



A Higher Power

There was once a Chosid of the Rebbe Maharash who traveled often to visit the Rebbe. The husband of one of the women that helped in his home had been drafted to fight in the Russian-Turkish war of 5638 (1877) and had disappeared in action. Stuck as she was, an *agunah*, she asked the Chosid's wife to request from her husband to ask the Rebbe Maharash about her missing husband.

When the Chosid arrived in Lubavitch he happened to meet the Rebbe Maharash riding in his carriage towards the outskirts of town for his daily walk. The Rebbe saw the Chosid and invited him to join.

As they were riding, the Chosid brought up the issue of the missing man.

The Rebbe Maharash responded:

My father, the Tzemach Tzedek, had formidable power in these types of issues. I, however, don't know how. Let me tell you a similar story that happened with my father.

My mother had a relative whose husband had left her because she was an ugly and mean woman. She came to us and my mother took her as a helper around the house. Many times she asked my mother to speak with my father about her situation, but my father would always avoid her.

Once, not long before the *Yomim Noraim*, my mother insisted, "Does it not say 'ומבשרך לא תתעלם', one must not ignore their own relatives?!"

Father answered her, "You too? Do I not have enough *agmas nefesh* and suffering from all these people who visit me with their sacks of problems, that you must add to it?"

"You have your choice," said my mother. "If you can't help them, tell everyone and they will stop traveling to you.

But if you eventually answer everyone, why will you not answer our relative?"

"But the Dnieper is not burning."

"Fine, but give me some sort of timeframe."

So my father told her that after Tishrei he would see what there is to be done.

During the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* my father called his *gabbai* and instructed him that when a specific merchant from Orsha would come to Lubavitch during Sukkos, on his yearly trip, he should be sent to the Rebbe immediately.

Upon arrival, the merchant was rushed directly to my father. My father said, "I want you to fulfill a *shlichus mitzvah* for me and deliver a letter to a Yid by the name of Chaikel who lives about 20 mil from your house."

"Of course," said the Chosid. "I would be honored to fulfill this shlichus. I will see to it as soon as I arrive home after Yom Tov."

"No," said the Rebbe. "I want you to leave this moment and for Yom Tov you will already be home with your family."

The merchant was obviously not thrilled with this; after all, he had already traveled and settled in Lubavitch for Yom Tov. But when the Rebbe says something, you do as you are told.

He took the letter and began to leave the room, but the Tzemach Tzedek called him back. "Make sure not to mishandle the shlichus," he said.

"*Chas veshalom!* Of course I will fulfill the Rebbe's instructions," replied the merchant.

He went back to his inn and told his fellow Chassidim, that he was upset. He had come to be with the Rebbe for

Yom Tov and now the Rebbe was sending him away. The Chassidim rallied around him. “On the contrary!” they told him, this is a *shlichus mitzvah*, there must be something very important in the shlichus. You should be happy, celebrate even, that the Rebbe chose you for such a mission and that you merited this mitzvah. They brought together a *‘tikun,’* some food and *l’chaim*, and celebrated with him, uplifted him, and sent him on his way.

All this took place the day before Hoshana Rabba. With Orsha a mere 90km from Lubavitch, riding in a two horse carriage driven by his non-Jewish servant, his trip should have been fairly short. As soon as he left Lubavitch, rain began to pour nonstop soaking him and his driver to the bone.

Arriving at his house soaking wet, the Chosid immediately removed his outer clothing and climbed onto the oven to warm his frigid bones. A few minutes later his servant rushed in, one of the horses had suddenly died!

Oy, he thought to himself, it should be a *kappara*.

A little while later the servant ran back in, the second horse had died! The Chosid was upset, but what could he do, Hashem would fill his loss.

Not long later and the servant returned with more bad news—the millhouse was burning. Suddenly the Chosid realized what is going on. Oy! The letter! Where is the Rebbe’s letter?! This is why all these things are happening! Oy!

What letter? His family is confused. “Bring me my clothing,” he shouted in a frenzy. “It is in one of the pockets.”

They brought him his clothing and he pulled out the letter. He quickly instructed his servant to take a third horse and travel to Chaikel to give him the letter from the Rebbe. The servant was not very happy to go back out into the rain. “I didn’t even dry off from the first rain,” he protested.

But the Chosid promised him a large tip in exchange for making the trip. That, and a large glass of liquor. With these to sweeten the deal, the servant agreed to ride the letter over to Chaikel.

The merchant Chosid added his own note to the letter of the Rebbe, telling Chaikel what had happened to him, the death of his two horses and the fire at his mill. He urged him to follow whatever it was that the Rebbe asked of him and to do so immediately.

The servant rode over to Chaikel and gave him the letter. In it the Rebbe asked him to immediately send the miller

who worked at his mill to Lubavitch in time for the last days of Sukkos. Chaikel did just that; he sent for the miller and relayed to him the message from the Rebbe, that he was to travel to Lubavitch immediately.

The miller was a simple person and demurred. “Why should I go?” He asked, “What do I have with the Rebbe? What does he have for me?” But Chaikel didn’t let him get out of it. Either he travelled to Lubavitch for Yom Tov, or he would not be welcome back at the mill.

Faced with no choice, the miller traveled to Lubavitch arriving on Hoshana Rabba.¹

When he went into the Tzemach Tzedek, the Rebbe grabbed his ears and said “Young man, why did you leave your wife for three years?”

The man was unnerved. “I don’t have a way to support her,” he protested.

“I will write to Chaikel your employer to give you a raise so that you will be able to support her,” said the Rebbe.

“But she is mean and wicked.”

“You say she is ‘wicked’ by which you mean that she doesn’t serve you a good meal. Now that you will have a way to provide for her, you will give her more money with which to buy food and she will make you better meals.”

“But she is ugly!” said the miller.

“Do you need a noblewoman?” answered the Tzemach Tzedek. “Come with me into the kitchen.”

My father brought him to the kitchen and said, “Here is your wife, take her with you and live with her according to the Torah, כדת משה וישראל.”

This, concluded the Rebbe Maharash, my father could do. I don’t have that power.

“So what should I tell that poor woman?” asked the Chosid.

“She should write to the main army office in Petersburg to investigate what happened to her husband,” replied the Rebbe Maharash.

They did so, and they soon received a confirmation that her husband had died. A Beis Din was convened and allowed her to remarry. **T**

Sippurei Chassidim, Story 523

1. As mentioned, Orsha and Lubavitch are less than 90km, a walk of approximately 5 hours

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