



# Shabbos at the Tavern

*The Friediker Rebbe related a story about himself. The Rebbe draws an important lesson for us all.*

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The Prime Minister of Czarist Russia, the ruthless anti-Semite Peter Stolypin, was on the loose once again, formulating a malicious decree against the Jews. Everyone knew that Stolypin never ceased to innovate new methods to antagonize his Jewish subjects. The Rebbe Rashab received word from his “agents” in Petersburg that a new disastrous law was about to be issued, and they convened to devise a plan to thwart Peter’s most recent scheme.

The Jewish activists in Petersburg did all they possibly could to sway Stolypin and his advisors, but try as they might, he remained adamant and unwavering in his intent to issue the malicious decree. When the activists raised their hands in despair, the Rebbe Rashab instructed his son, the Friediker Rebbe, to take on the assignment.

Between the Friediker Rebbe and the activists it was determined that the only possible avenue for success

would be to influence a prominent person who gained the Prime Minister’s respect and admiration and had a great deal of influence upon him, namely his political mentor, Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev. Although Pobedonostsev was quite far from being a lover of Jews, to say the least, nevertheless as a devout religious person himself, he held religious leaders in great esteem, and Jewish leaders were of no exception.

It was therefore decided that the Friediker Rebbe should meet with Pobedonostsev, in the hope that his reverence for religious personalities would persuade him to put in a good word for the Jews with Stolypin, who was very much influenced by his mentor.

With much difficulty they finally persuaded Konstantin Pobedonostsev to agree to meet with the Friediker Rebbe, but he would only agree to meet with him on Friday night after

dinner time. Although utterly ill-timed for the Friediker Rebbe to meet with the Pobedonostsev on *leil Shabbos*, seeing how difficult it was to obtain the appointment in the first place there seemed to be no other alternative.

Pobedonostsev lived in the outskirts of Petersburg, quite a distance away from the city. As a rule, Jews were prohibited from living in Petersburg or its suburbs. Jews who played significant communal roles such as distinguished businessmen and prestigious doctors were granted special permission to reside in the city itself, and these Jews of course would assist their brethren in evading the authorities when necessary. Had Pobedonostsev lived in the city proper, the Friediker Rebbe could have counted on the Jews living nearby for a place to stay.

But the mentor lived in the outskirts of the city, and there were no Jews living there. They wouldn’t even allow a Jew to rent a room in a hotel, if a hotel had even existed there at all. The only choice left was to spend the entire Shabbos in the tavern nearby,



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לזכרון  
הרבנית הצדקנית  
מרת חי' מושקא נ"ע זי"ע  
בקשר עם יום ההילולא כ"ב שבט  
נדפס ע"ר' מיכאל הכהן  
וזוגתו לאה ומשפחתם שי' כהן  
מנשטער, אנגלי'



being surrounded by a horde of drunken anti-semites. The only way he could possibly survive there would be to fake the role of a lowly drunkard all the way through Shabbos.

What an unbearable predicament for a *tzaddik* on the stature of the Friediker Rebbe, to spend the holy day of Shabbos confined in a tavern amongst drunks and to be forced to pretend to be one of them, knowing full well that their senseless hatred for Jews might explode at any given moment! But for the Friediker Rebbe, saving the Jews of Russia from the dreadful decree was his solitary priority, and nothing but nothing else mattered.

And so, the Friediker Rebbe stayed in the tavern with the Russian peasants from the early afternoon when Shabbos came in, until the time came to meet with Pobedonostsev. He succeeded in influencing Pobedonostsev to reverse the evil decree, after which he returned to the nasty tavern for the remainder of the Shabbos.

Why did the Friediker Rebbe relate this story? It is because he was trying to teach us something:

When the Friediker Rebbe got word that Jews were in danger, it disturbed him to the core and he could not rest until the crisis was resolved. Rational calculations didn't even pass through his mind, for if Jewish people were in jeopardy, he would do all in his power so that perhaps he might avert the dreadful edict. His care and concern for his fellow brethren was at the essence of his being and he just couldn't react otherwise.

This story serves as a fundamental lesson for all those who follow in the footsteps of the Friediker Rebbe and heed his instructions. If a Jew hears that his fellow Jew is in physical distress, or even more so if his fellow Jew is in spiritual distress, having sunken into the depths of the mundane and being distant from Hashem and His Torah, it should trouble him so, to the point that he will do all he can if only in the hope of alleviating the pain of another Jew.

True, when thinking rationally, taking into account all one must do to perfect one's own *avodas Hashem*, there truly seems to be no spare time to think about another Jew's wellbeing. Hence, if one were to be requested to,

“forget about yourself for just half an hour to help someone else!” he could counter, “I must first ensure that my davening and learning is up-to-par. Until then, how can I possibly find time to work with others?”

This is the lesson from our story: When a fellow Jew is in peril, one must do all in his power to aid, even if it means giving up on spending Shabbos in the spiritual atmosphere that one would prefer, and instead spending it in “a tavern with drunks” being forced to pretend to be like them.

Just as when Moshe Rabbeinu heard about the suffering of *B'nei Yisrael* in Mitzrayim, he left the spiritual haven he was in to descend to the lowly land of Egypt and spend his time with Pharaoh and his magicians, just in order to free the Jews from slavery. So too in this instance; we must take a lesson from the Moshe Rabbeinu of our generation, who instills a spark of his spiritual energy within us. When a Jew is in need of assistance, we should not be daunted by the fact that at times we must descend from our own spiritual level to lend a hand to another Jew. **1**

(Based on *sichas Yud Shevat 5720*)