



A Fortunate Mix-up

Reb Boruch Yosef Kozliner, lived in the city of Disna. He was referred to as “Reb Boruch Der Melamed” which was no surprise because he was a Melamad. Reb Boruchs’ sons learned in Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch.

Conscription to the czar’s army was very dangerous for any young man, but especially so for a Jew. In addition to the anti-Semitism, there was practically no way to keep mitzvos in the czar’s army.

This corrupt system begged for a little help from the hands of “adjusters”. In other words, it was possible to avoid conscription into the czar’s army by bribing the military bureaucracy. And the best place for this was Disna, a hotbed for this underground criminal activity. From Army doctors, to officers, to office clerks to garbage collectors, all were only too happy to accept a “small” monetary gift to free someone from military service. This underground custom flourished for many years.

The Lubavticher Bochrin had their own address, their special contact in this most important place. Reb Boruch Yosef was instrumental in freeing young Jewish men from military service. These young men would be sent to him by the Vaad Pidyon Shvuyim and he would take care of their problems. Reb Boruch Yosef, however, unlike most of the population who took their cut for the smallest favor, took no money for his troubles; he defied Russian law, with all the risks entailed, solely to fulfill the

mitzvah of Pidyon Shvuyim.

All good things come to an end. Someone informed the government of what was going on and the entire organization began to unravel into chaos. A special delegation was dispatched from the Russian capital in Petersburg to investigate the charges and to act upon their findings. The whole city was thrown into panic, chickens and geese ran in the streets, for there was no household in Disna that had not had a hand in the most profitable economy in town, bribing government officials, in one form or another.

The city was rapidly emptying, the investigation was finding too much evidence; each new charge was followed by an arrest. Scores of people were thrown into prison – both sides of the table suffered both the governmental officials accused of receiving bribes and the unfortunate citizens charged with having offered them. Fresh accusations were leveled every day, as more and more people were arrested and detained. The members of the delegation were determined to investigate each and every detail thoroughly.

Well, in came the delegation and out went Reb Boruch Yosef. Yes, he left for Lubavitch. For Reb Boruch Yosef was terrified, his activities to free Yeshiva Bochrin from the draft went back a great many years.

Thankfully, he arrived on one of the days the Rebbe Rashab granted

Yechidus, (the Rebbe used to have Yechidus on Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday, and once a week on Monday during the summer months in Zaulsha.)

Reb Boruch Yosef asked Reb Nachman the Gabbai, to let him speak to the Rebbe. Reb Nachman abruptly informed him, that he would have to wait at least several days before he could go in. Reb Boruch Yosef was not a familiar face to Reb Nachman, as he generally only came to Lubavitch for Rosh Hashana, and even then he did not always go in for Yechidus.

When Reb Boruch Yosef realized that he would not be given a turn, he wrote a quick Tzettel to the Rebbe, telling him he had something urgent to discuss, and that Reb Nachman refused to let him inside. He handed the Tzettel to the next person about to go into the Rebbe and asked him to deliver it.

Reb Boruch Yosef’s clever plan worked. The Rebbe read his note, and sent for him at once.

Once inside, Reb Boruch Yosef poured his heart out to the Rebbe. Where could he seek refuge, which city should he flee to? Should he go to Kremenchug or Poltava? To return to Disna was out of the question as his life was in danger there.

The Rebbe listened as Reb Boruch spelled out the two alternatives, and then paused for a minute, deep in thought. Then he asked two questions:

“Does anyone know that you are here in Lubavitch?” asked the Rebbe.

“No one, except for my wife,” he replied.

“And was absolutely everything you did to free the young men for military service done for the mitzvah itself, and not for monetary compensation?”

“I did everything honestly and faithfully,” Boruch Yosef answered.

After a slightly longer pause, the Rebbe took out his watch and checked the time. “I think you can still find a cab driver to bring you to the train station in time for the next train to Disna. In case it is too late, however, return here and my wagon will take you there. Travel in peace, and may Hashem be with you.” He said ushering Reb Boruch Yosef out the door.

