

Moshe Ben-Dov

From the Memoirs of a *Yeshivah* Student

I was still a young lad, sixteen years of age, when I was among the pupils of my teacher and master Reb Mojsze Mordche Zicher z”l, one of the most important Radzyń *Chassidim* and among the greatest scholars in Piotrków Trybunalski, from whose Torah and wisdom it was my privilege to become scented for about five years, and who gave me the good advice that I should move on to a *yeshivah* and continue my studies there. I was also privileged with the good advice and the important recommendation of the Beacon of the Diaspora, our Master Majer Szapira ztz”l, the founder and head of the *Chachmei Lublin* [Sages of Lublin] *Yeshive*, who advised me not to travel far away, but to the “*Keser Torah*” [Crown of T.] *Yeshivah* in nearby Częstochowa, which was headed, at the time, by the rabbi Reb Moishele Rabinowicz, son of the Kromołów *Rebbe* and son-in-law of the Radomsko *Rebbe*.

And on my way to Częstochowa, my heart was pounding. I trembled, asking myself, “What is Częstochowa like? Who are its people? [Who are] the heads of its *yeshivah*? How will they receive me? Will they be welcoming?” And I was still pondering on my near future as the train approached the city, which I had never [before] seen – and, here I was, inside it, observing its streets, houses and people. I see before me a bustling and lively city, which welcomes all who pass through its gates and I seem to see only beaming faces, even at myself... and I feel encouraged and comforted!

I recall my first appearance before the city’s Head Judge, Rabbi Wolwicz Borensztajn z”l, by whom I was to be examined before being admitted as a pupil of the *yeshivah*.

And here I stood, before a man with a very noble countenance, his beard flowing over his garments, his wide forehead and his smile – which did not disappear even for a moment – which truly enchanted me and encouraged me as well, as he tested me on the treatise “*Rabbi Eḥanina Sgan Ha’Kohanim*¹”.

After the examination, Rabbi Wolwicz passed me on to the *yeshivah*’s supervisor Reb Reuve’le, whom he instructed to tend to the technical arrangements for my reception into the *yeshivah* and to see to both my physical and spiritual needs.

When I heard that Rabbi Wolwicz had designated me to the advanced class of the Rabbi Reb Michal Szwarcbaum z”l, my joy was great. But when I presented myself before him and met the gaze of his piercing eyes, which gleamed from behind his bushy brows and above his patriarchal beard, I was rather fearful. But, after just a few minutes of introspection into the treatise, which he explained pleasantly and tastefully, I moved on to the state of “*rejoice with trembling*” [Psalm 2:11] and understood that I had been privileged to be in the personal space of a great man. This impression is preserved in my heart to this day!



In those blessed days of my life, I also had a good opportunity to become acquainted with the nature and character of the Częstochowa townspeople. I saw before me dear Jews of few words and great

¹ [TN: *Rabbi Eḥanina* the deputy High Priest; treatise in the tractate *Pesachim* of the Talmud Bavli, from p.14a to p.15b.]

glory, with broad hearts and homes wide-open to accommodate and generously and kindly take the *yeshivah* pupils in as guests and to attend to all their needs.

I personally knew quite a few of this city's dear ones and I regard it as my pleasant obligation to mention their names and deeds.

Reb Mordche Menachem Kromolowski z"l – a true Stryków *chussid* – whose guest I was every *Shabbes*. On these days, I felt the true delight of *Shabbes*, because every meal I ate at his table was interlaced with words of Torah and Chassidism [and] singing and melodies from the magnificent Chassidic musical source. Reb Mordche Menachem was able to make *Aliyah* near the end of his days and he died in Tel-Aviv.

I was also among the visitors at the house of Reb Dov Berisz Tiberg. He, too, was among the prominent Stryków *Chassidim* and I still remember his elderly father, Reb Nuta z"l, who, even after losing his sight, studied Torah and his mouth literally never stopped studying!

Among the excellent younger married men whom I knew was also the ritual slaughterer Reb Nuchem Bergman, a God-fearing scholar who held the rabbis and their disciples in great esteem.

I mention, in gratitude, Reb Chunon Gotlib, who lived at ul. Warszawska 5, under whose roof I was for a long time and I was considered literally a household member in that wonderful home, which was interwoven with love and true Judaism and I learnt much from his good traits. (One of his sons remained alive, thanks God, and he lives in Bnei-Brak).

And last but not least – is my Teacher and Master Reb Avrema'le Gotlib, who came from Wolbrom to Częstochowa to serve as Head of the "*Keser Torah*" *Yeshivah*, succeeding Rabbi Reb Michal Szwarcbaum who, due to his illness, was unable to continue in his position at the *yeshivah*.

Częstochowa was beautiful on the outside and more so on the inside.

(Although many years have passed since my feet trod within its gates and there were the most heinous years – years of war, wandering and great suffering in concentration camps, through which I passed and in which I suffered, she [i.e., Częstochowa] is yet etched into my heart and I shall never forget her!

And now, when the Częstochowa townspeople have set themselves to publishing a Memorial Book for this exemplary city, I told myself that it is my duty towards the city and its martyrs to set forth in this book some of my memories, as a memorial monument to the magnificent city!

May their holy souls be entwined in the thread of life and I pray to all-merciful God that he should console us in the consolation of Zion and Jerusalem!)