

The Jewish Weekly

Testing the Rabbis on Secular Subjects

By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

The days when the Czar ruled in Russia were unbearable for the Jews. It was almost impossible to believe anything could be worse. Anti-Semitism and evil decrees were constant. Every few years, wholesale massacres of Jews called ["pogroms"] popped up like poison mushrooms. But in this atmosphere of constant oppression and suffering, Judaism miraculously survived and even flourished! As the Torah says: "The more the Jews were oppressed, the more they were fruitful...." (Ex. 1:12).



Pyotr Stolypin (yemach shemo)

One of the biggest enemies of the Jews, and of mankind in general, was the Czar's Minister of the Interior - an evil, sadistic despot by the name of Stolypin. He was always making new oppressive rules and laws to terrify the people, secure his own power and, whenever possible, torture the Jews.

One awful day, the leading rabbis of Russia were notified that, under the direction of Stolypin, the government was passing a new law requiring all rabbis to pass a series of exams in secular subjects. Any rabbi failing to meet the requirements would not be allowed to lead a congregation. The idea behind this was to "normalize" Judaism and open the doors to "new" rabbis who cared nothing for such ancient ideas as "G-d" and "commandments," thus lowering the resistance of the next generation to, G-d forbid, conversion.

The rabbi leaders decided to meet in Petersburg to decide what to do. Hundreds of devout geniuses were present for one purpose: how to assure the decree would fail by opposing it in every way possible. But the cunning and ruthless Stolypin had already anticipated their opposition. On the second day of the convention, a messenger of the government entered the hall on his orders, took the podium and called for attention, and announced to the hushed crowd of rabbis:

"The Minister of the Interior wishes to inform you, in the name of His Majesty the Czar, that he fervently hopes that the rabbis are willing to support and join His Majesty the Czar in his new program. But if not, His Majesty the Czar will find it difficult to support and protect the Jews against those who threaten them, and it could certainly be that 101 cities will suffer pogroms at the hands of Anti-Semitic mobs."

The rabbis went pale with fear, and a deathly silence fell on them. These were no empty words. Just a few years earlier, they had actually come true; thousands of bloodthirsty Russian peasants suddenly swept through Jewish areas, destroying Jewish shops, homes and property, and sadistically killing and maiming thousands of Jews as they went. It seemed clear that resistance would be pointless, and, although there were still a few rabbis who had not yet taken the podium, it was doubtful that anyone could change the atmosphere of defeat in the air.



Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, and Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik z"l

The next to speak was supposed to be the Rebbe of Lubavitch, Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn (called the Rashab an acronym of his name). But he requested that he be allowed to speak last. So, the holy genius Rabbi Chaim of Brisk, the great Rosh Yeshiva and leader of the Lithuanian-style rabbis of his generation, stood and heroically declared that, despite the threats, he was opposed to the government idea. But it was obvious that he spoke with a heavy heart. It seemed clear that the outcome would be concession.

Finally, the Rebbe Reshab's turn came to speak. The Rebbe was not a healthy man and was often obliged to see doctors or take treatments for weakness. But here, he stood straight and spoke with a clear, loud voice that all could hear. (These same words would be spoken by his son and successor, Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, years later against the Communists.)

"It is not through our will that we are in exile, and not with our will that we will leave it... G-d has put us in exile and He alone will gather us from the four corners of the earth through our righteous Moshiach. Until then, all the nations on the face of the earth must know that only our bodies are in exile, for no power can rule or imprison our souls!"

"We must announce in public, for all to hear, that what is relevant to Judaism - Torah, the Commandments and even our customs - no one can change or influence. We must declare, with the

It Once Happened..

greatest Jewish stubbornness drawn from thousands of years of Jewish self-sacrifice, 'Touch not my anointed and my nation of prophets do not harm.'"

