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PURIM JUSTICE

It used to be the custom in the good old days for each community to appoint some local wit as their *rav*, whose tenure would last for the duration of Purim; and likewise any number of judges, or policemen, and whatever other functionaries they fancied.

One year, before Purim, in the days of **Rabbi Zvi of Zhidachov**, the townsfolk chose Reb Koppel, the *Rebbe*'s lively nephew, to be the provincial governor, a position whose incumbent in real life was empowered to enact and repeal statutes. He in turn chose a retinue of advisers from amongst his usually reliable and sober colleagues, and they all showed him the respect this is due a potentate.

Purim day arrived. *Megillat Esther* was chanted, with evil Haman being vigorously booed every time his name was read. After the morning meal was eaten, *Mincha*, the afternoon prayer, was recited at an earlier hour than usual. Immediately after, the highly anticipated Purim festive meal began, with its unique directive to drink wine [and/or other alcoholic beverages] with gusto until *ad d'lo yada*: until unable to formulate the difference between "*Baruch* (Blessed be) *Mordechai*" and "*Arur* (Cursed be) *Haman*."

Suddenly the door to the room swung open with a loud crash. A hush fell over the large assembly of chasidim huddled around the formation of the many tables pushed together. In trooped a pompously costumed Reb Koppel, along with all his appointed companions. The large masqueraded motley crew danced and tottered their way towards the table of his uncle, the *tzadik* (pure, righteous person). Of course, it goes without saying that in that whole itinerant band there was not one man sober.

The *tzadik* treated his nephew like a king, and entreated him to issue a decree repealing the legislation which that same year had in fact imposed the infamous candle tax on the Jews of the province. The provincial governor was kind enough to oblige.

The Rebbe then went on to request repeal of the other oppressive tax, on the sale of kosher meat. This too was promptly granted.

Finally, the Rebbe proceeded to ask his nephew to repeal the ordinance conscripting Jews to the army – but to his shock the tipsy young man flatly refused!

He tried both scolding and entreating, but to no avail. His chasidim too tried to help out – some by threatening, others by imploring – but the young man's mind was not to be changed.

The Rebbe thereupon left the room in anger, and all day would not look his nephew in the face.

The next day, when the effects of the wine had evaporated, the young man was asked by his fellow chasidim: "What on earth came over you yesterday, that you defied the rebbe's wish?"

"I solemnly swear I haven't the foggiest recollection of what went on here yesterday," he declared – and indeed the poor fellow could hardly believe the whole story.

That year the provincial authorities in fact repealed the legislation which had imposed the anti-Semitic taxes on candles and meat – but the cruel conscription order remained in force. The chasidim then realized that on Purim they had witnessed something beyond their comprehension; their rebbe had not been playing games.

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*Source:* Adapted and expanded by Yerachmiel Tilles from *A Treasury of Chassidic Tales*, as translated by R. Uri Kaploun from *Sipurei Chasidim* by Rabbi S. Y. Zevin.

*Biographical note:* **Rabbi Zvi-Hersh Eichenstein** [1785 - 11 Tammuz 1831], founder of the **Zhidachov** dynasty, was a prominent disciple of the Seer of Lublin. He championed the position that the practice of Chasidism had to be firmly based on the study of the Kabbala of the holy Ari of Safed. He wrote and published numerous commentaries on Kabbala, including *Ateret Tzvi* on the Zohar, and several on the weekly readings. The famous commentator on the 24 books of the written Torah, the *Malbim*, was a student of his. He was succeeded by three nephew-disciples, including Yitzhak-Isaac of Zhidachov and Yitzhak-Isaac-Yehuda-Yechiel of Komarno.