

The Rotenberg Family in Częstochowa



*Reb Aron Eliaz
Rotenberg z"l*

Three members of the Rotenberg family settled in Częstochowa, upon which they left their mark. Reb Aron Eliaz Rotenberg, who was called "Number One", his sister, the wife of the Rebbe of Pilica, and her son Reb Aron Eliaz Alfasi [Alfus], who was called "Number Two".

The Rotenberg family has one of the most prestigious pedigrees in Poland, tracing their lineage back to [the Tosafist] Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenburg, the greatest German Rabbi and [one of] the fathers of Halacha.

The *Rebbe* Reb Icchok Majer Alter¹ of Ger, the "*Chidushei Ha'Rim*", also belonged to this family. His brother, Reb Aron Eliaz Rotenberg was the progenitor of the Częstochowa Rotenberg family.

The family was also related to Reb Hersz *Tomaszów*, the renowned faithful servant of *Rebbe Mendele* of Kock ztz"l and of Rabbi Menachem Ze'ev ztz"l, the Rabbi of Kock.

Reb Aron Eliaz Rotenberg, "Number One" as he was called in Częstochowa, was born in 5635 [1875 (in Kock)] to his father Nechemie Rotenberg. He was a follower of Rebbe Aryeh Leib of Ger, the "*Sfas Emes*", who held him in great esteem for his bright personality and their kinship.

Reb Aron Eliaz once recounted that, as a supervisor over the butchers in Częstochowa. he saw things that were not to his liking. He travelled to the "*Sfas Emes*" to ask his approval that he relinquish his position, but the "*Sfas Emes*" refused to approve his resignation.

The son of the "*Sfas Emes*", *Rebbe Awrum Mordche* of Ger ztz"l, held him in great esteem, and his successor, the current *Gerer Rebbe*, *Rebbe Yisruel*, once remarked of Reb Aron Eliaz, "There are no longer Jews like him, he was a remnant of past generations".

He was a studious and brilliant Torah scholar but, at the same time, humble and retiring. Additionally, he was literally a "living encyclopaedia" in genealogical matters. Any Częstochowa Jew who came to him could hear from him about the genealogy of his forefathers.

He always had an outstandingly bright countenance. Sadness was never seen in his face. Although his financial situation was never the best, he always laughed and smiled.

When he emigrated to Palestine in 5696 [1936], he became a beacon for the Częstochowa townspeople [living there]. He visited all of them and remained in close and warm contact with them all.

At the *Gerer shtiebel*, he served as a sort of rabbi and Halachic authority. He was mild in his speech and studies, quiet and humble, a truly extraordinary character. He also spent his very last day in study. He studied at the *shtiebel* until ten o'clock at night, returned home and died! "[*Hillel used to*

¹ [TN: The Rebbe changed his surname from Rotenberg to Alter in 1830.]

say: *be of the disciples of] Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving mankind and drawing them close to the Torah*" [Avot, Ch.1, mishna 12], defines Reb Aron Eliaz Rotenberg's personality.

(His son Nechemie and his daughter Sura survived the Holocaust.) He passed away in Nisan 5710 [March-April 1950] in Tel-Aviv.

His sister Chaja Itta, the *Rebbetzin* of Pilica, was his elder. She was born in 5625 [1865]. She was orphaned in childhood and was brought up in the house of the "*Sfas Emes*". She was a household member of the *Gerer Rebbes*.

In 5644 [1884], she married Rabbi Abram Alfasi [Alfus], Head of Court at Drzewica, Opoczno County (Radom region), and became known as "the *Rebbetzin* of Drzewica", after her husband. She was highly respected at [the Chassidic court of] Ger, and no preparations were made for any celebratory events in the [*Rebbes'*] family, until "the *Rebbetzin* of Drzewica" had arrived. She was also famous for her activeness and, literally, all the town's poor ate all their meals at her table.

Following the death of her husband in 5672 [1912], she married *Rebbe* Pinchas Menachem Eluzor Justman, the *Rebbe* of Pilica, and she moved to Częstochowa, to the *Pilicer Rebbe's* fine and famous building.

In Częstochowa, too, she headed the activities of charity and also acted as a midwife, free of charge, of course.

(She passed away on 20th Iyyar 5690 [18th May 1930] and her tombstone is intact to this day. The horrendous Holocaust left it undamaged.

All her many children and grandchildren perished in the Holocaust, except for her son-in-law Rabbi Nathan Dov [sic.; David] Ha'Cohen Liebermann, who is now the Chief Rabbi of Regensburg, and his children, and her son Reb Izrael Alfasi z''l, who made *Aliyah* back in 5685 [1925] and was among the country's first industrialists and one of the first [settlers] of Bnei-Brak.

Of all her children, the only one who remained in Częstochowa was Reb Aron Eliaz Alfasi who, as I already mentioned, was called Reb Aron Eliaz "Number Two" in town, to differentiate him from his uncle Reb Aron Eliaz Rotenberg z''l of whom I have written above. He, too, was one of the select *Gerer Chassidim* in our city. He perished with his entire family in the Holocaust. May God avenge his blood.)