He then raised his arms and cried out, "Jews! Sanctify G-d's name in public!" (i.e. Be willing to die for the Torah.) Then, he fainted. Immediately, Rabbi Chaim of Brisk stood and shouted that he too opposed the new decree, even at the cost of his life. A vote was taken and it was decided: not one rabbi would support the decree.

Meanwhile, the Rebbe Rashab was taken to his room and a doctor was rushed in to treat him. Still, it wasn't long before two mammoth soldiers appeared there also, with orders to arrest him and take him to prison. It was only with the greatest effort and maneuvering, including the doctor's objections, that his sentence was reduced to house arrest and finally dropped altogether.

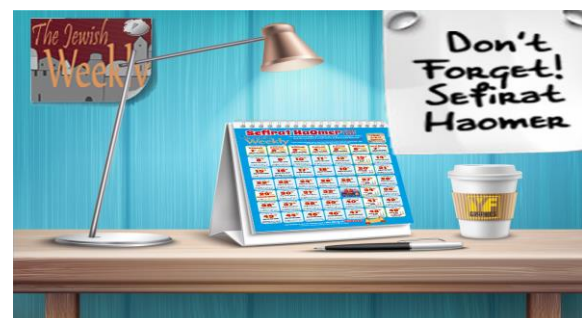
Several of the great rabbis with Rabbi Chaim of Brisk at their head came to visit the Rebbe to see how he was. They found him sitting in a chair at his desk weeping...obviously over the impending law. Rabbi Chaim put his comforting hand on the Rebbe's shoulder and said, "Lubavitcher Rebbe, why are you crying? After all, we did all we could! Now it is up to G-d to do the rest!"

"True", said the Rebbe. "We did all we could. Yet the decree has not been averted!"

Calming down a bit, he continued. "If a paid factory worker does everything possible to fix a broken machine, he can go home and sleep peacefully whether he succeeded or not. But not the factory owner; he won't sleep until the problem is solved!"

Unexplainably, however, the decree was never mentioned again by the government, and, thank G-d, Stolypin's threats of pogroms also never materialized.

Modified and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the rendition of Rabbi Tuvia Bolton in a weekly email a few years ago, which was based on an article in Kfar Chabad Magazine (#1017, pg 45) and a lesson in Toras Menachem (vol. 3, pg. 210).



Shabbat Times - Parshat Acharei - Kedoshim			
	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	6:49	8:06	8:43
Tel Aviv	7:05	8:08	8:40
Haifa	6:57	8:09	8:44
Be'er Sheva	7:06	8:07	8:42



Over the Chin it is Also Sufficient

By Rabbi Sholom-DovBer Avtzon

The "maskilim" were Jews who disdained Mitvah observance, and openly promoted and championed for the obligation of Jews to study secular subjects. They challenged the traditional education that Jewish children were receiving, and presented themselves before the Czar and his ministers as "enlightened" ["maskilim"] Jews (An early version of "Reformed" Jewry).

The cooperation between the Russian government and the maskilim - including their battle against the Rabbinical reign and religious Jewry in general - began during the leadership of the Mittlerer ['Middle'] (i.e. 'in-between' the first (Rabbi Shneur Zalman) and third (Rebbe) Rebbe) and intensified during the thirty-eight years of the leadership of his son-in-law and successor, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, known as the Tzemach Tzedek.

In 1858, when the latter was asked to participate in yet a third conference with government officials and representatives of the maskilim, he declined a second time, and instead sent his seventh son, the Maharash, to represent him. After eventually becoming his father's successor, the Rebbe Maharash remained at the forefront of the battle against the maskilim, openly opposing their agenda.

During that time, in the city of Zhitomer lived a passionate maskil by the name of Mr. Bergman. He wanted to propose to the government that a decree should be enforced making it mandatory for all rabbis to be fluent in the Russian language and possess some basic knowledge in secular studies. (In fact, since there were certain official functions the rabbi of a community was required to do for the government, such as recording births, marriages, and so on, in most major cities and towns the government appointed their own "rabbis" who were knowledgeable in the above "requirements.") Now Bergman was proposing that all rabbis be forced to learn the Russian language and secular subjects, even those who were not government rabbis and so did not have these responsibilities.)

