



In Merit of the Rebbe

A Simchas Torah Story

Rabbi Levin relates:

It was Simchas Torah. We went out on *Tahalucha*, the customary Lubavitcher march through neighboring communities of Crown Heights, to give over the Rebbe's Sichos and bring *Simcha* to the shuls of Williamsburg. Anyone who remembers the more difficult years between Satmar and Lubavitch, remembers the risky times for a Chabad Chossid trying to fulfill the Rebbe's directives in Williamsburg.

That year I clearly saw – exactly as the Rebbe always spoke – how much the Friediker Rebbe helped pave the way in putting the foundations of Yiddishkeit in the United States.

We came to the shul of the Lantzuter Chassidim, formerly presided by the “Lantzuter Rav,” *Zt”l*, where we were warmly welcomed. Naturally they allowed us to give over a *sicha* from the Rebbe, followed by some joyous Yom Tov dancing. As we prepared to leave, one of the shul's elder Chassidim asked us to wait.

“I want to tell you a unique story,” he said. Naturally, we stayed to listen.

OPPOSING VIEWS

The Elder Chossid began:

Once, during the early years of the current Rebbe's leadership, two *Bochurim* from Crown Heights came here. At the time the “Lantzter Rav” was still alive.

I was then just a young boy. My father *A”h* was the shul's caretaker, and the *Bochurim* approached him and

asked if they could give over a *sicha*. My father explained that the shul had a *rav*, whom they had to ask.

The *Bochurim* didn't waste any time. They went straight up to the Lantzuter Rav. The whole congregation watched this entertaining sight. Standing there among the adults, I also wondered what the *rav*'s response would be. To my surprise, he happily agreed to let them give over the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *sicha*. The truth is, since I knew quite well the community's position on the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his Chassidim, the conduct of the Lantzuter Rav struck me as highly unusual.

In the congregation was a highly learned and respected Jew who served as the shul's president. He was also known for his financial largess. When he saw that the Lantzuter Rav had given the *Bochurim* permission to say something from their Rebbe, whose entire approach was an affront to Satmar's – he grew furious. He turned to the *Bochurim* and said, “You have no permission to speak here. The *rav* was just being polite. No one gives a *d'var Torah* in the name of Chabad in this shul! Get out of here!”

Total silence engulfed the shul. This was sheer drama, the kind no one present would ever forget.

The *rav* replied softly but firmly: “I gave my permission – and they can give over the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.”

The president responded with respect but equal determination: “There is a tremendous dispute with Lubavitch...” alluding to the anti-Chabad position of the Satmar Rebbe and the ideological alliance between Satmar and Lantzut.

Courtesy of The Avner Institute. Special thanks to Rabbi Menachem Kircshenbaum.



Yet the other remained steadfast. “I am the rav here, and my decision stands. I request that these *Bochurim* who came from the *Beis Midrash* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe say Chassidus in his name.”

The president threw down the gauntlet. “If they speak, I am leaving the shul and resigning!”

Nevertheless, the Lantzuter Rav would not be intimidated. “I do not demand that you or anyone else leave the shul. You can do as you wish, but these *Bochurim* will speak words of Chassidus in their Rebbe’s name.”

The man arrogantly stormed out. The students spoke, as the congregation fidgeted in turmoil. Together with several leading community members, my father approached the Lantzuter Rav and asked him to explain why he had acted in such a manner.

“With all due respect to these Chabad *Bochurim*,” my

father said, “they had stopped by and would just go within a short period of time, while the pillar of the community has just walked out. Was it so important that these Lubavitchers come to the shul? Was it worth the price?”

The rav answered, “In regard to our honorable colleague, I can assure you that he’ll be back. As to why I was so stubborn about letting the *Bochurim* speak, I have to tell you a story that happened to me. Then you’ll understand everything.”

