



UNFLINCHING JEWISH COURAGE

Sicha – 6 Tishrei, 5750-1989

The Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneersohn, served as Chief Rabbi of Yekatrinoslav-Dniepropetrovsk. In 1938 he was arrested by the Communists for teaching Judaism. He passed away in exile, on the 20th of Av, 5704 - 1944.

At that time, Dniepropetrovsk was the “capital city” for Jewish matters throughout the entire Ukraine —as that part of Southern Russia was then known. The regime persecuted Rabbis to not get involved in Jewish matters. And they applied pressure on the Rabbis to sign a letter stating that the Communist regime allows for freedom of religion.

My father declared publicly that not only would he not sign the letter, although several Rabbis had already been forced into signing it, through torture, threats and terrorizing, etc.— but he would also publicize the fact that he wouldn't sign.

Why wouldn't he sign? Because he knew that it was false. Everybody knew that, but they were afraid to talk. Therefore, by his going public about it, at least some people would have joined him in his refusal. This would cause an upheaval which would force the regime to give in to various demands of his.

First and foremost was his demand about the Matzah, “food of faith.” He had to travel to Moscow in order to get a permit to allow them to grind wheat in a manner Kosher for Passover.

Yekatrinoslav-Dniepropetrovsk was in an area where much wheat and other grains grew. My father was the one who stood up and declared that he would travel to Moscow, The officials were afraid to refuse him permission to travel and to ensure that nobody would meet with him in Moscow.

So he traveled to Moscow and he spoke to Kalinin himself, who was the President of the entire Soviet Communist regime. And Kalinin gave my father a permit, instructing all government officials in Yekatrinoslav, where the central mills were, that they shouldn't mix in. They were to heed all of his instructions. When the observer appointed by Rabbi Schneerson would come along and say that the wheat was not Kosher, it was not to be used. He was harming the government. They could have accused Rabbi Schneerson of sabotaging the Communist regime —not only Yekatrinoslav and the Ukraine, but in the entire Russia, since that area was the source of wheat for the entire country.

However, my father said that he would not be scared off, he come out in public. And so he was certain that Kalinin himself would receive him, and would not allow him to be kept away.



פרשת עקב

And, indeed, that is what happened.

The command reached Yekatrinoslav, where all of the main mills were located. They said that my father should choose the observers. Nobody would tell the observers what to do, and they would not have to explain themselves to the government; which wheat they were rejecting and why.

They only had to report and explain themselves only to Rabbi Schneerson, and Rabbi Schneerson would then inform the authorities that the wheat that was received from a specific mill on such and such a date, and which they had ground into flour, etc., may not be used for Passover. It should be sent back, or sold for a cheaper price, etc.

My father's ability to do all of this was thanks to the environment that surrounded him in his home. Not only were they not afraid —which might have shaken his courage as well— but rather they encouraged him, and gave him strength to ignore all the dangers. Although the situation throughout the country was such that they would have accused not only the Rabbi himself, but also all his family members —especially his wife, who lives in the same home and supports him in his counter-revolutionary activities harming the entire country through the main mills. And yet, she helped him along, and refused to be disturbed or afraid.

Indeed, there were officials who were threatened; in fact, even some close friends were afraid that the government's threats would be carried out. They came quietly at night, so that nobody would know that they came to the Rabbi —since that was itself a sin. They told that they had information about the dangers through their connections with the Tcheka, as the secret police was called. They were the people who did the work for the Jewish Communists, the Yevsektzia. The Yevsektzia themselves did not have the power to do anything. They had to turn to the non-Jews, to the Communists, and they were the ones to actually carry out the threats.