

## CHAIM-NOAH BAGNO Z"L

My father z"l, Mr. Chaim Noah Bagno is from a distinguished and respected family and one of the greatest Torah scholars. His father, R. Simcha Bunim, was one of the dignitaries of the Jewish community in the town, and when he died, his coffin was carried on his shoulders by his companions as a sign of respect and great appreciation for the deceased during his lifetime.

Dad was born in 1878 in the town of Gostynin, near Kutno. From his youth he grew up in a traditional Jewish home, observant and imbued with the values of Judaism from generation to generation. Like all his contemporaries, he studied in a *cheder* and in a *yeshiva*, but from an early age he was interested in the Hebrew literature of his time and was considered by all his friends and acquaintances to be an educated man with wide views.

He came to Kutno as a young man. In this city he married a woman and established his family, everyone knew him as a noble-minded man, gentle, wise and ready to help his friend at all times. As our friend and teacher Y. B. Kac<sup>1</sup> z"l wrote in the "Gostynin Book"<sup>2</sup> (p. 88), my late father participated in meetings of the town's youth who were "Lovers of Zion." In the house of Y. B. Kac, debates were held on various issues that were at the forefront of the Jewish world at the time. And there were many issues: social problems, economics, culture and, most importantly, Zionism. From these meetings, the Zionist Organization in Gostynin arose and grew. But even here, in Kutno, Dad continued his nationalist activities and the dream of his life was to immigrate to *Eretz Israel*. However, he had worries about earning a living in a Jewish economy. He was busy and was very careful to provide for his family. However, he always found time to peruse the Book and even learn foreign languages. Interestingly, he also learned the language of Esperanto – a very rare thing at the time especially among the chassidim – because Dad was a chassid of the Rabbi of Gur. His Zionism was not an obstacle to keeping the commandments of the Torah and leading a traditional way of life like his ancestors. But Dad was also influenced by the new winds that blew in those days. He sent his daughters to a Zionist school, where boys and girls studied together. Of course, his friends – Gur's chassidim – did not like this. The people of the *shtiebel* in which Dad prayed threatened to expel him from the *shtiebel*, but he did not give up. His daughters continued to study in the mixed Zionist "*Am HaSefer*."

He sought to educate us in a Zionist spirit, and at the same time entrust us with the spirit of traditional Judaism. He also sent his sons, who studied in the *cheder* and in the *yeshivot*, to private teachers so that they would acquire a general education and not be cut off from the real world around them.

During World War I, Dad did not stand on the sidelines when trouble struck. He participated in many

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<sup>1</sup> TN: Yonah Baruch Kac.

<sup>2</sup> TN: the Gostynin Yizkor Book.

public actions to alleviate the plight of his congregation. He devoted much of his time to public needs, and when the support for the needy was established in the town, he would distribute hot meals to the needy and take part in various charitable activities such as: "*Hachnasat Kalah*", visiting the sick, etc. He also helped to the best of his ability in establishing a Beit Yaakov girls' school, which was a distinctly religious school for girls. But Dad realized that it was not enough for a Jewish boy to study in the *cheder* and the *yeshiva*. He saw with his own eyes the ascent of new Jew, who blends in his spirit the teachings of his ancestors and the desire for renewal and resurrection of his people. Indeed, his upbringing has borne fruit. All his daughters immigrated to Israel and even Dad was able to fulfill his life's dream and in 1934 he reached the shores of *Eretz Israel* and settled in Hadera. After a while, his second wife and young son Gabriel also made *aliyah*. However, his three beloved sons did not get to be with him in Israel. They perished in the Nazi inferno along with the entire House of Israel in Poland.

### **On the eve of *Yom Kippur* at my father's house**

Eve of *Yom Kippur* at father's house was engraved deep in my heart and in my memory. The impending Judgment Day atmosphere was in the house since this morning. The Divine and Holy, trembling and terror spread their wings over the whole house. Dad walks focused on himself, with his lips whispering a prayer and totally immersed in other worlds. The great and terrible Judgment Day is approaching. The heart of each of us is shaking. What does the holy day entail for each of us! Who will live and who will die? Who will be written in the Book of Life and who is destined to pass away from the world, God forbid?

The sun is already sinking. The shadows invaded our home in preparation for fasting, prayer and judgment. It is pure and clean and has no corner that is not dedicated to the big day. Shabbat of Shabbats is this day. Silence prevails in the house. The members of the household held their breath and their eyes were fixed on the head of the family – towards Dad, only the clock on the wall made its constant ticking. The very one that is the only witness to our lives that pass with joy and sadness, hopes in the heart and in pain, but which does not interfere with our lives.

The table is covered with a white tablecloth, looking like a white surface on which the large candlesticks with lit candles and next to them an alveolus in which a large and thick candle is stuck – the *Yom Kippur* candle, which will light the members of the house praying in the synagogue, tomorrow after the closing, when everyone will sit down to eat their hearts out after the holy fast. At the top of the table is this large braided *challah* – the "*koilitsh*". The table is set and awaits its diners, who will now sit down to eat the last meal before the fast.

But no one has yet taken his place next to it. All the boys and girls are waiting for Dad to take his place at the

top of the table and only then will we sit down too. Our gaze follows all his movements. And he is all tense but quiet. He goes to the closet, takes out the white robe, puts it on and sits at the top of the table, so we sit down, each in his own place.

Here, the "last meal" began. Silence reigns around the table, each man engrossed in his reflections, in his longings and expectations. Silence all around, only Dad occasionally stops the silence and talks about the sanctity of the day and its place in the life of the people. He begs us to eat more than usual this time, because fasting is long ahead of us.

We end the "break meal" with the blessing of food "in *zimmun*<sup>3</sup>". The girls also say the prayer. Then came the great moment that always cast a great fear on me, in which I sought to keep it away from me. Dad got up from the table. His eyes express kindness and anxiety, hope and wishes for the future, sadness and joy, and above all a prayer and a request for a good life for all his family. And while the children stand around him, he spreads his hands over his eldest son and blesses him as Yaakov blessed his sons, then, after the eldest, father blesses all his sons and daughters according to their age. His eyes are closed as he blesses, but a tear falls on his cheek and falls on the son's head. And the crying grips everyone, everyone cries softly and is called to his corner to be alone with himself. But the weeping increases, for it is an outlet for sorrow that has accumulated in our hearts for many days, even though it also has a request and supplication to the one who sits above so that he will not hide his face from us.

Father finished his blessings, now he will go to the synagogue to ask for life, and joy of life for all his family. And before he left his house, each of his sons would approach him, kiss his hand and wish in a quiet and loving voice: "Let the father wish himself a good year."

*Yom Kippur* descended on us in tears, prayers, fasting and hope for a good life for us and for the whole house of Israel. But the prayers prayed by the Jews of Kutno and the tears that flowed from the eyes of the fathers and sons every year, on the eve of *Yom Kippur* were to no avail. The House of Israel in Poland was sentenced to death and not to life. And the tears I shed on the eve of *Yom Kippur* have not dried up to this day.

Dad died in 1937 in Hadera and there he was laid to rest. His noble figure remained engraved on the tablet of our hearts forever. May his soul be bound in the bond of eternal life.

I did not mention our dear mother, because she died on us while I was a little girl and I hardly remember. She was about thirty-two when she left behind eight small children. May her soul be bound in the bond of eternal life.

Sarah BAGNO-FAJNER

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<sup>3</sup> TN: Judaism, when three adult men are eating bread, they must be invited to join the host for the Grace After Meals.