

## THE BRUTAL MURDER OF THE RABBI OF DĄBROWICE

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*translated from the Yiddish by Leon Zamosc*

The small Jewish community of Dąbrowice was under the jurisdiction of the much larger *community* of Krośniewice, whose rabbi was responsible for all the religious matters of the town. The Jews of Dąbrowice wanted to have their own rabbi, but they knew that they would have to maintain him on their own.

In the end, they decided to bring Rabbi Henschel Gajzler, son-in-law of the *shochet* of Krośniewice. He came from a very affluent family of Włocławek and his brother was a military rabbi.

Rabbi Gajzler was known as a great scholar, and also as a big fanatic. He delivered frequent sermons on the heresies of the youth, warning the parents that, God forbid, they endangered the very existence of the Jewish faith. There were no wealthy men in the town and, as it turned out, paying the rabbi's pension became increasingly difficult. The economic situation continued to deteriorate until it was impossible to maintain the rabbi. He was forced to quit the job of rabbi in order to work as a trader.

He went to Warsaw every week and came back with a variety of merchandise. His wife sold the goods locally. Around the middle of the month of Shevat 5663<sup>1</sup>, as he

was returning from one of those trips to Warsaw, he stopped in the synagogue of Krośniewice to pray. Then, before it got too late, he set off on the road to Dąbrowice.

In the morning, a farmer came to town and told Reb Asher Chelmiński that he had seen a dead man lying on the road. From the beard, he reckoned that the man was a Jew. Several youths immediately ran to the scene and identified the man – it was the Dąbrowice rabbi. He had been hit with an ice pick. His eyes were wide open, barely recognizable.

The terrible news immediately spread throughout the town. People flocked to the place of the disaster. The suitcase with merchandise had been taken from him, and his felted boots had also been stolen. The gendarmes arrived and brought back the rabbi in a wagon. The whole congregation accompanied the wagon, weeping and lamenting with broken voices. They were sure that they were carrying a corpse.

By some miracle, however, the rabbi survived. He lay in bed for weeks. Reb Shlomo Hoffman stood at his bedside. He asked the rabbi to say something about the attack, but, unfortunately, the rabbi could only whine.

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<sup>1</sup> TN: February 1903.

They went to Krośniewice looking for a doctor, but it was too late. The rabbi exhaled his soul.

When the Jews of Krośniewice got the sad news, they came in the morning with their *Chevra Kadisha* and demanded the release of the rabbi's body in order to bury him in Krośniewice. They justified the demand saying that the community of Dąbrowice belonged to Krośniewice and that the dead rabbi was the son-in-law of Krośniewice *shochet*. The Jews of Dąbrowice did not yield and a dispute broke out. The quarrel could have escalated into something worse, but Reb Shlomo Hoffman intervened, giving his consent to the burial of the Dąbrowice rabbi in the cemetery of Krośniewice.

When the dead rabbi was brought to Krośniewice, Reb Shlomo Hoffman was roughed up by the local Jews, even though they had been told not to mistreat him. On

Sunday, the whole town, young and old, showed up for the funeral. Many rabbis came from near and far. The funeral services were held at the yard of the synagogue. The Jews of Dąbrowice were deeply distressed, feeling that the tragedy had happened because they had been unable to provide a livelihood for the rabbi. It was therefore decided that they should ask for forgiveness from the dead rabbi. People were moved when the dead rabbi was brought into the synagogue and ten Jews from Dąbrowice took off their boots and, one after the other, asked for forgiveness from the dead rabbi. A mournful weeping broke out in the synagogue. The tragedy made a profound impression in the entire region. Late in the evening, by the light of a lantern, the rabbi of Dąbrowice, who had struggled so much for his livelihood, was finally laid to rest.