After much planning and deliberation with his fellow maskilim, he wrote all of his proposal on paper in detail, specifying the various stages of the decree's implementation. They then succeeded in arranging an audience with the Minister of Education for a formal presentation.

To demonstrate that Bergman had tremendous support, three of the wealthiest Jews in Russia accompanied him to the meeting. They were the magnates Mr. Varshabsky and Mr. Vavelberg, who had committed to finance the entire program so it wouldn't cost the government anything, and Baron Ginsburg, who agreed to also subsidize additional efforts of the maskilim.

After the magnates were cordially greeted by the minister, they presented the proposal's author to him,

who in turn invited Bergman to present his anti-Torah decree. But as soon as Bergman opened his mouth to speak, a frightening event took place. His tongue extended itself, as if it were falling out of his mouth, and remained hanging over his chin! Bergman was unable to utter a single word, yet nor was he able to withdraw his tongue back into his mouth.

Everyone in attendance was startled and shaken at this unbelievable occurrence. The meeting was duly canceled to enable the unfortunate Mr. Bergman to visit a doctor. Soon, different expert doctors attempted to help Bergman regain movement of his tongue and his speech, ultimately resorting in desperation to performing an operation. However, their efforts accomplished nothing, and he died shortly afterwards.

Meanwhile, at the same time this meeting was taking place, the Rebbe Maharash was davening (praying) at the Ohel (lit. 'tent' - a structure over the burial site) of his father, the Tzemach Tzedek. When he returned home he was in unusually good spirits. Smiling, he said to his son-in-law, Reb Moshe Leib Ginsburg (Not to be confused with Baron Ginsburg): "The [ten] spies were punished [for speaking evil about Eretz Yisrael] by having their tongues extend until their stomachs (Num. 14:37 with Rashi's explanation). But is it really necessary [for the tongue] to reach that far? I think that if it stretches out] over the chin it is also sufficient!" It was only later that the Rebbe's cryptic words were understood to refer to Bergman. (The Rebbe Maharash was the only one of the seven Lubavitcher Rebbes to be referred to as a "Baal Shem Tov style [revealed miracle making] Rebbe." We see here how the Rebbe Maharash resorted to a Baal Shem Tov type conduct to see what was happening far away and publicly counteract it).

At that time, Baron Ginsburg sided with the maskilim who desired to destroy traditional chinuch ([pure Jewish] education). Their pretext was that Jews should be well versed in the Russian language and other secular studies so they could get along better with Russian citizenry, and they denied the fact that their real intent was to erode traditional Judaism. To that goal, he had pledged to provide the money needed to cover the expenses of bringing a group of maskilim from Berlin to Russia.

To prevent this from materializing, the Rebbe sent for Reb Nachum Hermant, a wealthy businessman and an askan (advocate on behalf of the Jewish community) who lived not far from Petersburg (At that time, it was forbidden for a Jew to live in the capital unless he was a merchant or the like), instructing him to come to Lubavitch. He then directed him to visit Baron Ginsburg and convey to him the following warning:

"If you continue to support the maskilim in this new endeavor of theirs, I [the Rebbe] will turn you into a pauper. To demonstrate that I have this ability, I am informing you that every stock you will purchase until the tenth day of this upcoming month will cause you a loss."

Hearing these words, Baron Ginsburg trembled and immediately instructed Reb Nachum to inform the Rebbe that he was withdrawing his pledge of support to them. He then said: "I would like the Rebbe to instruct me what to do with the money I pledged. For what purpose should it be used?"

"Use it to build a shul," the Rebbe replied. Obeying the Rebbe's instructions, the Baron built the Kupetcheskye Synagogue in Petersburg. Since it was built at the Rebbe's behest, it was decided that the official nusach (prayer text) of the shul be [the Chabad] "Nusach Ari."

