

Ezriel Ben-Moshe

Simchas Torah with the Rebbe of Żarki z”l (from my memories)

We called him “The *Zhuriker Rebbe*”. But this was merely by accident because, in truth, he was originally from the Kresy¹ and he had only lived for some time in the village of Żarki - not far from Częstochowa.

The name stuck and, when he moved to Częstochowa, he was already known as “The *Zhuriker Rebbe*”.

He was a descendant of the famous *Trisker Maggid*, but he did not become *Rebbe* merely due to his lineage, but by his own merits. He was a great scholar [both] in [the Torah that is] revealed and [that which is] hidden [i.e., Kabbalah].

His followers in Częstochowa and throughout Poland bought for him Reb Chaskel Fiszel’s house on ul. Nadrzeczna - not far from the Old Synagogue - where he set up his “Chassidic court” and administered Chassidism.

Followers swarmed to him from all corners of Poland. They travelled to him for *Shabbes* in order to be near him and hear words of Torah and Chassidism from such a fine Jew, a descendant of the Turisk and Chernobyl *maggidim*. Above all, they visited the *Rebbe* on the holidays. But, of all the holidays, the largest attendance was for *Simchas Torah*. The greatness of his joy with the Torah was unheard of. His conduct on *Simchas Torah* was truly extraordinary.

As is known, the custom among Jews is that, on *Simchas Torah*, each member of the congregation receives a Torah scroll [to hold] for one *hakufe* [“circle”], but the *Zhuriker Rebbe*’s custom was to do all the *hakufes* himself.

His *hakufes* were so famous that hundreds of people came to see them, [both] religious and secular, for it was a truly glorious and rare occasion.

The *Rebbe* would enshroud himself in his great *tallis* [prayer-shawl], with the silver crown², and hold the Torah scroll under the *tallis*, and in this manner he would circle the Reader’s Platform with the Torah scroll for hours. A long row of *Chassidim* stood around the entire length of his large study-hall, who sung and clapped their hands with great fervour. The crowd reached the peak of their enthusiasm when the *Rebbe* took the Torah scroll out from under the *tallis* and danced with it, holding it up high the whole time.

It is impossible to describe the passion of those present. The singing and thunderous clapping reached further and further and it seemed as if the enormous choir was singing as one man, as one soul. The entire vicinity echoed. The joy that flowed from the *Chassidim*’s faces and how they shone with contentment could only be described by those who were present.

¹ [TN: Pol., Borderlands; eastern part of the Second Polish Republic during the interwar period, largely coterminous with the “Russian Pale”.]

² [TN: An embroidered strip of material, at times even made of silver or gold, situated where the *tallis* is placed on the head.]

Following the *hakufes*, the *Rebbe* began conducting the traditional holiday *Tisch* ["table"].

He only tasted from each of the plates and the rest was distributed by the *gabay* among the *Chassidim* as "*shiraim*"³.

In order that each and every *chassid* should have the privilege of tasting from the "*shiraim*", the *gabay* climbed up on the table and saw to it that no one was left without, heaven forbid.

(Thus events transpired for long years, until the destruction of the Częstochowa Jewry by Hitler's beasts. Eyewitnesses tell that when the Jews were taken to their punishment, the *Rebbe* went out among the first.



He walked in the lines, enshrouded in his *tallis*, inspiring admiration with his patriarchal bearing, proud and with his head high, knowing that he was being taken to his death as a martyr and his lips murmured prayers - the pure prayers of a great and holy Jew, who shared in the fate of the People of Israel and his loyal followers. May God avenge their spilt blood!)

³ [TN: Leavings or leftovers; a *Rebbe's* "*leavings*" are very highly prized among *Chassidim*, and are regarded as a remedy for all illnesses, evils etc.]