

LISTEN TO WHAT THEY SAY !

If there should be something unclear to you in a matter of law, between one type of blood which is clean and another which is unclean; between money claims of one man against his fellow; between one disease which is clean and another which is unclean, or any other matters of controversy within your city gates, then you shall arise and you shall go up to the place which HaShem your Lord shall choose. You shall come to the Kohanim, to the Levi'im or to the judge who will be in those days and you shall make enquiry and they shall tell you the verdict of their judgement. You then shall do according to that verdict which they tell you from that place which HaShem will choose and you shall take care to do everything that they tell you. According to the instruction of the Torah which they teach you and according to the verdict that they tell you shall you do — you shall not deviate from the verdict which they tell you, neither to the right nor to the left ...

Devorrim, 17 : 8 — 11 (with Rashi's commentary)

Many years ago, when Rav Moshe Feinstein was a Rov in Russia, there was a Jewish informer who terrorized his fellow Jews. Being close to the Russian authorities, he would constantly cause trouble for the Jewish villagers. He made their lives a misery as only an informer can and they all lived in great fear of him. One day, this man became deathly ill. Realizing that his end was near, he summoned the *Chevra Kadisha*. "I'm an old man," he told them. "I have sinned. I have sinned against G-d and against my fellow Jews!"

With this, he burst into bitter weeping. After a few minutes, he regained his self-control and continued in a shaking voice. "It's too late to do anything now except express regret and do *teshuvoh*. I am truly sorry for all the suffering I have caused. But that's not enough. I need a penance, a *ka'poroh*. Although I don't deserve any favours from you, whom I have persecuted for so long, I am humbly requesting one thing before I die." He took a deep breath and his voice, until then feeble, suddenly gained strength. "Bury me face down. That will be my *ka'poroh*."

The *Chevra* were shocked. "It's highly unusual. We can't do it."

"No, no," insisted the old man, his voice rising higher and higher. "I need a *ka'poroh*. I've been so wicked. Please bury me in this strange, disrespectful way so that my suffering in the World to Come will be less. And one more thing: I want you to sign that you'll do it. I don't want pity, *rachmonus*. Just sign that you'll grant this last wish to a dying man."

There was a long silence. Finally, the *Chevra Kadisha* agreed to the unusual request and signed.

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Shortly afterwards, the man passed away. But things did not go according to plan. When the great *Gaon*, Rav Moshe Feinstein, heard about the condition for burial, he would not allow it. Citing the *Shulchan Oruch*, he informed the *Chevra Kadisha* that a Jew is not allowed to be buried in an undignified position. Signature or no signature, request or no request, the man had to be buried in the normal way — the *halochos* had to be observed! And so it happened. The instructions of their Rov were followed and the Jewish informer was buried according to *Halochoh*, irrespective of his dying wish.

The next day, who should turn up but a small crowd of plain clothes investigators from the NKVD, the dreaded Russian Secret Police.

“Open up the grave!” they ordered. “This is an official investigation! We’ve come to check that everything is in order!”

“No, no,” the *Chevra Kadisha* said, trembling with fear. These cruel “officials” often inflicted terrible misery upon the Jews with the flimsiest excuse of any infringement, real or imagined, of rules and regulations. “It’s against our Law. We cannot do that for anyone!”

“Open it!” Their tone said that they would tolerate no disobedience. The NKVD were armed and anyhow never hesitated to use force to impose their orders. The Jews had no choice but to comply. They slowly started to remove the fresh earth but the Russians were in a hurry. They took over from the Jews and before long, the Russians had removed all the earth and revealed the plain wooden coffin. They removed the lid and stared inside. After a few moments’ quiet conversation amongst themselves, the officials looked meaningfully at one another and left without a word. The villagers never heard from them again.

It was only some time later that the facts came to light. The informer had in reality not regretted his wicked deeds at all. If anything, he had compounded his evil so that it should continue even after his death. For this evil man had devised a fiendish plan. Realising he was dying, he had informed the authorities that the Jews of the village would take their revenge on him for having assisted the authorities and they would demean him by burying him in a disrespectful position. His supposed deathbed confession and contrition was all a sham! In this way, he had sought to cause terrible trouble for his fellow Jews even after his death.

The wisdom and integrity of Rav Moshe Feinstein — and the Heavenly assistance that is granted to every G-d-fearing Rabbi — together with the simple Jews’ unquestioning obedience to his words — saved them. Rav Moshe’s strict adherence to *Halochoh* and their respect for their Rov and his instructions, saved them all from disaster.

Adapted from the *Jewish Tribune*, London.