TIME OF TRIAL

The Rav began:

Prior to the Second World War, there was a large and vibrant Jewish community in the city of Lantzut, located in southeastern Poland. Several thousand Yidden lived there before Rosh Hashanah 5700 and the occupation by the Nazis *Ym*’s. Ten days later, on Yom Kippur, the entire Jewish population, myself included, was expelled for allegedly being Communists. We were driven to Soviet-occupied territory, towards the San River.

A stranger in a strange land, I wandered from place to place, looking for somewhere I could rest from my weary journey. Then one day I was stopped by the Soviet authorities. Since I had neither identity papers nor knowledge of Russian, I was placed under arrest. After a hasty trial, I was exiled to the frozen wastelands of Siberia.

My hardships didn’t end there. Slanderous charges were lodged against me that I had passed secret information onto the Poles. This of course amounted to sedition and, if convicted, a death sentence! Twelve people testified to my guilt. Furthermore, since I was a rabbi, the case aroused a great deal of interest, and many people came to this kangaroo court.

Under normal circumstances, there was no chance for me to survive such proceedings. Yet, I experienced a miracle.

After the “witnesses” completed their testimonies, the judge pounded his gavel, turned to me, and said, “You are charged with violating statute number... The fact that you show ingratitude to Mother Russia, paying her



with evil for the good she has done for you, after welcoming you with open arms from the fires of Poland, and your willingness to assist the enemies of the Soviet people – all this pales in comparison to your greatest crime. You are a ‘rabbiner,’ a Jew, and it is written in your Torah, ‘Pray for the welfare of the government.’ Therefore, as a ‘rabbiner,’ how can you possibly act contrary to your Torah and commit treason against your country?”

“Your Honor is correct,” I replied. “I am a practicing rabbi, and our Torah condemns such conduct. However, it never crossed my mind for a moment to offer aid to our country’s enemies. All the testimony brought against me by these witnesses is completely false. I have never committed treason against Russia and I never will.”

To my astonishment, the judge accepted my plea. He rapped his gavel again, declared me innocent of all charges, and ordered my immediate release!

I was stunned. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I’d be set free. When the hall emptied and I left the courtroom, the judge approached me and placed a note in my hand. He had written that he wanted to see me in his home – at eleven p.m.

When I arrived, I couldn’t believe my eyes. The door was opened by a woman wearing a *sheitel*. The judge welcomed me with great respect and showed me that he was wearing a *tallis katan* underneath his Western garb. He then offered me a seat in his living room and proceeded to tell me what had impelled him to clear me of all charges.

FINDING FAVOR

The Judge began:

Just before joining the Red Army, I went to the Frierdiker Rebbe to receive a *Brocha*. The Rebbe gazed at me with his holy eyes and said to me cryptically, “When you reach a position of greatness, don’t forget to do a favor for another Jew.”

The years passed. I joined the army, where I was quickly promoted. After my discharge, having proven

my loyalty to Russia, I received high-ranking positions with the local Ministry of Justice, eventually being appointed judge.

When you arrived in my hall, my eyes began to dim. I saw the rows of witnesses before me, and I realized that if I dared try to rule in your favor, the people in the

“I SUDDENLY ENVISIONED MY HOLY AUDIENCE WITH THE REBBE FROM YEARS AGO. I AGAIN SAW THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE STARING AT ME WITH THOSE PIERCING EYES...”

courtroom would tear us apart. I was about to render my decision in accordance with Soviet law, when I suddenly envisioned my holy audience with the Rebbe from years ago. I again saw the Lubavitcher Rebbe staring at me with those piercing eyes and saying, “When you reach a position of greatness – don’t forget to do a favor for another Jew.”

I decided then and there that no matter what happened, I would risk my life to exonerate you. Hashem helped, and He placed the right words into my mind which, *Baruch Hashem*, resulted in your acquittal and our both leaving the courtroom, safe and sound.

With those words the rav concluded his tale. Deeply touched, all those who had gathered to hear him now understood why he had acted so passionately about letting the Lubavitcher bochorim give over a *sicha* of the Rebbe. ■