



NO BACKING DOWN

It was a tense meeting. They were somewhere in the middle of Ukraine and the two sides were negotiating. On one side of the table sat a string of Soviet government officials. Facing them, was the Rebbe's father, HoRav Levi Yitzchok Schneerson, the chief rabbi of Yekaterinoslav. The topic at hand: kosher matzah.

As chief rabbi, HoRav Levi Yitzchok would provide the *hechsher* for the flour produced in Ukraine for the purpose of baking matzah. This tradition had been ongoing for a number of years and the officials expected it to continue this year as well. The only problem was that they didn't care if the flour was actually kosher. In fact, they were demanding a blanket *hechsher* before production even started.

In Communist countries the factories belong to the government, with the people running them considered "managers," who oversee the factories for the government. When the government takes over a factory, they try to ensure that everything that enables the product's sale continues without interruption. They had recently taken over this

matzah factory, and one of the necessities in order for the matzah to sell was the *hechsher* of the chief rabbi on the flour.

When they set their demands, they assumed that it would be an easy conversation. "Hello Rabbin, we need your *hechsher*, you say okay, and we leave." And even if the rav would not be prepared to give the *hechsher* so quickly, all they would need to do is explain that if he refuses to give the *hechsher*, it would be his fault that the flour won't sell. Considering that the money from the sale of flour goes straight to the government, by him not giving his *hechsher*, he would be directly interfering with the government's income, and he would become an enemy of the State.

This was not an empty threat. An enemy of the State in a Communist regime meant that the government had full ability to stop the enemy by any means, including arrest and other severe consequences. Add to this the fact that Ukraine was known as the "breadbasket" of the Soviet Union, because most of the wheat was grown there. You therefore have a government very interested

in ensuring that the process goes smoothly, and they needed HoRav Levi Yitzchok's cooperation in providing the *hechsher* on the flour.

The officials were sure they had a quick and easy conversation ahead of them. But they were wrong.

When presented with the demand and the threat, HoRav Levi Yitzchok answered them measuredly: "If you give me free reign to watch over the grinding of the flour—to set up my own *mashgichim* and that the workers will listen to my instructions—I will gladly place my *hechsher* on the flour. If, however, I will not be allowed to appoint my own *mashgichim*, I will be unable to give a *hechsher*. Not only that, but I will publicize to the entire Jewish community that this flour is not under my *hashgacha*."

The officials repeated their demands, that they wanted a preproduction *hechsher* with no strings attached, and that none of the flour would be discarded because of *kashrus* reasons. And if the rabbi would refuse, he would be considered a "counter-revolutionary," fighting against the government.



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Undeterred by their threats, HoRav Levi Yitzchok replied that he will do absolutely nothing against the Torah. There was no way that he was going to give a *hechsher* if he couldn't guarantee the *kashrus*. He offered to travel to Moscow to meet with President Kalinin, president of the Soviet Union, to explain that he would not do something against the Torah, against the Shulchan Aruch, and against Hashem! And if the president wants to punish him, that's the president's business; but he, HoRav Levi Yitzchok, will not budge from his position.

While the officials continued to try to pressure the rav, it quickly became clear that there was nothing to talk about. The officials reported this to their higher-ups, who in turn reported it to their superiors, until it reached the Kremlin. Not long after, the Kremlin issued a directive to listen to the demands of the Rav, and to follow his instructions in everything related to the processing of the flour, so that he would provide his *hechsher* for the flour.

Because of the nature of this story, and the fact that the Communist regime deviated from their normal

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practice, it wasn't publicized for many years, until the Rebbe told it to the children at a Tzivos Hashem rally on Chai Nissan (HoRav Levi Yitzchok's birthday)—Chol Hamoed Pesach 5743. The Rebbe drew from it a powerful lesson:

When a Yid stands strong in his knowledge that he is fulfilling the will of Hashem, Creator of heaven and earth, that he cannot and will not go against His instructions, nothing will stand in his way. Even a powerful government, which made their agenda clear, had to listen to a Yid who was standing strong. He was even able to make them require that all matzah bakeries only use flour that had his *hechsher*, meaning that all the matzah that year was kosher.

True, not everyone has the strength of my father. But then again not everyone is faced with a Soviet government. What most people have to face is their own *yetzer*. And when this *yetzer* tries to intimidate the person by saying that the non-Jews will not allow you to do mitzvos and will look down at you, you should know that the opposite is true! If you stand strong, Hashem stands with you and you will prevail.

Based on the imperative to help other Yidden, it is not only important for you to have this firm conviction, but you must also enable others and help them stand firm in the face of opposition. And when Hashem sees us helping each other, He follows suit and helps us stand strong; He removes all obstacles from our paths, in everything that we need, to the extent that the nations help us as well, as we have seen with HoRav Levi Yitzchok.

Our efforts to bring every Yid out of his personal spiritual *golus*, through speaking heartfelt words and by our personal living example, will speed the coming of Moshiach. May it be now. **T**

(Adapted from sichas Chai Nissan 5743, Sichas 2)