

The Journey Planned in Heaven

“Men be prepared. We will resume our maneuvering shortly. First through Malensk and then we will march towards central Russia,” announced the commander.

To most of the platoon of Russian soldiers based near Lubavitch, the command was just another military order. The details were of little significance; a soldier does what he is told. However, for the small group of Jewish soldiers who were part of this regiment, the news struck a devastating blow. Having been so close to Lubavitch, enabled them to maintain a reasonable level of Yiddishkeit, obtain kosher food, and go to Shul once in a while. To add to their anguish, the transfer would take place around the time of Pesach. According to their commanding officer’s plan, during Pesach they would be in the midst of a march deep in the Russian mainland. To celebrate Yom Tov under such conditions was an impossible feat; there were no Jewish communities for miles around.

WE NEED A BROCHA

Full of disappointment and worry, the soldiers decided to seek the advice of the Tzemach Tzedek. One representative was chosen and he went as a messenger to Lubavitch.

Hearing the situation and concerns of the soldiers, particularly the difficulties

they would have observing Pesach during their maneuver, the Tzemach Tzedek suggested “Approach your captain with an alternative route for the journey.” Taken aback by this audacious idea, the soldier listened on, “Point out to him, that the cities on his planned itinerary are more than a single day’s journey apart, this is a considerably large setback as the Platoon will be forced to setup camp for the night in the wilderness.

“A far more convenient route for everyone would be to pass through White Russia, stopping at Orsha, Shklov, Kopust, and Mohilev. The distance between these cities is much shorter, making it traversable in a day’s journey. This will give you the opportunity to gain access to the Jewish communities along the way.”

Before sending him on his way, the Tzemach Tzedek added, “I also have a personal request. You will probably be in Shklov on the first two days of Yom Tov. When you go to Shul on the first night of Pesach, you will be invited to the home of one of the locals. While you should accept his invitation for the meals, adamantly refuse his offer for you to sleep by him. Rather just excuse yourself and spend the night in the Shul known as the ‘Green Shul.’

“Finally, on the last days of Pesach you will be in Mohilev. There too, as with the first days, accept any invitation for the meals, but once again decline the offer to

spend the night in a private home, rather, insist on sleeping in the communal guesthouse.”

Upon his return to the base, the messenger relayed the Tzemach Tzedek’s bold suggestion. As the initial commotion died down, one soldier voiced the sentiments that were gnawing at each of their hearts: “His words ring with logic, but how can we dare bring it up? Who knows what the captain is capable of doing if he feels insulted at our mere suggestion that his plan is less than brilliant?”

A CHANGE OF PLANS

As the day of the march loomed gloomily ahead, not a single one of them had the courage to approach their short-tempered captain.

Finally, with little time to spare and the comfort of the Rebbe’s Brocha in their minds, they decided to act.

With trepidation, they presented the alternative plan to the captain and braced themselves for his outburst at their insolence. Much to their surprise however, he was both impressed and willing. As the brilliance of the proposed plan registered, he blurted out in disbelief, “Your suggestion is very good. How did you come up with such an idea, surely it is beyond the ability of you simple men?”

“To tell you the truth, honorable captain, it was not our own idea, but that of a great sage, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of



Lubavitch,” they answered.

With great joy, the Jewish soldiers joined their fellow men on the march to Shklov and arrived there just in time for Pesach.

The Jewish soldiers were given the next two days off, and hurried to the local Shul to seek arrangements for their Yom Tov needs. There was no shortage of families who were eager to host the soldiers and they went off with their gracious hosts.

At the end of the Seder, the soldier who had received a private Shlichus from the Tzemach Tzedek, prepared to leave despite the insistence of his host that he remain. Entering the ‘Green Shul’, he found himself a quiet corner in which to spend the night.

A TROUBLED SOUL

As he was on the verge of falling into a much needed sleep, he was suddenly awakened by the sounds of a man moaning deeply. Fully awake, he realized that he was not alone in the building and there was an elderly man hunched over the table in obvious distress at the other end of the room. With an eager desire to help this pitiful man, the soldier soothingly asked, “My good man, what is on your mind? Perhaps I can help you?”

“Help me eh...?” the man answered miserably. “Just go back to sleep and ignore me.”

The soldier respectfully backed away, and attempted to go back to sleep, however, the older man’s anguished groaning continued and prevented the soldier from dozing off. “Please share your troubles with me,” he said sympathetically as he approached again. “Perhaps I can ease your pain and we can come up with a solution.”

The soldiers concern and sincerity finally convinced the elderly man to share his woeful tale: “A while back I lost my first wife and, not wanting to remain

a widower, I remarried a woman much younger than myself. I was looking forward to many happy and peaceful years together, but this was not to be. A mere few weeks after our wedding, a traveling orchestra came to town. One of the musicians became friendly with my wife, and... and the next thing I know they had taken all my money... everything I owned... and disappeared. Gone...

“I have nothing to my name and I have no idea how to piece together my fragmented life. With no income or home,

tations to the locals’ homes.

Following the Rebbe’s explicit directives, the soldier left for the night and went to sleep in the communal guesthouse. During the night, a loud commotion and ruckus disturbed his sleep. He got up and saw, much to his distress, that a rowdy group of people had arrived to spend the night in that very guesthouse. Scrutinizing the group closely, the soldier was surprised to see that one of the men and a woman fit precisely the description

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what choice do I have but to sleep here in the Shul,” the man concluded.

Attempting to comfort him, the soldier began, “Maybe I can be of help to you. Our platoon is on a long march into the inland reaches of Russia, on our trek we will be travelling through many towns and villages. Give me a description, as detailed as you can, of your wife and the musician; perhaps I will come across them while we’re on the road. I give you my word to do the best I can to assist you.”

The soldier’s sincere and genuine concern calmed the elderly man and he laid out a detailed description of the pair. With a lighter heart, he finally fell asleep.

A FAMILIAR FACE

The next week, the marching soldiers found themselves in Mohilev, exactly as the Tzemach Tzedek had foretold. Being that it was right before the last two days of YomTov, the Jewish soldiers were again given leave and they accepted invi-

he had been given by the old troubled man in Shklov.

The next morning, before the town was fully awake, the soldier hurried to the house of the local rabbi and desperately banged on the door. Not waiting for a formal welcome he said, “I am so sorry to disturb you, Rabbi, but there is an urgent matter which must be dealt with now, without delay.”

“I believe that I have found his runaway wife and her friend from the orchestra,” he exclaimed, after having related the old man’s sad tale.

The local authorities were quickly contacted and the two troublemakers were immediately arrested. The stolen money and valuables were hunted and returned to their rightful owner. As soon as Pesach was over, the Rabbi arranged a Get and the man was able to rebuild his shattered life thanks to the care and concern of the Tzemach Tzedek. ■