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Story #1371 (5784-28) 8 Adar Sheini 5784 (March 18, 2024)

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The PURIM Night Revolution Resolution

Each year on the night of the Purim Festival, the elderly chasid Reb Zalman would tell the following story.

Mottele¹ was a child when he, together with his friends, was kidnapped by a group of soldiers of Tzar Nicholai the First. They were taken to serve in the Russian army [for 25 years].

In one moment the happy life of the child was ended, he was torn from his loving family, instead sent to a training camp in the frozen wastes of Siberia.

At the very last moment his heartbroken mother managed to put a little bag in his hand. Inside were a pair of *tefilin* and a *siddur*. "Promise me you will stay a loyal Jew. Even if they promise you all the best of the world, and even if, G-d forbid, they cause you terrible suffering, stay a Jew'," she said to him while crying desperately before she was rudely pulled away from her beloved son.

Mottele promised.

Mottele was a brilliant child. The army officer in command of the children noticed this right away. Because of this he tended to treat him with more kindness than the other boys.

Soon though the commander found out that this favorite of his was also the hardest nut to crack. While his companions slowly acclimated to their new surroundings, Mottele refused to cease his Jewish practices. Not once and not twice was he punished severely; he was humiliated, made fun of, starved and more.

As far as following military training, Mottele did everything he was ordered to do perfectly. This was not enough to satisfy his commander. He knew that the goal was to sever the boys from their identity as Jews. As long as Mottele clung to his religion this was not accomplished.

"I don't understand why you have to be like a stone, unpliant all your life," he said to Mottele at every opportunity, "We both know that with your talents you will be able to rise to high status as an officer and the sky will be the limit. You only have to take the right step."

¹ Nickname for Mordechai

Close to a year passed and Mottele stayed loyal to his Jewish roots. The commander who sincerely cared for him gave him many responsible duties. Each time someone had to be sent to the nearby city on an important mission, he would send Mottele.

One day the commander decided to change his approach. He called Mottele in for a long and serious talk, trying one last time to convince Mottele to drop his attachment to his Judaism. When, as he expected, all his arguments fell on deaf ears, he changed his tone.

"I won't allow you to bury yourself all your life in your dark world," he said. "If you are incapable to make the correct decision by yourself, I will do so in your stead."

Mottele's eyes opened wide in astonishment. The commander looked stern, even angry.

"I will no longer play games with you," the commander said. "From this moment on I will give you a certain amount of time to consider carefully and make the right decision. If you do, well and good. If not, I will find a way to force you."

Two days later Mottele was sent to the city to carry out a certain mission. As always he paid a hurried visit to the local *shul* (synagogue). There he learned that in three days' time it would be the festival of *Purim*. He was very excited to hear this and his joy knew no bounds when one of the men gave him a small *chumash* (Five books of Moses) which included the Scroll of Esther.

The next day Mottele was transferred to another company. He assumed that this was the first step in the plan of the commander to put pressure on him. In this new company no one knew him and he would not enjoy special treatment.

He did not know that his transfer was part of an all-encompassing plan that his commander had prearranged with the commander of the company he was sent to. The latter told the commander about the success he has in causing a group of Jewish boys to convert. The ceremony of the conversion was to take place the next day in the presence of the priest Provoslavi and the highest officers of the camp.

"Send this stubborn protégé of yours to me," he said to his friend, "when he will see his Jewish friends striding towards the light with joy, his obstinacy will be broken and he will follow their example."

Mottele didn't waste time getting to know his new companions. As soon as it was evening he called together the Jewish boys among them, explaining to them that this evening was Purim. He took the *chumash* out of his pocket, browsed till he got to the Scroll of Esther

and started reading the *migilah* with as much of the tune as he remembered from last year, from home.

When he finished, the boys surrounding him stood quietly, deep in thought. After a while one of the boys started to speak and so opened a dam of reminiscences that deeply touched the other boys. One after the other they told with great emotion about Purim in their parents' home. Their conversation carried on till late into the night.

Before going to sleep a decision was reached: The conversion ritual that was planned for the morning was cancelled, at least on their part.

"And I," said Reb Zalman, after ending the story as he did each year on the night of Purim, "I was one of those boys, we were young children standing at the edge of the abyss. We were saved thanks to Mottele, he is our *Mordechai HaYehudi*, who was sent by Divine Providence to bring about our own Purim miracle."

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*Source:* Translated by Mrs. C.R. Benami, long-time editorial assistant for AscentOfSafed.com, and enhanced by R. Yerachmiel Tilles from the popular Hebrew weekly, *Sichat HaShavua* #739 (3-3-2001).

*Why This Week?* **PURIM!**