

A LONG DUTCH DRIVE

Some 30 years ago, Rabbi Yitschok Vorst, was just beginning his assignment as a Chabad representative in Amstelveen, Holland. Shortly before Passover, he received a phone call from Lubavitch Headquarters in Brooklyn. Rabbi Hadokov, the Rebbe's personal secretary, informed him that the Rebbe wants him to go to a certain small town and give shmura matza, the special matza hand-made from flour that was guarded against moisture, to the Jew that lived in that town. The young rabbi asked for the name of this Jew, whereupon he was informed that the Rebbe did not mention any names. Rabbi Hadokov assured him, though, that he would be able to locate him once he got to the town.*

Rabbi Vorst attempted to explain that the town was many hours' drive from Amsterdam, that he was busy making preparations for his first communal seder in Holland and distributing matzas, and besides, he did not believe there were any Jews located in that town anyway. Rabbi Hadokov was adamant. The Rebbe said that he should leave tomorrow for this town. There was no choice.

The next morning Rabbi Vorst packed a lunch and spent the day driving to this secluded town. Once there he spent hours searching and inquiring for any Jews in the town, to no avail. He finally decided that the expedition was a total waste of time and went to fill his car with petrol for the return trip. The gas station attendant asked the rabbi what had brought him to town. Upon hearing his story the attendant replied that he believed that a worker at the local butcher shop was indeed Jewish.

With nothing to lose, Rabbi Vorst made his way to the shop. When he walked in, the man behind the counter took one look at him and fainted. When he revived he told Rabbi Vorst the following story:

His mother and he were the only survivors in his family of the Nazi horrors. They moved to this secluded part of Holland to avoid further persecution. On her deathbed, his mother made him swear never to marry a non-Jewish girl and always be true to his faith. That had been five years prior. For the last several months the local priest had frequented his shop and began proselytizing him. They would enter into long discussions, but for this man, conversion was out of the question.

Eventually, though, the priest began to make headway. One of his arguments G-d had abandoned the young man, as proved by the fact that he was the only Jew in the area. Therefore he should convert and become part of a community.

After several months of being worn down, the young Jew agreed to be baptized. But, he insisted, first he wanted three days to think it over further.

He felt confused and depressed. He was indeed all alone. But how could he abandon his faith? How could he renege on the vow he made to his mother? He cried bitterly.

Finally he called out to the Almighty, "I will wait for you, dear G-d, to show me a sign that you are still watching over me. If I do not see anything from you by 6:00 PM on the third day, I will convert!"

And so the man cried. For three days he became more morose. He found work impossible. The third day had arrived and still no sign. The man spent the day looking at the clock. At lunch time he took a break and again beseeched the Almighty. There was less than six hours before he would agree to convert. During his 3:00 break the man again turned and prayed. Now there was less than three hours. If he did not see some sign indicating that the G-d of the Jews still cared for him, he would be baptized.

As the minute hand passed the 5:00 mark, the man was besides himself. Perhaps the priest was right after all. Maybe it would be better for him to convert. The minutes ticked on. Each one felt like an entire hour. At 5:45, he began closing the store. At 5:55 PM Rabbi Yitschok Vorst, armed with his matza from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, walked into this man's store.

After hearing this story, Rabbi Vorst begged the man to come back with him to Amsterdam and spend Passover. The man agreed. Every step of the way was a new beginning for this man. He had never been exposed to Judaism as his mother wanted to hide him from it. After Passover, he thanked the Rabbi and left. Cont.

- Twenty-five years later, Rabbi Vorst traveled to Jerusalem for the wedding of a relative. He was praying devoutly at the Western Wall, deep in concentration, when he heard his name being called and felt a hearty slap across his back. He turned and saw a large, burly man. The man asked him in Dutch, "Rabbi, don't you recognize me, I am so and so from the town of I spent Pesach in your house one year. Now I live in Jerusalem with my family. I owe everything to you." Sometimes, it is possible to make a deal with the Almighty.

[Adapted by Yrachmiel Tilles from the rendition of Rabbi Herschel Finman in his weekly email "The Torah e-Parsha" shliach613@aol.com.] - ascent.org