

The Queen, the Prince Consort, and the Rabbi

One time, **Rabbi Marvin Hier** was invited to a very special dinner in Victoria Canada with Queen Elizabeth II of England [and other Commonwealth nations such as Canada] and her husband, Prince Phillip. He informed the organizers that although he was quite touched and flattered by the invitation, he would be unable to attend because of his special dietary needs.

But the Canadian government held Rabbi Hier [who led the Shaarei Tzedek Congregation in Vancouver, B.C., Canada, from 1964-1977,] in great esteem. They were willing to accommodate his every wish. And so, they assured him that he would have his own set of dishes and cutlery and of course, special kosher food.

Greeted by Queen Elizabeth herself, Rabbi Hier and his wife were quite honored to attend a dinner of such dignitaries. But, to their chagrin, after the first course, in an effort to allow all the guests to acquaint themselves with one another, all the guests were asked to move to another seat.

A nice idea, but not for the Rabbi and his wife. For them it created quite a problem. What would he now do about his kosher food and utensils? Although it would look strange, he and his wife decided that they were going to have to bring along their dishes and cutlery to whichever seat they moved to. Indeed, there were those who stared and thought it to be quite strange and even rude. In fact, one unaffiliated Jew was quite disturbed by the "*Hillul Hashem*" (disgracing of G-d's name). How could it be that the Rabbi would act in such a difficult manner when the royal family had gone to such great lengths to accommodate him, he challenged.

Regardless of what it looked like, the Rabbi was not about to compromise on his standards. And so, he brought his plate with him wherever he went. The Queen and her husband walked about the room greeting the various dignitaries. And when Prince Phillip noticed the Rabbi standing with his plate in his hands, he asked about the peculiar behavior.

Rabbi Hier explained why he had to carry around his dishes and utensils, and his explanation impressed the prince. Expressing curiosity as to the details of this religious practice, the prince engaged the rabbi in a relatively lengthy discussion about the laws of keeping kosher. Eager to share this new revelation, Prince Phillip even included Queen Elizabeth in the conversation.

Shortly thereafter, seeing how well received the Rabbi was, this irreligious fellow decided that he, too, would capitalize on his Jewishness. He approached Prince Phillip and introduced himself as another Jew. But the prince looked at him disapprovingly and asked him one piercing question: "If you are a Jew, then where are your dishes?"

Needless to say, the embarrassed fellow sheepishly walked away.

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from an article by **Rabbi Reuven Semah**, which was first published in the Parshat Ki Sisa 5778 (2018) email of the Jersey Shore Torah Bulletin, then reprinted in an email of Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace. Submitted by Daniel Keren ("Shabbos Stories for the Parsha").

*Biographical note:* **Rabbi Moshe "Marvin" Hier** [born 1939 in New York City] is the dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, its Museum of Tolerance and of Moriah, the Center's film division.

*Connection:* This week's Torah reading of *Shemini* contains much information about Keeping Kosher.

*Editor's note:* for a very interesting (although much lengthier) story that concludes with the same theme, see #[1005](#) in this series, "Queen Esther of Jerusalem"

*Appendix (from a long, mostly negative article about Rabbi Hier that appeared in the LA Times on July 15, 1990) – another episode from that dinner:*

Hier's message is that Jews are never safe, that anti-Semitism is pandemic, occurring everywhere and in various degrees of virulence, and no matter the occasion, Jews must always stand up for themselves.

"I have experienced anti-Semitism in public life in a very profound way," says Hier, harking back to **his dinner with the Queen**. Sitting at his table--Hier had ordered a kosher meal--was a kilt-clad Canadian admiral holding forth on the ethnicity he declared was ruining Canada. The admiral turned to Hier and said: "Take you, rabbi. Here we all are having dinner. And you have to eat differently."

Hier turned to the admiral in distaste: "With all due respect, sir," Hier said, "if you are not embarrassed to sit amongst us wearing a skirt, I don't think I have to be embarrassed about what I choose to eat."