



## Against all Odds

*In honor of Chof Av, we present the following short excerpt of the Rebbe's sicha from Vov Tishrei, 5750, in which the Rebbe discusses his father's incredible mesiras nefesh and courage in standing up to the Communist government, emphasizing one particular instance when he stood steadfast, ensuring the availability of Kosher L'Pesach Matzos to Jews all across Russia:*

### **IMMENSE COURAGE**

The city of Yekatrinoslav- Dnipropetrovsk [where my father served as Rov] was considered to be the *de-facto* capital of southern Russia (the Ukraine), in particular regarding matters pertaining to *Yiddishkeit*.

It is well known regarding the terrible persecution which took place in those days against anything even remotely connected to *Yiddishkeit*; as a result, a delegation was sent by the *rabbonim*, pleading with the government to stop its attacks. However, instead of receiving some form of assistance or help, they were told that the government will not change its stance, and they [the *rabbonim*] must publicize a letter to the world declaring that there is complete "freedom of religion" in Russia, including for Jews!

My father announced that he would not sign such a letter under any circumstances; in fact, he'd publicize that, as a result of the ongoing persecutions, he refused to put his name to such a blatant lie.

In general, although people knew about the hardships and problems that were going on, they were afraid to talk about it publicly; but if they would hear that my father did not sign the letter because of the government-sponsored persecution, other *rabbonim* would also muster the courage and refuse to sign, and there would be an outcry throughout the country!

When the government heard this threat from my father, they caved in and yielded to many of the *Rabbonim's* demands.

### **"MATZOS"**

One of the requests the *rabbonim* made was for a permit to grind *Kosher L'Pesach* flour for Matzos (as kosher as was then possible, under the circumstances). Yekatrinoslav-Dnipropetrovsk was situated near vast grain-producing areas, so it turned out that my father would be the one who would take care of all the arrangements for this flour.

He fearlessly traveled to Moscow and met President Kalinin [head of the Com-

munist government at the time] in person. He managed to convince Kalinin to issue an order to all the government officials of Yekatrinoslav, that under no circumstances were they allowed to make any decisions regarding the making of flour for matzos. If a *mashgiach* appointed by Rabbi Schneerson would say a specific batch of flour was not *Kosher L'Pesach* and should not be used, they must follow the *mashgiach's* directives and not use it. My father managed to accomplish this despite the fact that this would seem to be an attack on Russia: if the flour could not be sold at *Kosher L'Pesach* prices it would have a deprecatory effect on the entire Russian economy, since that region produced flour for the entire country!

Although there was a very real fear that the government would take my father's demands as an assault on them, he was not intimidated. He publicized beforehand that he was planning to travel to Moscow to demand this accommodation from the government; because of



CREDITS: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 104485

# The Modern Day Mikdash

that publicity beforehand, Kalinin was forced to meet with him and give the permit. And, as mentioned, the permit came together with an order to the local government that no one had the right to appoint any *mashgichim* or command them to do anything; nor did the *mashgichim* have to report back to anyone else aside from Rabbi Schneerson, and if Rabbi Schneerson would decide that a certain batch of flour is not *Kosher L'Pesach*, he must be obeyed (although the flour would have to be returned or sold for a cheaper price).

## “HOME BASE”

This was all only possible because in my father's immediate surroundings; in his home, the atmosphere was conducive to this. My mother would constantly ensure that the atmosphere at home was such that my father would be encouraged to withstand any risk and danger, and continue on with his work, despite the very real possibility that the government would accuse not only my father but all those who were close to him, and specifically my mother, with “counter-revolutionary” activities and attempting to destroy the entire country's economy. In fact, there were government officials who had made threats of such nature, and my father was warned by close friends who had connections with the “*Cheka*” (the secret police) of the grave danger he was in (although coming to warn him of the planned punishment was in and of itself a “crime”). ■

(*Hisvaaduyos 5750 vol. 1 p. 62*)

*Reb Avraham Ber Bobroisker, born in 5586 was a chassid of the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe Maharash, and the Rebbe Rashab. An exceptional Oved and Maskil, as a child his father hired the best Melamdin of Homel for him. Although generally reticent by nature, when speaking about chassidus or stories he would open up, and would be more talkative.*

When I reached the age of six, my father took me to Lubavitch for Shavuos, before enrolling me in the cheder. I was informed of this after Pesach, and preparations for the trip began by Lag B'omer.

I remember well how I went in to the Rebbe with my father for yechidus. My father entered the Rebbe's inner room, and I followed him, holding tightly to the corner of his coat. When we approached the place where the Rebbe sat, he raised his eyes and gazed into Tattes's face, and into mine. My father started trembling, and I also became flustered and commenced weeping silently.

The Rebbe stretched out his holy hand to take the pidyon from my father, who stood in his place, paralyzed with fear and at a loss for what to do next. He remained standing in silence, head bowed, eyes flowing with tears. At first he managed to control himself, crying silently; within a few moments he broke into loud weeping. When I saw my father crying like that, my heart fell to pieces and I too began to cry in earnest as I looked into the Rebbe's holy face.

The Rebbe read the pidyon that my father had handed him, and studied it for some time. As he read it, he looked up into father's face, and into mine, from time to time. Then he spoke to my father. As soon as the Rebbe started speaking, Tatte stopped crying. When the Rebbe finished speaking, my father said, “Here is my son,” as he pointed to me and moved me closer to the Rebbe. “I am about to enroll him in the cheder, and I request that the Rebbe bentch him.”

The Rebbe studied me for a moment, then closed his holy eyes. After a few moments he opened them again, looked directly at me, and said, “Study diligently, and do not waste any time. May Hashem help you to become a lamdan and a chassid.” “Amen!” we both exclaimed.

As soon as we emerged from the Rebbe's holy presence we went to the small Shul. My father lifted me onto his shoulders and joined into the