The Shtiebel of the Stryków Chassidim

The Stryków Chassidim established their first shtiebel in Częstochowa back in 5670 [1910], on ul. Garncarska, at Reb Jankel Dawidowicz’s house.

The founders and main activists in setting up the shtiebel were my father Reb Berisz Tiberg and Reb Mordche Mendel Kromolowski. They were called “Stryków Chassidim” after the town where the Rebbe, Reb Menachem Mendel Landau, lived. He was the son of the Rebbe Reb Dov Berisz – the “First Rebbe” of Biala, who was the son of the prodigy, the Rebbe Awrum Landau, the “Tzadik of Ciechanów”. His grandson, the Rebbe Reb Awrum Landau, who is among the Torah giants in Israel, lives in Tel-Aviv and continues leading the magnificent Stryków dynasty, which is famous within Polish Chassidism.

Many different people prayed at the Stryków shtiebel in Częstochowa, with prominent figures amongst them. Therefore, the shtiebel was crowded even on weekdays, and on Shabbes and holidays – even more so. The people gathered there not only for prayer. The Chassidic meetings at the shtiebel attracted people and charmed its visitors. Anyone who came to the shtiebel felt that he had before whom to pour his heart out and receive aid in time of need.

At the shtiebel, there was no difference between wealthy and poor. Inside it, the simple Jew and the scholar walked together, arm in arm. There were no “aristocrats” and they knew nothing of an “Eastern Wall”, for everyone could choose to sit wherever they liked, both during prayers and for studying.

Despite the fact that the number of poor people at the shtiebel was larger than that of the rich, they always helped others beyond their means. Those in need were given loans large enough to rebuild businesses and establish them. It sometimes even happened that the debtors pulled through and returned the loans.

On weekdays, following morning prayers, people sat at the tables and studied or recited Psalms, ma’amudot and the like. They also recapitulated the Rebbe’s Torah teachings, told Chassidic stories and had friendly conversations. This pastime was very spiritually fulfilling. Sometimes this happened after the evening service and many stayed for a chat and to study Torah long into the night.

The shtiebel members organised rosters for visiting the sick, even to stay overnight. The sick man’s household were, of course, unable to do everything for him, and our Chassidim helped them by staying by his side overnight, as well as giving important aid to the family.

---

1 [TN: The front pews at the synagogue, which are usually reserved for important people.]
2 [TN: Also pronounced Ma'amadot; a collection of verses from the Hebrew Bible, Mishnah, and Talmud that are to be recited each day of the week.]
All the shtiebel’s congregation wore long caftans and the special hats that ultraorthodox Jews use, and were very strict in their observance of all the Halachic laws and traditions. On Shabbes and holidays, they wore Samet³ hats, shtreimels and silken caftans. Thus the Chassidic garb itself instilled a spirit of sanctity and festivity all around. Both children and adults wore these clothes. It was the custom to also wear these Shabbes garments for religious festive events, such as circumcisions, engagements and weddings.

On Shabbes, the shtiebel took on a distinct festive and warm atmosphere. On Friday, nearing the afternoon service, clean white tablecloths were spread on the tables. The floor was also spotless. The lighting was at its fullest. The gabay, Reb Mordche Mendel Kromolowski, took care that everything should be in its place, and the shtiebel - with its two rooms - filled up. When the words “O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever”⁴ [Psalm 136] were heard, each and every one felt the spirit of Shabbes inside him.

During the interval between Minche and the Welcoming of Shabbes, some of the Chassidim studied, while others discussed Chassidic topics amongst friends.

They always endeavoured that the leader of the prayer should be a good singer, with a pleasant voice, and the young men assisted him in singing Chassidic melodies.

On Shabbes, in the morning, it was their custom to start prayers later, for all the worshippers had fixed Torah studies before the service, at home or at the shtiebel.

The gabay, Reb Mordche Mendel, also read from the Torah scroll, and led the Mysef service on the High Holidays.

It should be mentioned that, among the youth at the shtiebel, there were also a few from “Tzeirei” and “Ha’Chalutz Ha’Mizrachi”, such as Chune Tatarka, Uszer Gotesman and [and] Awrum Dancyger hy’d who, when called up to the Torah, promised donations⁵ to “Keren Kayemeth Le’Israel” too, which was normally not acceptable among Chassidim. But the Stryków Chassidim usually tolerated this, because they were not opposed to Zionism.

On Shabbes afternoon, they would again gather at the shtiebel for various studies and, after Minche, the “Third Meal” was held. After the first morsel and drinking “le’chaim”, came the songs, which followed a predetermined order. They sang the songs with the old, traditional melodies of Vurke, Biala and Aleksander.

The gabay honoured one the boys with the singing of “Shir Hama’alos⁶”, following which the blessing after the meal was said and, after the Ma’ariv prayer and Havdulah were said, all went home.

On Saturday nights, “Melave Malke⁷” parties were held. There were also banquets on the yuhrzeits of the Rebbes and, occasionally, on the first of the [Hebrew] month.

---

³ [TN: Velvet; the Samet hats were worn by the bachelors and the shtreimels by the married men.]
⁴ [TN: Beginning of the Friday afternoon service.]
⁵ [TN: It is the custom to “pay” for the privilege of being called up to the Torah by promising to give a donation to charity after the Sabbath.]
⁶ [TN: “A Song of Ascents”, Psalm 126; this psalm is sung at the end of the meal, before the post-prandial blessing is recited.]
⁷ [TN: “Escorting the Queen”; the name of a meal that is held after the Shabbes has ended.”]
They would travel to the Rebbe for Shabbes or holidays and were careful not to go without a shtreimel. Usually, a group of Chassidim would travel together. It was the custom of the shtiebel’s well-to-do that they would pay for the journeys of the less fortunate. Those returning would describe to those who had remained all the details of the “tables” and the Torah addresses they had heard.

The shtiebel was also honoured with important visitors, who came on behalf of the Rebbe. The visit from the Rebbe’s son, Reb Berisz Landau from Piotrków, made a great impression. He stayed with Reb Berisz Tiberg, and many came to see him and received him with respectful awe.

On the days preceding the High Holidays, prayers were started before sunrise. On the High Holidays, the prayers were always led by Reb Majer Pilcer, who read Mysef, and Reb Mordche Menachem Kromołowski, who led “Kol Nidrei” and, sometimes, also the “Neile”9. The shoifar was blown by Reb Duwid Majer Liberman and, after he left Częstochowa, Reb Mojsze Leib Birencaig blew in his place.

At the close of Yom Kippur, after the evening prayer, all parted company with great happiness and with wishes for a good and prosperous year and, immediately after the meal, they began building the sukkah.

“Hakufes” were held three times - on the nights of Shemini Atzeres and Simches Torah, and on the next day. During the “Hakufes”, the joy at the shtiebel reached its peak and dancing and dancing continued for a long time.

★

During the First World War, the shtiebel was temporarily moved to home of Reb Michal Bram at Nowy Rynek 11 and, six months later, to ul. Strażacka 8. After the end of the War, an apartment was rented at the house of Reb Mojsze Fajgenbaum and, there, they prayed for about ten years. When the merging with the Zawiercie Chassidim took place in 5687 [1927], they moved to Reb Awrum Granek’s house at ul. Warszawska 17. The unified shtiebel was considered one of the largest in town and its custodians were Reb Berisz Tiberg and Reb Chaim Szajn.

