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From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles <editor@ascentofsafed.com>

A Deadly Pair of Dogs

A Jew in a Soviet Siberian prison camp in the mid-1900's went to fellow inmate **Rabbi Mendel Futerfas** one winter day and asked him for a blessing. "Tomorrow night I'm planning on escaping from here, and I want a blessing from you for success."

Reb Mendel was shocked. "It's a clear risk of life to try and leave this place, and well against the odds! There are guards and dogs, and barbed wire, and high walls. How can you even think of such a thing?"

The man explained that for a very long time he had been diligently knocking small holes into one of the outer walls in a large circle. "It's at the point now where I just have to push into the center and the entire hole will cave in." More recently, he had observed and discovered that every night at a certain time, there is a window of opportunity for 30 minutes when the guards are changing their positions.

The next night, Reb Mendel watched as this man waited for his half-hour window. When the moment arrived, he went to the wall and pushed into the circle, and just as he had said, a large round hole appeared and he crawled through.

As soon as he emerged on the other side he started running. R. Mendel watched incredulously as two huge dogs appeared out of nowhere and began to chase the speeding Jew. When they almost caught up to him, he saw the Jew reach into his pocket, pull out two huge pieces of meat and throw them behind him. The dogs stopped in their tracks and began tearing apart their surprise meal.

R. Mendel noticed that there was a guard atop the wall in the tower, who had watched this entire scene unfold. Right then he lowered his rifle, aimed at the feasting dogs and shot twice. R' Mendel watched in horror as both dogs died instantly.

R. Mendel found himself unable to comprehend the series of events his eyes had witnessed. After a few days he walked over to the guard and asked him, "Why did you feel the need to kill the dogs? What did that accomplish? All you did is cause a loss for their owners."

The guard hesitated, then decided to answer R. Mendel. "We spend months of time and a lot of money and energy to find the right dogs for this job. They are hand selected and bred and then trained for service. If all it takes is a couple of pieces of meat to reverse all of that training and all of their pedigree, then what purpose could they possibly serve? We don't need them and they might as well be shot."

Reb Mendel would often retell this story, and append to it the following take: "The Creator puts us in this world to deal with a multitude of trials from Heaven. If all it takes is a little bit of tasty meat for us to be sidetracked and fail a test, then what good are we? We are no better than a dog that cannot stay on course whenever a little bit of temptation comes his way!

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*Source:* Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from...oops! I don't recall and somehow did not write it down. If anyone recognizes where I might have taken it from, please let me know.

*Connection:* Weekly Reading of *No'ach* – Every species of animal, in pairs.

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Menachem-Mendel ("Reb Mendel") Futerfas** (1906 - 4 Tammuz 1995), was a near legendary Lubavitcher chasid, even for those who knew him personally. In 1947 he was arrested for administrating networks of underground yeshivas and Jewish schools, and for facilitating the repatriation of thousands of Soviet Jews to Poland after WWII, and sentenced to 8 years in Soviet prisons and labor camps, which he went through without compromising any religious observances, despite the cruel pressure to do so. After another six years in Siberian exile he was allowed to emigrate to England, thanks to an appeal for family repatriation made by prime minister Harold Wilson during his summit meeting in Moscow with Chairman Nikita Khrushchev. In 1973 he settled in Kfar Chabad, Israel, where for twenty years he was a major influence on three generations of chasidim.