

HERSH-MEIR AND CHANA RAK

My father Hersh-Meir and mother Chana born Wajsberg came from old families in Kutno. Like most Jews in Kutno, Dad was also busy all his life in his business, to support all his family, but despite the worries of earning a living, he took care of the education of his children – his sons and daughters – who were twelve in number. He himself also found time for Torah and every day, before going out into his business, my father studied the "*daf yomi*" together with the Gemara in the *Beit Midrash*. But Dad found the compensation for all the mundane worries on the Shabbat. On this day, a spirit of holiness pervaded the whole house. Already in his blessing "Shalom aleichem", upon his return on Shabbat night from the synagogue, Dad brought a spirit of holiness and holiday into the house! Everyone was pleasant and uplifted. And the dear and noble-minded mother added to the charm, beauty and refinement of the Shabbat in a Jewish home!

In honor of this day, in honor of Shabbat, Dad used to bring a guest from the synagogue and sometimes even two or more, because he did not like the festive Shabbat meal knowing that there was a lone Jew left in the *Beit Midrash*, or hungry for bread on the holy day!

Indeed, both father and mother were from *Beit Shammai*, they were very strict towards themselves in the *mitzvot* and in everything that concerned their way of life, but they were from *Beit Hillel*¹ when it came to others. And of course, they sought to educate their children in their spirit, that of traditional Judaism, to keep faith in the heritage of Judaism. And indeed quite a few of us have gotten this heritage. Every Shabbat, Dad would study patriarchal chapters with us in an endearing melody, explaining things through the parable, bringing examples from the realities of our lives.

In this way, Dad instilled in us values from our culture and ancient heritage and enriched our world with content and values that did not touch us in the way we lived. These spiritual and cultural assets that were acquired at Dad's home accompany us wherever we go. The holidays were especially beautiful. They were like a bright and radiant light that brightened our murky reality in the conditions of a town in exile. But when the "terrible days"² came, the whole house was in gloom. Here comes the battle and doomsday, the day of reckoning of the soul, a day that all in the world stand before the Lord of the worlds! And who would not panic?! Before he went to

"*Kol Nidrei*", Dad would cover his descendants with his large prayer shawl and blessed us as our ancestor Yaakov did with his sons. We knew that Dad was anxious for our well-being, our lives and our destiny.

But Dad could not protect us. Terrible days that were unparalleled in the history of his people and in the history of the human race were approaching. Hitler came to power. Antisemitism in Poland began to rage in all its ferocity, it was no longer possible to breathe in the poisoned atmosphere and the Jewish youth, including us, began to look for a solution, for wanderings to other countries. We, eight boys and girls, were privileged to immigrate to *Eretz Israel*! Our dear parents accompanied us to the train station. With tears, sighs, joy and trembling they parted from us, hoping to see us in the Holy Land to which Dad so longed, but no! Father and mother, as well as my two brothers Yehoshua and David and their families remained on the cursed land of Poland and were not allowed to reach the Promised Land – *Eretz Israel*. Nevertheless, these brothers devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the idea and action of Zionism, to the resurrection of our people and its redemption!



Hersh-Meir and Chana Rak z"l

Good and honest parents, good and merciful father! Although we have not walked in all your ways as the commandments of your holy Torah, we carry in our hearts your love for the heritage of our ancient people, your loyalty to all the holiness in our people at all times – the love of Israel, its moral values and hope for complete redemption of our people in its independent, flourishing and free land!

The Children

¹ TN: Hillel and Shammai were two debating scholars, the former being usually more lenient than the latter. "Beit Hillel" is the one generally accepted among Jews.

² TN: the ten days of repentance between *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur*, when the fate of each Jew is supposedly sealed for the beginning year.