**Shabbos Stories**

**For PURIM 5773**

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**Heroes of Olde: The**

**Shpoler Zeide’s Purim Play**

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| “Wait, Mendel,” the rebbe said. “How will you know who your lawyer is?” |

 Once a Jew named Mendel came to the *tzaddik* Reb Aryeh Leib of Shpola, asking for help. At a glance, the rebbe could see that he was terribly upset.

 “Rebbe, I don’t know what to do!” the man said. “A year ago I left my home in Rumania to come to Russia, together with my wife and family. We hoped to get a new start in life, but we’ve had no luck. “In addition to all the expenses of moving, which I don’t know how I’ll pay, I have now received official papers demanding that I appear in court on charges of stealing money from the government.”

**Insists to Not Having Done Anything Wrong**

 “Believe me, Rebbe, I never touched a penny that wasn’t mine in my whole life. I don’t know what it’s all about. Rebbe! What am I to do?”

 “Don’t be worried,” said Reb Aryeh Leib, trying to calm him down. “Tell me, where is the trial to take place?”

 “Here in Russia,” Mendel replied. “They wanted to take me back to Rumania, but the Russian government protected me.”

 “Good. It’s best to be on your own ground. Is there a date for the trial?”

 “Yes, it’s scheduled for ——.”

**Make Sure That the Trial**

**Takes Place on Purim Day**

 “Have it changed,” the rebbe said sharply. “Do everything in your power to make sure the trial takes place on Purim day! Do you have a lawyer?”

 “No, Rebbe. Not yet!”

 The rebbe paused for a moment and then said, “Mendel, I’ll make you a deal. I know a certain girl who is soon to get married. The poor girl is an orphan, with no father or mother to help her. I am trying to do what I can. She still needs 300 rubles for the wedding. If you get me the money for her, I will get you a good lawyer.”

 Mendel was overjoyed. 300 rubles was a lot of money, but Mendel immediately handed the sum to the rebbe. Filled with good hope, he turned to go.

**The Lawyer Will Have a**

**White Hat and Red Gloves**

 “Wait, Mendel. How will you know who your lawyer is?” said the rebbe. Mendel gazed at the rebbe without speaking. “Listen, don’t worry. He will meet you in the courtroom on Purim day. You will be able to recognize him by his white hat and red gloves. Is that a good enough sign?”

 Mendel smiled gratefully. “Thank you, Rebbe,” he said.

 Mendel returned home and immediately began carrying out the rebbe’s instructions. He began going to the offices of the court, filing papers and speaking to officials in order to have the date of the trial changed. At first he met with no success. Refusing to take no for an answer, he kept on trying, until at last he succeeded. The trial was set for Purim day.

**A Second Gift of Money for the Needy**

 Shortly before the trial, Mendel sent a letter to the rebbe enclosing more money to be distributed to the needy on Purim, and asking for the rebbe’s blessing.

 Finally, the day of the trial arrived. In the Shpoler Zeide’s shul, everyone was in an excited Purim mood.

 Following his yearly custom, Reb Aryeh Leib prepared to make his Purim play. He gave instructions to his students and to the people of the town who would be the actors, but no one really knew what the play was about.

 One of the townsfolk was instructed to play the part of a Jew named Mendel. Another was to be Mendel’s old friend who had turned against him, and was in fact the chief witness for the prosecution.

 The judge was to be played by the rabbi of the town. The prosecutor, who was trying to prove Mendel’s guilt, was told to cover his face with black paint. The Shpoler Zeide himself dressed up as Mendel’s lawyer. He put a white scarf around his fur *shtreimel*, and wore red gloves.

 The trial began. First the “chief justice” read the charges. Then the “prosecutor” with the black face tried to tell the court what a terrible person “Mendel” was, a hardened criminal and a thief. However, all the townsfolk watching the play kept interrupting him and laughing at everything he said.

 Next, “Mendel’s former friend” took the stand. He told the court that the true reason “Mendel” had moved to Russia was in order to run away from the law. He had found a chest of golden coins belonging to the government of Rumania, and now he was trying to make off with the money.

**Mendel’s Two Witnesses Take the Stand**

 Then two “witnesses on Mendel’s side” were called to take the stand. They testified just the opposite. They told the court how they had seen the “friend” demanding a huge sum of money from Mendel. When Mendel refused to give him the money, the “friend” threatened to make big trouble.

 Finally, the Shpoler Zeide, dressed up as Mendel’s lawyer, made his speech. He showed how the whole case was based on a lie, made up by the wicked “friend.” He proved that there never was a chest of gold; and even if there had been one, and Mendel had found it, the Rumanian government could not legally claim a penny. Everyone was spellbound, and hung on to his every word.

