

Abram Nuchem Sztencel

This greatly-talented Jewish poet and essayist was born in the small *shtetl* of Czeladź (in Zagłębie) in 1899.

His father, Reb Chaim Berisz, was a son of the renowned rabbinical judge in Częstochowa, the rabbi Reb Szlojme Sztencel. His mother was also of rabbinical lineage - she was a granddaughter of the old Rabbi of Będzin, Rabbi Berisz Hercygier.

At the beginning of the First World War, his parents returned to live in Częstochowa.

The young Abram Nuchem'l, a Chassidic lad dressed in long clothes, already then - being always engaged in Torah study and Chassidism - showed the signs of a "poet". Always musing, he would sit in the study-hall at his Talmud tractate, silently muttering unintelligible words and, sometimes, a wild ecstasy would seize him and he would run around, back and forth, in the study-hall in an incomprehensible frenzy.

Already then, his closest and most intimate friend was Wolf Wiewiorka, a son of Reb Binem Mendel, the *shoichet* of Żyrardów and a brother of the later renowned socialist leader and writer Abram Wiewiorka.

It was with him that he held, in great secrecy, his first discussions on Jewish literature and its classics, Y.L. Peretz and Mendele Moycher-Sforim. And Wiewiorka often visited the Peretz library with him, and even got them into the "Jewish Literary Society" to hear an interesting speaker lecture on a literary subject¹.

Although Sztencel and Wiewiorka had, by then, completely changed their views, they nevertheless continued wearing Chassidic garb, being still bound to their religious homes. They did not feel at home in the Yiddishist cultural circles, feeling that they were mocked there, usually not for their presence [itself], but for their ungainly Chassidic attire. Thus they felt much better in the circles of "*Tzeirei Mizrachi*", where they were met with a heartier attitude and were welcomed as brothers.

Sztencel began partaking in the Torah and wisdom [?] lessons that were held every day at the "*Tzeirei Mizrachi*" premises in Częstochowa.

After the War, when antisemitic winds began blowing in the fledgling independent Polish State, a great part of the nationalist, Jewish youth left Poland. Abram Nuchem Sztencel was also among those young men from Częstochowa who left.

He was in Germany for a short while. From there, he moved to London, where he published a monthly journal entitled "*Lushn und Leben*" [Yid; "Language and Life"].

¹ [TN: It is unclear whether they sneaked in just on one occasion or if they went there regularly.]

In 1948, his collection of poems *“Jerusalem”* appeared in London. It contains ballads and poems which expressed his passionate love for the Celestial Jerusalem² and the Earthly Jerusalem to be rebuilt [in the future], as well as his affinity with the concept that *“The Torah, God and the Jews are one entity”*³.

In 1961, his book *“The Shtetl Whitechapel of Britain”* was published, which contains essays and lyrical poems on the personalities and happenings in the Whitechapel diaspora.

From Sztencel’s works sprout forth the streams of the great spiritual nourishment that he received in Częstochowa’s *shtieblech* and study-halls, as well as in the youth organisations to which he was always drawn, whether openly or secretly.

² [TN: See Talmud Bavli, Taanit, 5a, where it is stated that there are two cities of Jerusalem, a heavenly one and an earthly one, which are bound together.]

³ [TN: Although there is no known source for this exact wording, the general concept seems to originate in the Zohar, p.73a. It is interesting to note that the author of this article placed the Torah before God, which is rather unusual.]