

Jakób Chune Plai (Filik)

The *Shtiebel* of the Szydłów Chassidim

Among the older and more renowned *shtieblech* in our city, the “*Szydłówer shtiebel*”, which was located at the Stary Rynek [Old Market], held a special position. It was especially distinguished for its group of *Chassidim* - exalted men of virtue, among whom were great scholars, who delved deeply into the teachings of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*¹.

The Szydłów *shtiebel* was particularly noteworthy due to its authentic ways and its drawing directly from the Chassidic sources of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*, as had been the case already with [Szydłów's] First *Rebbe*, *Rebbe* Meir'l of Apta [Opatów], author of “*Or Le'Shumaim*” [A Light to the Heavens], who was one of the distinct teachers of the First *Rebbe* of Radomsko, *Rebbe* Szlojme HaCohen Rabinowicz ztz'l, author of “*Tiferes Shloime*”, who fervently opposed the methods of Kotzk². [His ideology] was based mainly on the service of God, with innocence and simplicity, and particularly on the boundless love for [the People of] Israel, at whose centre stands the Righteous One of the generation who, besides having a spiritual-religious influence, also draws forth material wellbeing and deliverances for the Jewish People. This ideology was best put to practice by the famous *tzadik Rebbe* Duwid'l of Lelów and those who followed his ways in Chassidism and the service of God.

We may surmise that, in Częstochowa and its vicinity, there were those who had known and huddled in the shade of the *tzadik Rebbe* Duwid'l of Lelów. Among others was the renowned Częstochowa resident, Reb Lewi Icchok Gotlib, the son-in-law of the rabbi Reb Nechemie (the son of Reb Duwid'l of Lelów), and the son-in-law of the rabbi Reb Mordche'le of Stobnica, the elder brother of the First *Rebbe*, Reb Meir'l of Opatów. When the *tzadik* Reb Mojsze of Lelów emigrated to the Land of Israel in 5611 [1851], the Lelów *Chassidim* split into two groups - one group travelled to *Rebbe* Szlojme HaCohen Rabinowicz of Radomsko, the “*Tiferes Shloime*”, whilst the second travelled to the grandson of *Rebbe* Duwid'l of Lelów, the righteous rabbi, *Rebbe* Jakób of Opatów (the son of Reb Nechemie'le).

Szydłów was actually an amalgamation of the Chassidic methods of Radomsko and Opatów, for *Rebbe* Szlojme HaCohen of Radomsko was a disciple of both *Rebbe* Duwid'l of Lelów and *Rebbe* Meir'l of Opatów. The two dynasties of Radomsko and Szydłów later also became connected by marriage several times, and there were times when people travelled to both Radomsko and Szydłów.

Following the death of the *Rebbe* Reb Janke'le of Opatów, he was succeeded by his son, the *Rebbe* Reb Majer Duwid Mordche of Szydłów, the father of the Częstochowa resident Reb Michal Leib Mindycz and of the *Rebbetzin* Mincze Rabinowicz of Radomsko, the daughter-in-law of the “*Chessed LeAvruhom*” (and the mother-in-law of the last *Rebbe*, Reb Szlojme Chanoch Henech HaCohen of Radomsko *hy''d*, who was murdered, by the Nazis, with his entire family in the Warsaw ghetto).

When the *Rebbe* Reb Majer Duwid Mordche of Szydłów died, his followers returned to Radomsko, and I remember that the *shtiebel's* seal was “*Shtiebel of the Radomsko Chassidim, who are called Szydłówer*”.

¹ [TN: “*Master of the Good Name*”; *Rebbe* Yisrael son of Reb Eliezer (c.1698-1760), the father of Chassidism.]

² [TN: *The Kotzker Rebbe put Truth before all else and deeply despised any external show of supposed devotion.*]

During its final years, the *gaboim* at the *shtiebel* were Reb Szlojme Grinbaum and Reb Michail Lipski. Reb Mojsze Chaim Grinbaum and Reb Icchok Honigman led the services on the High Holidays. Reb Meszylem Kolin read the Torah scroll for many years.

Among those who prayed there regularly, we should mention the names of these Torah scholars and men of great deeds - Reb Nuchem and Reb Awrum Behm, and Reb Perec Rajch. The latter distinguished himself with his sayings from the teachings of the Sages and Chassidism and had great influence over the youth who visited this *shtiebel*.

Among the prominent Szydlów *Chassidim* were the pious Rabbi Chune, son of Reb Lewi Gotlib, the brothers Reb Szmaja, Reb Rachmiel and Reb Chaim Hersz Szthal, Reb Daniel Behm, Reb Aba Kongrecki, Reb Józef Ber Gliksman and Reb Duwid Ickowicz.

The Szydlów *Chassidim* particularly excelled in their pleasing and impassioned prayers. When they recited the psalm "*O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good*" [Psalm 136] in the *Minche* service at the start of *Shabbes*, their fervour and passion were extraordinary. I still remember the immense impression that saying the "*O give thanks unto the Lord*" made on me, as well as the fiery and radiant faces during "*Light is sown for the righteous*"³ [Psalm 97:11], and then the hymns sung to welcome the *Shabbes*, and those of the *Shabbes* morning service, which reached their peak during the Third Meal, which was always greatly prolonged and was therefore called "a *Szydlówer* Third Meal".

The majority of the Szydlów *Chassidim*, and especially the most prominent among them, were later concentrated in the Radomsko *shtiebel* on ul. Targowa and, together with the Radomsko teachings, continued in the Szydlów ways. Among the veteran worshippers, there were the elderly vestiges of Chassidism, Reb Szmul Chaskel Kohn, Reb Duwid'l Działoszyce, Reb Ber Szczekacz, Reb Józef Szaja Wargon [and] Reb Duwid *Shoichet*. Among the married students, Reb Duwid Szthal and Reb Berisz Czystochowski especially distinguished themselves.

At the old *Szydlówer shtiebel* prayed the *Chassidim* of the older generation, Reb Mojsze Srul Zomper and Reb Nussen Oderberg, who were renowned for their piety and artlessness.

(This magnificent Chassidic *shtiebel* continued thus until the Holocaust and the destruction of Jewish Częstochowa.)

³ [TN: This verse is repeated loudly several times at the beginning of "Kol Nidrei".]