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## *A Timely Rebellion*

He was known as “Leib Sarah's” because of the extraordinary story of his mother’s self-sacrifice which precede his birth (see story #483 in this storylist’s archives). Early on, he became famous as a miracle-worker, and he was sent on many missions by the Baal Shem Tov to aid Jews.

One day, as he stood in the marketplace of Berdichev, a Jew approached him and exclaimed, "Thank G-d, I've found you!" The Jew, named Reb Benyamin, was the head of the community of Kobrin, and they had a serious problem.

The small town of Kobrin belonged to the Count Upinsky. While the old count had been friendly to the Jews, inviting them to settle on his lands rent-free, his son and successor was a bitter anti-Semite. The young count was now threatening to expel the Jews and seize all their property unless they paid him both rent and interest for all the years they had lived on his estate.

Rabbi Leib listened attentively to this tragic story, and then promised to try to intercede with the count.

The very next day Leib Sarah's travelled to Kobrin and stood before the nobleman, ready to plead the Jew's case. The count was momentarily startled by the sudden unexpected appearance of the stately old Jew, but he recovered quickly and demanded immediate payment of the 'debt.'

Reb Leib replied in measured tones: "Sir, your father never expected or demanded rent from the Jews, and I ask you in all fairness to cancel their debt, for payment had never been intended. In return they will pray for your success and well-being all the days of your life."

The Count sneered. "I do not need the prayers of the Jews, but their money I cannot do without!"

Leib Sarah's shot the count a burning, penetrating look that had the effect of calming his hostility.

The Count soon regained his composure and changed his tone: "Listen, I am going to make you an offer. If you agree, the debt will be cancelled. What I'm telling you is in the strictest confidence; take care no Jew betrays me."

The Count paused, then continued. "Our Polish people are tired of the Russian Czar's oppression. We are organizing a rebellion and we want Jews to join our side. "

Rabbi Leib responded calmly but firmly. "No, sir, this we cannot do. Our religion commands us to support the government under which we live. We may not join you."

His reply enraged the Count. "Get out," he screamed. "You will pay dearly for this!"

Rabbi Leib returned to Benjamin with news of his failed mission. "However, Reb Benjamin, I now will send you to someone who can indeed help. But you must keep his identity and location strictly secret."

Deep in the forest was a small hut where a poor broom-maker lived with his wife. It was here Benjamin was to go with all his provisions for Shabbat. Arriving at the hut Benjamin saw an old woman sitting in a poorly-furnished room. Just then her husband arrived, his face showing no surprise at the unexpected guest.

Benjamin prayed under the fragrant fir trees, and then entered the hut to find the old man reading the 'Grace After Meals' prayer slowly, like a small child. After quickly eating, Benjamin lay down on a bench outside and fell asleep.

In the middle of the night he was awakened by the sound of a voice singing Shabbat melodies. The voice came from the hut, but a heavenly voice seemed to echo back. The hut shone with a burning light; Benjamin quickly shut his eyes, and when he opened them again, it was morning.

The night's vision convinced Benjamin that the broom-maker was no ordinary man. He could hardly wait for the end of the Shabbat to reveal his mission.

But immediately after Havdalah, before he could relay his request, the broom-maker said to him, "The Guardian of Israel has heard the prayers of the Holy congregation of Kobrin. The Count's decree is nullified. Go in peace, but never tell anyone about this Shabbat."

When Benjamin returned home the next morning, he soon heard what had occurred. On Shabbat morning a squad of Russian Cossack soldiers stormed the Count's castle, arresting him for treason. It seems the governor had suspected Upinsky of traitorous activities. One day a letter was intercepted which said that the count had been unsuccessful in enlisting the support of the Jews for the rebellion. With this evidence the castle was seized and the rebellion quashed.

In appreciation of their loyalty, the Czar awarded the Kobrin Jews the land of the Upinskys as a perpetual free hold, rent and tax-free.

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*Source:* Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from *//L'ChaimWeekly.org* (#864), where "Talks and Tales" (*Kehot*) is cited as the source.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Leib Sarah's** (1730 - 4 Adar 1796) was held in high esteem by the Baal Shem Tov. One of the "hidden righteous," he spent his life wandering from place to place to raise money for the ransoming of imprisoned Jews and the support of other hidden tzadikim. [The Lubavitcher Rebbe stated the possibility that Rabbi Leib Sarahs and Rabbi Leib, the Shpoler Zeide, are the same person. There are two different, equally remarkable and well-known stories about the birth of each. There are also differing traditional *yahrzeit* dates.]

*Connection:* Seasonal -- 4 Adar (this year: Shabbat, Feb. 29) is the 224th *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Leib Sarah's.