 At last came the verdict. The “judge,” who was the rabbi of the town, declared Mendel innocent. Mendel’s wicked “friend” was reproached and sent off in shame. The “prosecutor” with the black face was grabbed and pushed out of court, and told to go wash his face.

**Sat Down to a Festive Meal**

 Then the Shpoler Zeide and all his followers sat down to their festive Purim meal. In the middle of their rejoicing, a message from the real Mendel arrived. The trial had gone splendidly! He was free! He would return to Shpola at once.

 A few days later, Mendel showed up and told everyone about the trial and his wonderful lawyer. People opened their eyes in disbelief. It was exactly what had happened in the Shpoler Zeide’s Purim play!

 Mendel could not wait to see the *tzaddik*. “Thank you, Rebbe,” he said. “You sent me an amazing lawyer. Everyone said they had never heard anyone like him before! Most important of all, here I am. Free! He saved my life!”

 “I am so glad to hear it,” said the rebbe. “Do you by any chance know who that lawyer was?”

 “No, Rebbe,” Mendel replied.

 “So I will tell you. He was a holy angel from heaven, created by the charity you gave to help that orphan girl get married.

 “If you are lucky, you may see him again. After 120 years, when you will be summoned to G‑d’s court in heaven to account for what you did in this world, he may come again to be your lawyer and to speak in your defense!”

*Reprinted from this week’s email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**It is Purim Today – L’Chaim!**

**From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles**

[**editor@ascentofsafed.com**](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000pPG0:001H996100000P11&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1361371314&randid=1698358062&content=central##)

 Purim had arrived, and a poverty-stricken Jew who lived in a village on the outskirts of the town of Koznitz lacked the means to purchase the basic necessities for the festive Purim feast held on the afternoon of the holiday. He felt terrible about it, especially for his wife and children--that such a happy day should turn into a depressing one with no celebration to look forward to.

 “Oh, well,” he thought to himself; “at least I should do the mitzvah of hearing the Megillah in the best possible manner. Of the four special mitzvot of the day - hearing Megillat Esther, giving money and gifts to the poor, sending portions (mishloach manot) of food and drink to friends, enjoying a Purim feast”it is the only one that does not cost any money. I’ll walk to town early in the morning and hear the Reading from the Rebbe himself!”

 The Rebbe was **Rabbi Yisrael** [named for the Baal Shem Tov because of his miraculous birth, but that’s a different story for another time -editor], the famous Maggid (preacher) of **Koznitz**. The Maggid did not appoint a reader from among the knowledgeable members of the congregation, preferring to read it aloud himself from a scroll for the benefit of all assembled.

 The villager, although by no means a scholar, found this special reading to be inspiring. Despite his untenable financial situation, he began to be filled with the unique joy and good feelings of the Purim festival. But then, after the Reading, everyone lined up to pass by the Rebbe and exchange individual holiday greetings with him.

 When our villager approached, the Maggid said to him, “Aren’t you from the village just outside town? Well, then, why did you not bring me Mishloach Manot, as is traditional?”

 The poor man’s newly acquired good spirits crashed. He stood, mouth agape, in stunned silence. He couldn’t even afford a half loaf of bread for his children; how was he supposed to bring the Rebbe a present, even if that was what everyone else on the line was doing?

 “Alright, my friend,” smiled the Rebbe, “donâ’t be sad. It is Purim today, after all. Everyone is invited to my house; come join us for a bite and a bit of whisky.”

 He didn’t have to be invited twice, especially for the l’chaim part. As he cheerfully toasted two or three times, his cheerful Purim mood was quickly restored. [He lifted some spirits to lift his spirits! -editor.] Another cup or two and he was seized with a clever idea, as well as the chutzpah (nerve) to put it into action.

 He excused himself from the table, and off he went to the nearby house of a wealthy wine merchant. When the man opened his door, the villager saluted him with an enthusiastic “Happy Purim, my dear fellow Jew!” Then he followed with “Please give me a nice bottle of wine on credit. Of course I’ll pay you back. But if Heaven forbid it should happen that I don’t, well, it’s Purim today, isn’t it? Merry Purim! L’chaim!”

 The astounded merchant gave him a bottle with a shrug, a big smile and a “Happy Purim!” of his own. Our man, pleased with his success, went on with a bit more confidence to the fruit and vegetable store.

 “Merry Purim, friend! Please give me a few juicy red apples on credit. Of course I’ll pay you back. But if Heaven forbid it should happen that I don’t, well, it’s Purim today, isn’t it? Happy Purim!” The F&V man also became caught up in the visitor’s enthusiasm and good cheer, and presented him with two large apples.

 The villager ran as fast as he could back to the Maggid’s house, and with a grin of satisfaction presented him with the wine and apples. “Happy Purim, holy rebbe, and L’Chaim! Here is Mishloach Manot for you from me.

