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Before we begin, here is a very interesting postscript to last week's story, thanks to subscriber **Reuven Ansh** of Jerusalem:

I heard an additional part to the story which explains why the Sanzer Rav said he was too sharp for them:

It was normal practice for the father of a Kallah to test the prospective son-in-law in learning. Although the Avnei Nezer answered the questions sufficiently, the Sanzer Rav decided he would like to give an additional test, to which the Avnei Nezer responded, "If so, I would also like to test the Rav"! Everyone present was astounded at his nerry request. He explained himself as follows:

"In truth, just as the prospective father-in-law may test the prospective son-in-law, so too, one should also have the right to test the prospective new father-in-law. However, it is accepted that this is not necessary, since one can rely on the test that *his* father-in-law already gave to him before his own *shiduch*. Here, though, since you do not want to rely on my first test, then I also do not have to rely on the first test *you* were given by *your* father-in-law, and therefore I have the right to test you again also"!

And this is why the Sanzer Rav stated that he was too sharp for them.

Pre-empting the Anti-Semites

Rabbi Reuven-Yisrael Kott was a Torah prodigy whose cleverness and chutzpah saved thousands of Jews from annihilation by the Nazis.

Born in a Polish *shtetl* in 1897, Reuven was one of fifteen children. His family was chasidic followers of the Rebbe of Gur. Reuven's exceptional intellect was apparent at a young age. He was a gifted scholar of Talmud and Jewish scripture, so precocious that he was given rabbinic ordination when only 17 years old.

The Rebbe took a special liking to Reuven, and every Friday night Reuven sat next to the great man at his festive Sabbath gathering. Small in size -- he stood only 5'1" [155 cm.] -- Reuven was known for his big brain, and big heart.

Reuven was selected by his community to represent them as the Jewish voice on the local provincial council. When the Polish president died in the 1920's, young Reuven stood at the graveside with other clergy and delivered a eulogy on behalf of the Jews of Poland.

Although life still seemed fairly good for Polish Jews, the Gurer Rebbe in that generation, **Rabbi Avraham-Mordechai Alter**, often referred to as the ***Imrei Emmes***, sensed that big trouble was coming. Starting in 1922, he urged his followers to get out of Poland and move to *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel), at that time known as "Palestine" and under British rulership.

As the Rebbe's right-hand man, Kott threw himself into the mission of helping Jews leave Poland and return to their ancestral homeland.

The British had a strict quota system restricting the number of Jews they allowed in, but Rabbi Reuven Kott managed to find a bureaucratic loophole. That is, the quota

was not for a total amount of individual Jews, but rather was expressed as a maximum number of families, with “family” defined as two parents and their offspring...with “offspring” being an undetermined number!

Kott collected money and used it to bribe Polish authorities to get blank birth certificates. He would then “create” new families, matching people up, changing names and identities as needed. Every “family” had at least a dozen children.

He told those he helped that they must stick with their fake identity. Most people complied, but a few didn’t and were caught. Under threat of being sent back to Poland, somebody gave Reuven Kott’s name to the authorities.

Reuven and his brother were on a train in Warsaw when three plain-clothes officers approached. After verifying his identity, they arrested Reuven for bribery and forgery and threw him in jail.

As a pious Jew, Reuven couldn’t eat the non-kosher jail food, so every day his daughter brought him a kosher meal -- a two hour journey each way.

After several long months, his brother finally got word that there was going to be a hearing in the case. He went to visit Reuven in jail, told him the news and asked which lawyer he wanted to hire.

Reuven didn’t answer. Instead he scribbled something on a scrap of paper, folded it up and slipped it through the bars of his cell.

Outside the jail, Reuven’s brother unfolded the note. He was shocked to read the contents: “Hire me the most anti-Semitic lawyer in Warsaw!”

Reuven's family was baffled. With so many top-notch Jewish lawyers, why would he want an anti-Semite? Had his incarceration led to a mental breakdown?

The brother assured them that Reuven was of sound mind. Of course, there were many anti-Semitic attorneys in the Polish metropolis, but when the brother discovered that one of them was especially notorious for his fierce hatred of Jews, he promptly hired him.

The day of the hearing arrived, and the courthouse was packed with family members and hundreds of chasids from Reuven’s community. According to prison regulations, Reuven was allowed only three minutes with his lawyer whom he had not been allowed to meet previously. Those present noticed that Reuven did all the talking in the entire three-minute ‘conference.’ Then the hearing began.

To everybody’s shock, Reuven’s lawyer presented a brilliant and eloquent argument, and got the case dismissed.

As soon as Reuven arrived safely home everybody wanted to know what he had said to his lawyer in those brief three minutes.

Reuven said his Talmud study had taught him that in a business deal, if you get three “Yes” answers, the deal will close. So he asked his lawyer three questions:

“Do you hate all Jews?
“Would you like to see me rot in jail until I die?
“Do you want all the Jews in Poland to leave?”

The lawyer answered a firm ‘Yes!’ to all three questions.

Immediately, Reuven shot back, “What good would it do if one measly Jew rots in jail? If you can get me set free, I will continue to get thousands of Jews out of Poland!”

Reuven gained his freedom by blinding the lawyer with his own hate. He continued his work “creating” large families and helping them move to Palestine. The Jew-hating attorney even helped him procure more blank birth certificates!

People often asked Reuven when he would go to Yisrael. He said, “I’m like the captain of a sinking ship. It is my responsibility to get all the passengers out before I get in the lifeboat.”

Over the course of 20 years, Reuven helped tens of thousands of Jews escape Poland. Unfortunately, Reuven himself never made it to the Holy Land. He was murdered at Auschwitz in 1942.

Today, almost half a million descendants of those Polish Jews owe their lives to Rabbi Reuven Yisrael Kott.*

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\* *Editor’s note:* It would be traditional to insert here, “May the Al-mighty avenge his blood,” but I think this concluding sentence of the story demonstrates how that goal is already accomplished!

*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from a report on a WhatsApp story group. The story was first revealed publicly by Reuven Kott’s granddaughter, Ziporah Bank. She heard it from her mother - the daughter who brought kosher meals to her father in prison. The 1/2 million calculation in the last paragraph was made by her family.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter** (1866 - 6 Sivan 1948), the son of the *Sfas Emmes*, was the third Rebbe in the Gur dynasty. Known as the ***Imrei Emmes*** after the title of his major book, he was the spiritual leader of over 250,000 Chassidim in pre-WW II Poland. In 1940, he managed to escape with three of his sons to Israel (then Palestine), although the vast majority of his followers did not survive. He began to rebuild the Gerrer community in Jerusalem, but he died there during the siege of Jerusalem on Shavuot, 1948.

*Connection:* -- PURIM (when we read *Megilat Esther*, where almost everything is not what it seems and nearly everything turns into its opposite!)