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The Soul in Charge

The rumor was extraordinary: for the first time there was a real threat to the rights of the Moscovitz family to be in charge of the centralization of the alcoholic beverages business in Hungary.

Once every three years the government put the rights up for bidding. The rich family Moscovitz had always been the only contestant, and submitted a reasonable price, that enabled them to enjoy a handsome profit. Now a group of gentiles decided to take the rights away from the Jews and to submit a higher bid.

The family was very concerned. Their rivals were determined to expropriate the rights from them, at whatever price would be necessary.

Distressed, the family decided to turn to the *tzadik* **Rabbi Mordechai of Nadvorna**, even though they were not Chasidim and were not in the habit of visiting the *tzadikim*. Because of this they preferred to send a messenger to the *tzadik* with their request for a blessing.

They choose the chasid Reb Avremeleh Birnbaum as their messenger. He was an innkeeper whom the Moscovitz family supplied with the alcohol he sold. Over the years he accumulated a debt to the family, but they were kind to him and didn't pressure him. He was glad to now have an opportunity to do them a favor and to represent the family to the Rebbe.

Rebbe Mordechai scrutinized the *kvitel* (note with a request for a blessing) for a long moment and asked: "Where does the family Moscovitz live?"

"In the city of Potik", replied Reb Avremeleh.

"Potik?" The Rebbe frowned. "Where is Potik?"

Reb Avremeleh was surprised. He knew that the Rebbe used to travel every year through the country and he certainly must know the towns and villages in the surroundings.

"Maybe you can tell me the name of the city close to Potik?" the Rebbe asked.

"Serentz," replied the chasid.

“Mordechai doesn’t know where Serentz is”, said Rebbe Mordechai. “Maybe Karstir is close by?” he asked.

“Indeed”, Avremeleh said, pleased.

The face of the *tzadik* lit up. “That’s why I didn’t know,” he said joyfully. “What I need to know, I know” As explanation he described the house of Avremeleh in all its details even though he had never been there. “But I do not know the city of Potik because it falls under the ‘ownership’ of the *tzadik* **Rebbe Yeshaya of Karstir.**”

The Rebbe took his watch out of his pocket, looked at it and said: “Go, you will still be in time to reach Rebbe Shayaleh and receive his blessing before the auction begins.”

When Reb Avremeleh left the Rebbe he was quite upset. He knew Rebbe Shayaleh very well. They had both been the attendants of **Rebbe Hirshel of Liska**. Not only that, but Reb Avremeleh was the main attendant and Rebbe Shayaleh was his assistant... Now he felt embarrassed, how would he present himself to Rebbe Shayaleh as a chasid coming to his Rebbe?

Rebbe Shayaleh sensed his visitor’s discomfort. He served him coffee and wished him success with the rest of his trip. Reb Avremeleh didn’t know what to do, he had to carry out his mission but he was incapable of doing so.

With a heavy heart he climbed into the carriage to continue his journey. A moment before he could do so the *tzadik* told him: “Go in peace and health, everything will be well with the Moscovitz Family!”

Avremeleh was tremendously relieved. The *tzadik* with his divine inspiration had understood the reason for his visit and with great sensitivity had given his blessing without embarrassing Reb Avremeleh.

The day of the auction arrived. Mr. Moscovitz considered which tactic to adopt. He knew that his rivals would offer higher prices than his. He saw no chance of his winning the bid in a natural way. “If the blessing of the *tzadik* will help, I will win even with a low price,” he thought.

The Jew presented himself before the governor and suggested a sum lower than the sum of previous years. The governor was stunned. He decided not to call out the sum loudly out of fear that the rival group would also lower the sum they were going to offer.

It was the turn of the spokesman of that group to offer an amount. He walked over brimming with self-confidence, cleared his throat and then... strange sounds started coming out of his mouth. The bewildered man tried again and again to speak but was only able to make incomprehensible sounds.

Questions posed him by the governor were met with grunts and croaks. The governor became furious. He regarded this behavior as extremely disrespectful. He immediately announced that the Moscovitz family had won the bid.

The group's spokesman returned to his allies pale and confused. "I don't know what happened to me", he mumbled. "A slender Jew with a white beard appeared before me, caught me by the throat and every time I tried to speak he choked me! I couldn't get even one word out!"

This story was told by Rebbe Yeshaya from Krastir himself to the chasid Reb Shlomo Engel and concluded: "I was obligated to help the Moscovitz family. They were the ones who bought me my first pair of boots when I was a child and they paid the tuition money for my *melamed* (teacher of small children.)

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*Source:* Translated by **C.R. Benami**, long-time editorial assistant for AscentOfSafed.com, from the rendition in the popular Hebrew weekly, *Sichat HaShavua*, which is based on "*Reshumim Beshimcha*" by Rabbi Yitzchak Shlomo Unger.

*Connection* – This week's double reading: Both portions deal with Moses having to 'arbitrate' requests concerning the division of The Land among the tribes.

*Biographical notes:*

**Rabbi Mordechai of Nadvorna** [?-15 Tishrei 1895], the great grandson of Rabbi Meir "The Great" of Premishlan, was orphaned early and raised by his uncle, the famous Rebbe, Meir of Premishlan (see below). Chassidim from all over Rumania and Hungary streamed in to receive his blessings. An extraordinarily large number of his descendents became Chassidic leaders and Rebbes, including dozens in the world today. His teachings are collected in *Gedulas Mordechai*.

**Rabbi Yeshaya "Shayaleh" of Karstir** (Iyar 3, 1851-1925) was the founder of the Kerestirer dynasty. He was a disciple of Rabbi Chaim Halberstam of Sanz after whose passing he became a disciple of Rabbi Mordechai of Nadvorna. The latter suggested that he move to the town of Kerestir (Karstir). In Kerestir he became a famous Rebbe known as a miracle worker.