His mind awhirl, Reb Boruch Yosef stood stock still. How could he return to Disna? This was not the answer he expected. This wasn’t even part of the question. He asked the Rebbe which of two cities he should settle in to escape the wrath of the Russian government, Disna was neither.

Oh, but there was no time for Reb Boruch Yosef to stand and speculate, he had a coach to catch. He hurried off in the direction of the cab drivers, and took the last wagon to the train station. By morning he was back in Disna.

For the next few days Reb Boruch Yosef sat at home, broken and depressed, expecting the authorities to knock on his door and drag him off any minute. More and more people were being carted off to jail every day, and Reb Boruch Yosef figured it was just a matter of time until his turn came. Anyone with even the slightest connection to bribing officials was being sought. Afraid to show his face in public, Reb Boruch Yosef remained indoors, fearful and desperate.

Not long later he was paid a surprise visit by his friend the Chassid Reb Yaakov Reuven Meller. “Mazal Tov!” he

cried as he entered the door. “Your salvation has come, you are saved!” he announced to the dumbfounded melamed.

Reb Yaakov then related the details behind this news. As a vegetable seller Reb Yaakov made the rounds of the Disna aristocracy, selling fruit and vegetables he had grown on his property. Some of the fancy homes he visited belonged to high government employees, who’s’ wives were among his regular customers.

That day, Reb Yaakov had gone to the home of a highly placed deputy officer to settle a bill. When he got there he heard the sound of heart rending sobs and weeping coming from within. The deputy officer’s wife, eyes red with tears, opened the door and invited him in. She could not contain her sorrow and soon spilled the reason behind her grief.

Her husband was the deputy to the main supervisor of the central offices. Many years previously her husband had been involved in the underground acceptance of bribes to “fix” papers. When the superior officer got wind of the bribe, he too began to accept bribes and soon was heavily involved in his newfound source of revenue. Since that time, however, the deputy officer had been uninvolved in the whole corrupt business, and was free of any wrongdoing. Now the governmental commission from Petersburg had caught the superior officer and sent him off to prison. Of the entire office staff only her husband and the office clerk remained on the job, everyone else was in prison.

That morning, the deputy had in his pocket a letter informing on the illegal activities of one Boruch Yosef Kozliner. He was planning to hand it over to the governmental commission that was due to visit his office that very morning.

But a wrench was thrown in his plans. A letter was sitting in the morning mail. Had he known its contents he would have fled for his life.

The imprisoned superior officer was burning with rage. Why should he be the only one to suffer, when he had only followed the example set by his deputy? So he sent a letter hoping to gain a companion in prison.

Morning found the two remaining employees sorting the incoming mail. The clerk opened one letter and got the surprise of his life. Here he had a beautiful document denouncing the deputy officer, spelling out his past crimes in full detail.

The two men had been sitting on opposite sides of the desk. “Look at this!” the clerk cried, “You’re in big trouble now.” The deputy paled. He began to plead with the clerk for his life. The delegation was due to arrive any minute! At first the clerk was afraid to withhold the information from the investigators; he himself could be thrown into jail for withholding information! But after listening to the deputy’s pleas, he agreed to hand over the letter. The deputy gratefully took the letter from the clerk and put it in his pocket.

Suddenly the door burst open and marched the dreaded commission. The two employees were shaking; their hearts in their boots. The exact illegal activity the commission was investigating had taken place seconds before! In his fear and confusion, the deputy reached into his pocket, and handed a letter to the officials. Oh the sorrow! It was the wrong letter! Instead of informing on a Boruch Kazliner, he had informed on himself, handing them his very own verdict.

The clerk immediately ran to tell the deputy’s wife what had happened. She now related the entire story to Reb Yaakov.

As you can well imagine, Reb Boruch Yosef lived the rest of his days out in peace and harmony.

(Shmuos V’Sippurim)