

The *Rebbe* Reb Awigdor Szapira ztz"l



*The Rebbe Reb Awigdor
Szapira ztz"l*

Rebbe Awigdor Szapira was the son of Reb Szulim of Przytyk and was the grandson of Reb Jankew of Będlewo. Despite living in Częstochowa for many years, he was not known by his town of residence (as are other *Rebbes*), but by his own name and as Reb Awigdor'l by the common folk.

He was born in Kazanów in 5640 [1880] and was raised in Przytyk. Already in his youth, he was distinguished for his great perseverance in study, his holiness and wisdom. He was particularly good-hearted, in the full sense of the word. When he was about thirteen-years-old, he came to Kazanów to his grandfather the Rabbi, who dallied with him and sat him next to himself. Henceforth, he spent whole nights studying and serving God and gained renown as a great young prodigy.

In 5658 [1898], he married the daughter of the Rabbi of Widoma, who was descended from the "*Muor Vushemesh*"¹, the "*Good Jew*"² of Neustadt [Nowy Korczyn], and other rabbis and prodigies.

The local Rabbi and Head of Court, the famous prodigy Reb Leib Charif, who was originally from Przedbórz, took to the young married man Reb Awigdor, whom he viewed as a distinct Torah scholar, and would spend time with him discussing Torah and Halacha. In 5660 [1900], Reb Awigdor settled in Częstochowa, throughout which he immediately became famous, especially among the simple people, as an extraordinary man of exalted attributes, a true lover of the People of Israel, who was always prepared to act selflessly for the good of the public and the individual. Many flocked to him for advice and guidance and presented him with "*notes*"³ and "*redemption money*"⁴, as was the custom then among Jews. But he refused to take money from poor people. In those cases, it was quite the contrary. He would help them generously with his own money, and even above his means, although he himself lived in a state of great privation.

The *Rebbe* Reb Awigdor was an "*Agudas Yisroel*" affiliate and he, therefore, was opposed to Zionist activity and even to that of "*Ha'Mizrachi*" and "*Tzeirei Ha'Mizrachi*". However, knowing that the Rabbi of Częstochowa, Reb Nuchem Asz, was great in Torah and God-fearing, diligent in the observance of the lightest precepts as in that of the most severe ones, he showed him great respect, and their friendship continued for many years. Rabbi Asz also agreed that Reb Awigdor's son-in-law, Reb Józef Rubin, be appointed as one of the [rabbinical] judges in Częstochowa.

As a rule, Reb Awigdor was not a natural zealot. He understood the spirit of the times and spoke well of every Jew, saying that there were usually no evil Jews, and that Jews did not sin, and if it sometimes happened that a Jew did commit some sin, he was convinced that he would eventually repent. "*A Jew does not leave this world as a sinner, and every Jew repents before his death*" is something which the *Rebbe* repeated often.

¹ [TN: Also pronounced "*Maor Vashemesh*", Heb. "*Light and Sun*"; name of book by which its author Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman HaLevi Epstein is known.]

² [TN: I.e., miracle worker. This was Reb Josef Burech, the son of the "*Muor Vushemesh*".]

³ [TN: Known as a "*kvitel*" in Yid.; a note with the person's name and mother's name, specifying the particular problem he/she had.]

⁴ [TN: See above, p.290.]

He particularly excelled in his love for Jewish children - the pupils at the *cheders* - whom he called "little angels". He would gather around him the children from the *cheder*, which he had founded, and give out sweets and treats to them. This was his greatest pleasure.

The *Rebbe* Reb Awigdor'1 died on *Shabbes*, 18th Adar 18 5688 [10th March 1928], at the age of forty eight, and was laid to rest on the following day. The Częstochowa Jews, who cherished him when he was alive, showed him their respect after death as well and almost all of the city's Jewish residents participated in his funeral.

He left three sons - Józef Burech, Jankew Icchok and Elimelech and three daughters - Perl, Jochewed and Fajgel, who married *Rebbe* Joel Teitelbaum, the famous Satmar [Satu Mare] *Rebbe*, who lives in Brooklyn (the rest of his children were annihilated by the relentless enemy, may his name be obliterated).