

## He shall say to them, “Hear, O Yisrael, today you are coming near to the battle against your enemies; let your heart not be faint; do not be afraid; do not panic and do not be broken before them. (20:3)

*Chazal* (*Talmud Sotah* 44) teach that, during a war, it is absolutely prohibited to run from the enemy. While today, outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, we cannot really say that the Jewish People are involved in a physical war, we are certainly embattled in a spiritual battle against an anti-Semitic world that does not want to see us observing Torah and *mitzvos*. What a sad commentary it is that anti-Semitic gentiles have a greater perception of the value of Torah and *mitzvos* to the Jew than do our secular brethren. They have long ago relegated our People’s treasure, Hashem’s Divinely authored guide to Jewish life, to the dung heap of history: it is antiquated; it is not in tune with the times; its demands are not sufficiently liberal to satisfy their base desires and disjointed code of morality. Thus, the Torah and *mitzvos* are outdated and are not relevant to today’s progressive society – which would compete favorably with the pagan, Roman and Greek cultures.

The anti-Semites of the early twentieth century, under the leadership of Joseph Stalin-- self-styled dictator, a human fiend who found his equal in the Nazi chancellor-- made life very difficult and almost impossible for people of any religious affiliation. He reserved a special place in his ignoble heart for the Jews under his rule. Public study of Torah and *mitzvah* observance were punishable with imprisonment, often in the wasteland of Siberia from which very few returned alive. Yet, there were those who fought valiantly – and succeeded. When Stalin came to power following the Bolshevik Revolution, he focused on obliterating the religious affiliation maintained by the younger Jewish generation. Once the youth were his, the nation no longer had a future. They systematically picked on observant Jews – especially those affiliated with a *chassidic* movement, of which *Lubavitch* was the largest and most outspoken. Arrest, persecution, torture, exile and even death were the usual punishments for anyone caught participating in such *mitzvos* as *Bris Milah*, *Shabbos* and *kashrus*. The majority of Jews deferred to the enormous pressure on their lives. Others served Hashem clandestinely, at great risk to their lives and the lives of their families.

The man who was singly most responsible for rallying the troops was the *Lubavitcher Rebbe*, sixth in line of succession from the *Baal HaTanya*, **Horav Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, zl**. He once told the Czarist police, “Schneersons do not run away!” As such, he remained the primary Jewish leader to guide the remnant Jews who survived the many purges and continued to live in the Soviet Union.

The *Rebbe* created a widespread network of underground institutions throughout the length and breadth of the Soviet Union. Whatever religious life still pumps in the veins of descendants of that generation may directly be attributed to his leadership and the efforts of his students and emissaries.

One night in 1924, the *Rebbe* met in Moscow with a group of young men. They made a pact, a covenant, to devote their lives to the preservation of Torah Judaism in the Soviet Union. They were blessed with incredible *siyata di'Shmaya*, Divine assistance, establishing schools, *shuls*, building *mikvaos*, anything that maintained the spark of Judaism in the hearts and minds of the Jews living there. Some were caught and sent to the firing squad. As soon as one was taken, another immediately stepped in and shouldered his responsibilities. Indeed, throughout the years of the accursed communism, hundreds of *Lubavitcher Chassidim* sacrificed their lives for the sake of preserving our Torah.

Our story begins one night as a group of activists convened with the *Rebbe*. Among the *Lubavitcher* devotees were also a number of *Yevsekas*, apostate Jewish police, who would do anything to slander their brethren. These people were biologically Jewish, but every fibre of their souls was aligned with Amalek. The *Rebbe* was acutely aware of the incursion of these vile insurgents, but he did not care. His mission transcended the work of Eisav and his minions. It was an emotional evening, with the *Rebbe* exhorting his emissaries to continue their work despite the danger of exposure. "Every time they close a school – we will immediately open another one" was their attitude. The *Rebbe* explained why he was so driven to achieve success at all costs: "When the first salvo of the war against our religion was thrown out by the Bolsheviks, the *Rebbe* asked his father, the *Rashag* (*Horav Sholom Dov Ber, zl*), 'Like Nicolai?' the *Rashag* replied, 'Yes, like Nicolai.'"

The *Chassidim* were noticeably taken aback by this dialogue between their holy mentors. One of those who were present explained the interchange, "I hail from a *chassidic* family, and *Chabad Lubavitch* was our sole source of spiritual nourishment. When the government closed down a school, it was they who placed their lives in danger and opened up another school. Until Czar Nicolai rose to power, the country was always at war. When Nicolai became Czar, things changed. The reason is that, prior to Nicolai, whenever a battle took the life of one of the soldiers, the remaining soldiers left the corpse and ran for their lives.

"When Nicolai entered the fray, the rules changed. Now, when a soldier fell, his gun and ammunition were retrieved, and the battle continued. Regardless of how many soldiers fell, no one left the battle. When a soldier fell, another one immediately took his place. 'When we are at war, we fight until the end': This was Czar Nicolai's rule.

"This is what the *Rebbe* asked his father: 'Is our attitude in the battle for *Yiddishkeit* to be fought in the same manner, with a like strategy as that employed by the Czar's Army? When a soldier falls, he is immediately replaced. The *Rebbe's* emissaries throughout the Soviet Union knew only too well the risks of reaching out to Jews, but this was a war against a godless regime, a government bent on destroying the Jewish soul. The only way to triumph over such an evil was to fight relentlessly, never giving an inch, never waning in one's commitment and, certainly, never giving up.'"