 “Well done!” responded the Maggid. “You should remember every Purim to bring me Mishloach manot.”

 Thrilled with his good fortune in obtaining Mishloach Manot for the Rebbe, the Jew decided to push his luck further. “My poor family is sitting alone at home, starving. They have no Purim joy at all. Let’s see if I can take care of them too.”

 He strode over to the local liquor vendor and tried his same formula again. “Happy Purim, my brother! Please give me a bottle for l’chaim, on credit. Of course I’ll pay you back. But if Heaven forbid it should happen that I don’t, well, it’s Purim today, isn’t it? Merry Purim! And l’chaim!”
 The owner laughed and gave him a bottle of plum brandy. This, in turn, inspired the flushed visitor to continue on to the bakery. “Happy Purim, friend! Please give me a large braided loaf on credit. Of course I’ll pay you back. But if Heaven forbid it should happen that I don’t, well, it’s Purim today, isn’t it? Merry Purim!”

 It worked. Now all he needed was a main dish. He decided to try the nearby grocery store. “Happy Purim, friend! Please give me some delicious fat herring on credit. Of course I’ll pay you back. But if Heaven forbid it should happen that I don’t, well, it’s Purim today, isn’t it? Merry Purim!” The grocer cheerfully obliged, and the Jew set out for home with both hands filled with goodies. Arriving just at the traditional hour for the meal, he burst in the door, proclaiming loudly, “It’s Purim today, it’s Purim today. Happy Purim, dear family. L’chaim!”

 His wife and children never expected to see him in such a joyful, excited mood. They couldn’t imagine what had happened to him and worried greatly-- had he flipped out, lost his mind from the desperation of poverty on Purim Day?

 He, however, was oblivious to the obvious concern on their faces, and continued his cheerful patter. Then he set out on the table the bread, fish and liquor that he had acquired, and told them to sit, and eat, drink, feel good and be merry; it’s Purim today! Happy Purim. L’chaim!â”

 Whatever had happened, they weren’t about to refuse this enticing invitation. They set to with gusto as he sat down and joined them. After a few sips of L’chaim they too began to happily enter the spirit of the day, and soon they all jumped up and started dancing around the table, holding hands and singing loudly “Purim today! Purim today!”

 Round and round they went on in this vein for quite a while, until suddenly they heard knocking at their door. “Don’t open,” he instructed his wife. It is probably someone ignorant of Purim that wants to ruin our celebration.”

 But the knocking didn’t stop. Finally, his wife said to him, “I think I know who is there. It’s that elderly non-Jew who lives near the forest and regularly comes around to sell us potatoes from his garden. I am going to open the door for him.”

 She did so and indeed it was him, but he was bruised and bleeding and appeared seriously injured. They quickly administered to him and washed and dressed his wounds as best they could, then gave him some of their food and a cup of the brandy [and perhaps said to him, “L’chaim and a Happy Purim” - editor.].

 After he ate and drank, he thanked them: “You restored me to life! I was a moment away from death out there.” He went on to explain to them what had happened.

 “My only son did this to me! He wanted me to advance him a large sum from his eventual inheritance, and when I refused to do so he beat me nearly to death and then threw me out into the freezing cold. I couldn’t find anyone to help me except you.

 “And since my son has turned out to be a cruel murderer and ingrate, I will never let him get his hands on any of my money. And since you were the only ones who cared enough to help me, I will show you where I have my fortune hidden in the forest. It is likely I will die soon from these injuries, and if I do, you can take the money as a present in gratitude for your kindness.”

 The Jew accompanied him into the forest and noted the tree under which the injured man said he buried his wealth. A few days later the man did indeed die as a result of the vicious beating. The week after that the Jew went into the forest and dug up the strong-box. It turned out to contain a small fortune and he was now, suddenly, a rich man.

 The next Purim he returned to Koznitz and presented the Maggid with a large basket filled with expensive items of food and drink, and a generous monetary donation as well.

 And so he did every Purim after that too. L’chaim and Happy Pourem!

 [Source: Translated and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from Sipurei Chasidim-Moadim by Rabbi S. Y. Zevin, and expanded based on respected oral sources. DO NOT reprint or publish in any form without written permission from <[editor@ascentofsafed.com](http://webmailb.juno.com/webmail/new/8?folder=Inbox&msgNum=0000pPG0:001H996100000P11&block=1&msgNature=all&msgStatus=all&count=1361371314&randid=1698358062&content=central##)>. Yes, you can pass the email along.]

 Biographical note: **Rabbi Yisrael Haupstein**, 1737- 14 Tishrei 1814, **'the Maggid' of Koznitz**, a major disciple of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech, and author of the chassidic-kabbalistic work, 'Avodas Yisrael' and other books. His miraculous birth is the subject of a popular Baal Shem Tov story.

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