moved to

Częstochowa, where he acted as *Rebbe*, and his son Reb Chanoch Henech remained in Wieruszów until after his father's death in 5681 [1920].

In the circles of *Chassidim*, it was remarked that the *Rebbe* Reb Pinches Menachem *tztz''l* had invited his son to come visit him for the *Shabbes* of "*Vayetzei*"<sup>1</sup> – the day of his death – long in advance, but due to various public troubles that he had in Wieruszów, his journey was postponed and he was not present at his father's death.

Following his father's death, Reb Chanoch Henech Gad *tztz''l* was crowned "*Rebbe* of Pilica" and settled in Częstochowa. Many followers began swarming to him to hear words of Torah and to receive his advice and judgement. His special personality, with which he had been endowed from childhood, attracted a large number of admirers to him.

He was generous and of a good disposition. He shared the troubles of others, felt the pain of each and every Jew and there was no limit to his love for people. He was never seen angry [and] was naturally humble. The Torah addresses he delivered at his table<sup>2</sup> were very passionate and animated. In his letters to his followers, he always stressed the importance of peace and unity, of setting fixed Torah lessons and public prayer.

In his days, the *yeshivah* named for the "*Sifsei Tzadik*" was founded in Częstochowa, which he managed. A few dozen pupils from Częstochowa and the neighbouring towns studied Talmud and Halacha there.

In 5691 [1931] he was appointed Rabbi of Wieluń and, there too, he did much to strengthen Torah and Judaism.

### **C: During the Holocaust Years**

(With the onset of the Second World War in 5699 [1939], Wieluń was among the first locations bombed by the Germans. Mere minutes after the *Rebbe* and his family had left their home, it was bombed and burnt. After many hardships, he arrived with his entire family in Częstochowa, where they lived with the Grajcer family, at Aleja 4. During the war years, he endeavoured to strengthen and encourage the public. Conferences of *Rebbes* and Rabbis, who were at the time in Częstochowa, were held at his home, from which various directives and regulations emerged. He was also in contact with the rabbis and activists in other places. Despite the danger at the time, the *Rebbe* held "tables" with Torah addresses and words of encouragement, as well as public lessons on Talmud with *Tosafot* and on *Mishna*. He arose every morning at 6:00 and waited at the door of his house for the night-curfew to end, so that he could go to the study-hall at ul. Warszawska 23. He did this to the last bitter and unexpected day – Yom Kippur of 5703 [10<sup>th</sup> September 1942]. When the rumour had spread that they were about to annihilate the entire ghetto, he gathered his children and the relatives who prayed within his inner circle, bade farewell to them and ordered them to go to their homes. In the evening, after much pleading, he agreed to move to the Stary Rynek to Reb Szyja Bratt, who had prepared a "good shelter" in which he wished to house the *Rebbe tztz''l* and his family. However, in the end, he refused to conceal himself because he was unable to do so, as hundreds of people had gathered around him, to be with him in his last hours. He said: "*As long as I'm alive, I will live both as a Jew and as a person, along with all the Jews*". Even just a few hours before the "*Akcja*", he did not stop studying and he said to his close ones, "*Even though everything*

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: See above, p.291.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: At all Chassidic courts it is the custom that on special occasions a great table is set in the study-hall or synagogue, and the *Rebbe* and his followers share a festive meal. The *Rebbe* speaks about the specific holiday etc. and there is much singing, dancing and merry-making. This tradition is simply called "*Tisch*", i.e., "*Table*".]

*has been done to annul the evil decree, what can we do if it has already been sealed, and the time is short, [but] to soak in as much Torah and fear of God as is possible?"* The Rebbe went out to the Akcja without looking at the faces of the Germans, may their name be obliterated, leaning on his son, the rabbi Reb Szyja Srul Herszel z"l, who was holding his three-year-old son Icchok Majer in his arms, and with him was the Rebbetzin Dwojre Majtel and the rest of the household. People who had walked next to him later told that they heard him exclaim, *"We may be being punished for not doing enough for the Land of Israel!"*.

One man who fled Treblinka said that the Rebbe ztz"l had refused to take his Tallis Kuton<sup>3</sup> off and was thus shot on the spot. May God avenge the blood of the martyrs!)

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: "Small prayer-shawl", a fringed garment traditionally worn either under or over one's clothing by Jewish males. It is a poncho-like garment with a hole for the head and special twined and knotted fringes known as "tzitzis" attached to its four corners. It is considered a "mitzvah" to wear this garment during the day.]