

The Chickens and the Ticket

The following story is taken from *Me'oros Ha-Daf Ha-Yomi*, (a *dafyomi* pamphlet by Kollel Chassidei Sochotchov, Bnei Brak), vol. 96, citing "*VeAmech Kulam*."

Everyone in the compartment of the dilapidated train made a lot of room for her to sit down. Not that the other passengers respected elderly woman - no one wanted to be near her, for she was traveling with filthy, smelly chickens and geese! The shrill whistle from the platform signaled that the train was about to pull out. Suddenly a young and frightened boy, out of breath, jumped into the compartment. As he refilled his lungs with air, the train jerked forward and started to pick up speed.

The boy quickly studied everyone in the coach, which was crowded with robust Russian farmers and peasant housewives. He saw that the only place left for him was near the old woman's geese and chickens. "Sometimes life surprises a person," Dovid Mendel mused. Not many hours ago he was happily and calmly studying Gemara [= talmud [the oral written down jewish tradition]] with his *chavrusa*, [study-partner] and now he found himself shivering like a windblown leaf in a fourth-class coach of a packed train heading to Kiev. That morning, a high-ranking Russian soldier with a scowl on his face had handed the Rosh Yeshivah [head of the tora school] a government order saying that all the yeshivah [tora school] students had to leave Lubitz within twenty-four hours. Not obeying the order would bring bitter consequences.

The yeshivah boys knew about Stalin's evil decrees. Sadly, therefore, they went to their rooms, packed what few possessions they had, and started off in different directions, heading for their homes. Of course, Dovid Mendel wanted to go home, too, to Kiev, but he didn't have a penny to his name. He came from an impoverished family, and it had taken his parents many months to gather enough money to send him to the yeshivah. Now he had no money to return. The Rosh Yeshivah [head of the tora school] was not able to

help in this respect, but blessed him that he would not suffer misfortune. Then he told him to leave Lubitz as quickly as possible.

"One thing I *can* give you," said the Rosh Yeshivah with tears in his eyes. "Some advice - any time you are threatened with trouble say to yourself the verse ***"Ein od milvado"*** [Hebrew]

["There is no[power] besides Him"]

The landscape outside the window of the racing train changed rapidly. Soon they would arrive at the first stop, where a checker would board the train to make sure that everyone aboard had tickets. From minute to minute, Dovid Mendel's concern grew and grew.

The old woman finished feeding her fowl. Dovid Mendel stud-

ied her deep bewrinkled face, and realized that she was Jewish - the only other Jew in the coach. In his predicament he had no choice and decided to ask her for help.

When he saw that no one would notice, he whispered his story to her, but she did not seem to hear. Finally he begged her, "Please, can you help me?" When he finished pleading, the old woman fell into a deep sleep, without a word of response, and her thunderous snoring was heard throughout the crowded coach.

The train continued to speed on towards its first stop. Contemplating his bitter fate, Dovid Mendel did not notice that the old woman had awakened and had stood up, holding a large goose and a noisy chicken. Then she started to stroll with them around the coach.

The other travelers were suddenly startled by the shrill shouts of a chubby and stalwart man who was terribly annoyed by the chicken and goose. His cries woke up several passengers who had been sleeping. The old Jewish woman paid no attention, however. "Excuse me," she said, "but will this ticket get me from Lubitz to Kiev?" "Lady," the man replied. "I already told you that it's all right! Don't worry! Your ticket is just fine. It's 100% good!" She then continued to slowly wander from one person to another accompanied by her birds, showing each passenger her ticket and innocently asking, "Will this ticket get me from Lubitz to Kiev?" Each time, she received a clamorous dismissal: "Yes, yes, it's a good ticket, don't worry. Just go and sit down!" During the tumult Dovid Mendel awakened from his troubled thoughts. His first impression was that not only had his fate not improved, now he must suffer traveling next to this bizarre and hapless woman. He pleaded to Hashem [G-d] to save him from the misfortune that probably was about to befall him for not having a ticket to show the checker.

The old woman finally returned to her seat - seemingly satisfied that her ticket would get her to Kiev. She put the goose and chicken back in their place and contentedly went back to sleep. It seemed to Dovid Mendel that every so often she winked at him - but on the other hand, he wasn't sure.

The train started to slow down and pull into a station. Dovid Mendel saw the ticket checker waiting on the platform, just as he had imagined in his dismal musing. The checker was tall and stocky, with a cruel face. He had handcuffs hanging on his belt, intended for passengers like Dovid Mendel who sneak aboard without paying. "Ein od milvado," [there is [no] power besides Him] whispered Dovid Mendel, trembling.

Suddenly Dovid Mendel felt something being shoved at him.

The old lady was pushing her worn-out ticket at him. Before he could ask her what she was doing, she quickly motioned to him to remain quiet, closed her eyes, and appeared to fall into a deep sleep again.

As the checker approached and yelled, "Ticket, please!" Dovid Mendel held out his ticket. Then the checker passed on, looked down at the wrinkled old woman and said, "Ticket, lady. Lady-

ticket!" She did not wake up and he shouted his command again: "Lady - ticket!" She still did not budge, and then the other passengers began to call out from all sides of the coach: "Leave that crazy woman alone! In the name of all that is holy, please, do not wake her up!" The passenger that she had disturbed first said to the checker, "Believe me, she has a ticket! Everyone here saw her ticket. Just don't wake her up! We have already suffered more than enough from her!"

Lacking much choice, the checker continued on to the next compartment. Dovid Mendel thought he discerned a slight smile in the corner of the clever old woman's mouth. Her eyes remained closed. She remained "asleep," not bothering a soul, just as the other passengers wanted.

This old Jewish woman put herself in great peril in order to help her fellow Jew, though she had never seen him before in her life. What great courage she demonstrated! One small slip and both she and the boy would have wound up in a terrible Soviet prison for many years. Later, when Dovid Mendel went over to her to express his deep gratitude, she explained with shining eyes and simple faith, "When you told me that you are a yeshivah bachur, [=boy learning in a tora school] I knew I had to do whatever I could to save you."

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