Reprinted from an excerpt from the 7th Lubavitcher Rebbe's personal journal, Reshimas Hayoman, pp. 274-275.

Torah Compilations With Yossi

Parshat Acharei-Kedoshim

Over so many years people have asked me, "Yossi, what drives you to do what you do? When everyone is running away from an incident you run to it!" to which the answer is in this week's Parsha, in the 5th Aliyah that we will be reading tomorrow, it says "לא תעמוד על דם רעך - You shall not stand by your fellow's blood" and then two paragraphs later it says, "ואהבת לרעך כמוך - Love your neighbor as yourself."

So a question is asked, How can the Torah demand that one love a stranger as much as oneself?

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, explains it in the following way: Every Jew consists of two components: a גוף (body) and a נשמה (soul). While all Jews are separated by virtue of different bodies, they are like one with regard to the נשמה. This is because all נשמות (souls) are a part of Hashem, and Hashem is the father of us all. With this realization, it is easy to love the other Jew as oneself, because through our נשמות we are all one.

Furthermore, the word "ממך" seems superfluous. Shouldn't the Torah simply have said "ואהבת לרעך - Love your neighbor"?

The Tal Oraot answers that regarding the creation of man, the Torah says: "בצלם אלוהים ברא אותי" - In the image of G-d He created him". The reason a Jew should love another Jew as himself is because of "ממך" - the common denominator that both are "בצלם אלוהים" - "in the image of G-d."

The Midrash Tanchuma says that although many people have love and affection for others, "Every craftsman hates his rival of the same profession." Therefore, the Torah emphasizes that not only "ואהבת לרעך - you shall love your fellow" - but even if he is "ממך" - in your field of work - you must still make every effort to love him.

I personally have taken it to mean that if Heaven forbid, something ever happened to me, Someone should be there the way I am for them. This is what drives me to get on a plane and transport a patient to wherever they need to go to get the best medical care.

This week Hatzolah organizations worldwide, under the international Hatzolah organization joined together to jointly raise 10 million dollars. Hatzolah Air, which I am a proud member of has also joined. This fundraiser is essential for us to fuel our flights and to continue our life saving work all over the world.

I turn to you on behalf of our 400 strong volunteer members to ask that you open your hearts and your wallets and help us by contributing generously during this year's Hatzalahthon (<https://hatzalahthon.com/hatzolair/yf>). Our volunteer members, who make themselves available 24/7/365 to respond to anywhere in the world during someone's emergency, are counting on your continued financial support, so we can continue to fuel our response to those in need.

For more information, feel free to reach out to me, or check out www.hatzolair.org.

So let's show our love for each other and let's pray with all our hearts, for the healing of all those injured, for the safe return of those taken as hostages, as well as Divine Protection for our brave IDF soldiers, police officers, medical professionals, firefighters, ZAKA members, security personnel and all those citizens protecting us in Israel as well as around the world, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children or parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, safe, quiet and sweet Shabbat and Pesach Sheni Sameach.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

Parshat Acharei Mot
NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 28
MITZVOT ASEH: 2
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 26
NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 80
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1170
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4294

Parshat Kedoshim
NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 51
MITZVOT ASEH: 13
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 38
NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 64
NUMBER OF WORDS: 868
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 3229

HAFTORA:
Ashkenazim: Amos 9:7 - 15
Chabad & Sephardim: Yechezkel 20:2 - 20

שני Pesach Sheni is Monday, 14 Iyar - May 12, 2025.

ל"ג בעומר Lag B'Omer is Friday, 18 Iyar - May 16, 2025.

This Shabbat we study Chapter 3 of Pirkei Avot

אחרי מות - קדושים

This week is sponsored in honor
of the 50th Wedding anniversary
of my parents,
Gershon & Rivka Fraenkel

לג בעומר - י"ח אייר

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