

# The Radomsker Rebbe

**He was an extraordinary Rabbi – a charismatic leader for thousands of Hasidim as well as a successful businessman.**

Rabbi Shlomo Chanoch Hakohen Rabinowicz, born in 1882, was the fourth and the last Rebbe of the Radomsk Hasidic dynasty. He was born in Radomsko, Poland, the eldest of two sons. He married the daughter of Rabbi Ahron Twerski of Krasand, and had one daughter, Reizel. She married her father's cousin, Rabbi David Moshe Rabinowicz (1906-1942), in 1929. Rabbi David Moshe was the son of Rabbi Nosson Nachum Hakohen Rabinowicz, Rav of Krimolow.

He succeeded his father as Rebbe upon the latter's death in 1910, and was a dynamic and charismatic leader. Thousands of chassidim attended his court on Shabbes and Jewish holidays. On the eve of World War II, Radomsk was the third largest Chassidus in Poland, after Ger and Alexander.

Rabbi Shlomo Chanoch Rabinowicz was an unusual Rebbe in many aspects. He was both a Rebbe and a businessman. He was not an ordinary businessman, but a millionaire, who was counted among the Jewish millionaires in Poland. And among the Rabbis he was certainly the greatest millionaire. He was not just a partner to other businessmen, but he himself headed large businesses, including a glass factory. He owned a large number of houses in Poland – in Warsaw and Sosnowiec – and from 1933, before Hitler came to power, he was also the owner of many houses in Berlin and Leipzig.

And at the same time, the Radomsker Rebbe sat day and night learning Torah, in the service of God. He devoted himself to the yeshivas he had built in various cities in Poland and Galicia and the businesses were run by his loyal chassidim. Even when he was a leader of thousands of chassidim he would travel to other Rebbes as a chassid, in particular to the Chortkower Rebbe, Rabbi Yisroel Freidman.

When he became Rebbe at the age of twenty-nine, he was already a successful businessman with interests in Berlin, Łódź, Warsaw and Kraków. Rather than accepting donations, as was customary, he would on many occasions assist his chassidim financially. Although he was a great scholar, he refrained from overtly displaying this. Despite his wealth, he spent little on himself, diverting much of his financial resources to support his network of thirty-six yeshivos throughout Poland.

He was greatly admired by chassidim throughout Poland and Galicia, remaining aloof from disputes and arguments (Chassidim until today make a distinction between Poland and Galicia, regardless of the fact that it is all part of Poland, as the Jewish customs and accents are different). The Radomsker Rebbe had thousands of followers in Poland and Galicia. It has been said that he was the only Rebbe in Poland to whom large numbers of chassidim travelled to from Galicia. There were more Radomsker shtieblekh in Kraków than Gerrer.

On every Shabbos and holiday, thousands of chassidim from Poland and Galicia would come to Sosnowiec, where the Rebbe lived before the Second World War. The Rebbe would conduct the proceedings in the old Radomsker manner, reciting Torah, singing Shabbes songs and sharing meals.

He possessed a huge and valuable personal library, containing old manuscripts and prints, that was reputed to be the second-largest private library in Poland, surpassed only by the collection of the Rebbe of Ger. Each year the Radomsker Rebbe would spend large sums of money to buy old writings and books.

In the aftermath of the turmoil created by World War I, the Rebbe perceived the need for a new method of chassidic education. In 1926, he announced his plan to establish a network of yeshivas called Keser Torah. Soon after, eight yeshivas were opened in Będzin, Podgórze, Chrzanów, Wolbrom, Oświęcim, Częstochowa, Łódź and Kraków. The Rebbe paid for the entire operation, including staff salaries, food, and student lodging, from his own personal funds.

A yeshiva for advanced students was established in Sosnowiec, and he appointed his son-in-law,

Rabbi David Moshe Rabinowicz, to head it. Rabbi David Moshe also served as the dean of the entire Keser Torah network, monitoring students' progress, delivering lessons, and administering the end of the semester tests.

Over the following decade, more yeshivas were opened, and by the eve of World War II, there were thirty-six branches of Keser Torah with thousands of students in Poland. The yeshivas were disbanded after the German occupation, and most of the students were murdered in the Holocaust.

When the war broke out, the Rebbe who was resting in the Carpathian Mountains, returned to Łódź. and was encouraged to flee Poland while it was still possible. He refused saying that he wanted to remain with his Jewish brethren. He arrived in Warsaw around Chanuka 1939-40, initially living in Dzielna Street, and subsequently relocating to the apartment of his Chassid, R' Nosson Ehrlich, at 30, Nowolipki Street.

Several times plans were made for his escape, but the Rebbe always refused the chance to flee. According to the testimony of a Radomsker chassid, Abba Bornstein of London, he repeatedly telephoned the Rebbe in Sosnowiec during August 1939, with an offer to fly him to England. To this the Rebbe responded, "And where shall I leave the Jews?" His chassidim completed arrangements to fly him to Italy by mid-1940, but he refused, saying, „I want to be with all the Jews”.

The Radomsker Rebbe was one of the prominent chassidic Rebbes incarcerated in the Warsaw ghetto. Notwithstanding the danger, he refused to shave off his beard. He was listed as a worker with the burial society and wore the Pinkert cap, and later registered in Shultz. Due to the efforts of the manager of Shultz, Avraham Hendel, a work permit was obtained for the Rebbe despite the fact that he was over the age of fifty. Hendel, with great difficulty, managed to convince the authorities that "Rabinowicz" was an irreplaceable expert in his trade. Unfortunately, the Rebbe spent much time in his apartment, a fact which eventually led to his death.

In the Warsaw ghetto he taught the tractate Taanis. With his eyesight deteriorating due to

diabetes, he continued to learn Torah mainly by heart. During the ghetto period, regular prayer services were conducted in his apartment, and on Shabbes the Rebbe made a tish for shalosh seudos, with many chassidim attending. The Rebbe's son-in-law, rabbi David Moshe Rabinowicz, also regularly gave lessons in the Warsaw ghetto, and composed many novel Torah thoughts, which his students recorded.

According to Hillel Seidman, despite the danger involved, the Radomsker Rebbe continued to visit other Rebbes. Additionally, he continued to generously give charity for the needy, even though he was at this stage without resources, and surviving on loans.

The Rebbe and all the members of his family, including his only daughter, son-in-law, and their infant son, were killed during the action on the 1st of August 1942. When the Nazis stormed his house with the intention of deporting its residents, the Rebbe refused to leave, saying, „I know you've come to kill me.” On the 18th of the Hebrew month of Av, 1942, the Rebbe and his family were murdered by the Germans in their apartment. Binyamin Kaminer, the son of the well-known community leader Meshulam Kaminer, managed to organise for the Radomsker Rebbe to be buried in the Warsaw cemetery on Okopowa Street (Gęsia), where an ohel marks his grave until this day.

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*Photo:* the Great Synagogue in Radomsko (Wikipedia); photo at the Current News site:

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