

“And now, go and I shall dispatch you to Pharaoh and you shall take My people, the Bnei Yisrael, out of Egypt.” (3:10)

Hashem assures Moshe of success despite the odds, the apparent hopelessness of one man triumphing over the strongest power in the world. That is *mesiras nefesh*, dedication to the point of self-sacrifice, for *Klal Yisrael*. One endeavors whatever he can on behalf of his people who are incarcerated. The *Skulener Rebbe*, *Horav Elazar Zushe Portugal, z.l.*, was like that. Nothing stood in his way in his mission to rescue Jews who were in need. He was in Chernowitz, which was under Soviet dominion, in order to assist Soviet Jews who had smuggled themselves across the border in to Romania. Furthermore, it was much easier to get papers to enable them to go to America or Israel. The Jews were caught and immediately found guilty. The punishment was imprisonment in Siberia or a quick bullet to the head. The *Rebbe* was indefatigable; nothing stood in his way. “I will get them out – regardless!” he exclaimed.

The colonel who was in charge of the border guards lived in Chernowitz and knew the *Rebbe* well. The *Rebbe* had won him over many a time with heartrending entreaties on behalf of his brethren. The last time he was there the colonel had told him, “This is the very last time you will bother me. If you come again on behalf of your Jews, I will kill you!”

Nonetheless, when the *Rebbe* was notified about a family of nine people that had been captured, he immediately undertook the daunting and dangerous task of rescuing them. Nothing worked, not even a hefty bribe. They were adamant; these people were to serve as an example for others. There was still one avenue to be employed: the *Rebbe* would go to the colonel and beg, regardless of the imminent personal danger involved. Jewish lives were in danger and that was more important than his own life.

His family begged him not to go. “How can you risk your life like this?” they asked. He responded, “It is not clear that he will take out his wrath against me, but one thing is for sure, their lot is sealed unless I am able to do something in their behalf.”

The *Rebbe* approached the colonel's house with trepidation, climbed up the steps and knocked on the door. When the colonel saw who stood at his doorstep, he was overcome with anger. He grabbed the *Rebbe* and threw him down the stairs. The *Rebbe* was hurt badly, yet, with extreme difficulty, he was able to get up. With the little strength he had left, he once again climbed the stairs and knocked on the colonel's door.

The colonel opened the door and could not believe his eyes. There stood the *Skulener Rebbe*, dirty, bloodied, clothes torn – but with defiance in his eyes. “I must speak to you, colonel!” the *Rebbe* said, with tears streaming down his face. The colonel listened: the *Rebbe* begged, he cried, as he depicted the bitter plight of this hapless family. The colonel's hardened heart could not ignore the selfless pleas, the heartfelt emotion of the *Rebbe*. His devotion to others at the expense

of his own health impressed the colonel. The family was freed. *Mesiras nefesh* triumphed.