

R' Mordechai Sirota

His Youth

The Chassid, R' Mordechai Sirota, was born in a small town near Uman. His parents were Chassidim and Yirei Shomayim, but were unable to raise him since they passed away when he was a child, leaving six orphans. His sister, who was ten years older than Mordechai, raised him along with another brother.

His sister tried to raise him in a pure atmosphere. Although she could not teach him Torah, she instilled him with Yiras Shomayim.

Mordechai had a refined Chassidic appearance. He knew the complete Sefer Tehillim by heart, and he constantly said verses of Tehillim. He spent most of his time working since nobody could support him.

His Marriage

When he was 15 years old, he moved to Tashkent where one of his sisters had recently married. When he reached marriageable age, he married Rivka Kogan from Dnieterovsk. She too hadn't had an easy life, as she was a 16 year old orphan. She was taken with her sister to an orphanage until she grew older. At that point, she traveled with a relative to Tashkent where she met Mordechai Sirota.

The wedding took place in Tashkent in 5687 (1927). R' Mordechai would say; "Many tears were shed at that wedding." In the period before World War II, R' Mordechai walked 40 minutes to shul with Mesirus Nefesh. But when numerous informers frequented the shul, R' Mordechai decided to open his own shul. He rented an apartment and organized a minyan. Despite the danger, he was fearless and he worked mightily in maintaining the minyan. R' Mordechai made hats for a living, something he learned from his brother-in-law. He supported himself and his ten children. The advantage of this line of work was that he did not have to work on Shabbos.

R' Mordechai did not have an easy life. He lost two of his children. A daughter passed away at the age of two and a half, and a 20-year-old

son was killed when a car hit him as he rode his bike. He was buried in the cemetery in Tashkent where many of Anash who passed away during and after the war were buried.

His Children

R' Mordechai had eight surviving children who live in Eretz Israel, New York, and Montreal. From oldest to youngest they are: Zev, Reuven, Clara (Goldsmid), Moshe, Hershel, Boruch, Rivka (Klein) and Yisroel.

Hospitality

R' Mordechai (Motte) Sirota was compassionate, a trait which characterized him above all others. For many years, he devoted himself: body, soul, and money, for others, as will be related. They said about him that when the Chassid R' Simcha Gorodetzky was exiled to Siberia after being caught by the NKVD, R' Mordechai thought about how R' Simcha would suffer from the bitter cold and on the spot, he removed the fur coat he was wearing and gave it to R' Simcha.

With the outbreak of World War II, many citizens were drafted to fight against the Germans. Since R' Mordechai was a father of eight children, he was exempt and was assigned civilian duties. After a few months he was exempt from that too from service since one of the officials had pity on him and released him. The war years were ones of chaos and upheaval. As the German enemy approached Moscow, the capital, hundreds of thousands fled the city and traveled to distant Asia. Many of them found refuge in Tashkent, which became crowded with refugees.

Among the hundreds of thousands of refugees were also thousands of Jews who arrived in Tashkent lacking all basic amenities, without food and money. Many Jews wandered the streets of Tashkent without knowing where they would sleep that night.

R' Mordechai Sirota opened his heart and his home. His home was all of three small rooms in which he, his wife, and their eight children were crowded. Yet, any refugee who didn't have a place to go, went to R' Mordechai. Despite the crowding, Mordechai didn't stop seeking out guests. When he heard that a train with Jewish refugees had arrived, he would go to the train station and look for Jewish faces. When he found Jews, he brought them to his home with great honor, and gave them a meal. They were able to stay at his home for extended periods. One of the families lived with the Sirotas for two years! One of Anash, who lived in his home for an extended period, relates: "I arrived at his house late at night. I saw many people sleeping on beds, as well as on and under the tables. I looked for the balabus but didn't find him, so I got ready to go to sleep when I suddenly saw R' Mordechai sleeping on the floor in the hallway, with all the guests." Furthermore, R' Mordechai hosted sick people who were in critical condition. He helped them as best as he could until they fully recovered.

B' Mordechai didn't only provide his guests with food and a place to sleep, he also helped them find employment so they could support themselves and their families in dignity. He helped establish many families who were poor and starving. Hosting refugees was no simple matter. Most of them did not have identification papers and the NKVD would conduct searches in the homes of those who hosted people without identification. Yet this did not stop R' Mordechai from endangering himself and hosting refugees. *One time, late at night, R' Mordechai found out that the NKVD were conducting searches in nearby homes. He immediately and gently woke up his guests and took them down to the cellar. He covered the door to the cellar with a table. That time, the search wasn't thorough and the NKVD didn't find anything.

R' Mordechai's daughter, Chaya Goldschmidt relates:

"It happened a few times that the NKVD arrived without our receiving prior warning. Sometimes my father would get rid of them with a bribe

of money or vodka and they left, but they often took my father for interrogation. As a young child, I was very afraid. I thought my father would return from the interrogation (which generally took a few hours) and would say we would no longer have guests. However, we always continued having guests.

“I remember one night as a terrible night. They knocked at the door again and as usual, my father tried to explain that the people living in our home were poor relatives who had no place to go, but the NKVD didn't want to accept that. To the sound of the cries of the family and our guests, both my parents were taken for interrogation. We cried and cried, and were very afraid for my mother who was a refined woman. Our prayers helped and late at night my parents returned. From the gleam in their eyes we immediately understood that they would continue hosting guests as always.”

R' Zalman Klein relates:

"R' Mordechai Sirota was a man who exemplified true Ahavas Yisrael, a strong Jew who was not afraid to do whatever he thought was right. At one of the interrogations, they tried to break him by making him wait in a dark corridor of the NKVD building until they called him. Generally, someone who was kept waiting for so many hours would be in turmoil and terribly frightened, but R' Mordechai wasn't afraid. He simply laid down on the floor and went to sleep. When the interrogator went to call him, he was shocked by what he saw."

R' Mordechai's house was open to all, and he hosted hundreds of Jews. At the war's end, one of his guests emigrated to the U.S. where he went into business and became wealthy. Despite his wealth he did not forget R' Mordechai, his former host, and he decided to send him a large package with food and clothing.

The problem this Jew had was that he didn't remember R' Mordechai's address. After thinking about it, he decided that everybody knew R' Mordechai Sirota of Tashkent. He wrapped the package and wrote "For Mordechai Sirota, Tashkent, near the bathhouse in the courtyard

of the home of Boruch Ben Reb Tziyon. It's hard to believe but in a city as big as Tashkent, with over two million residents, the package reached its destination. The post office employees knew Mordechai Sirota too.

A Place Where Chachamim Met R' Mordechai's home was a "Beis Vaad La Chachamim." Since he had a fiery Chassidic soul, he hosted distinguished Chassidim and Mashpiim.

Anash in Tashkent knew that when they wanted to farbreng, they could go to R' Mordechai, who was an unparalleled host. The great mashpiim of the day, such as R' Yisrael Neveller, R' Peretz Mochkin, R' Shlomo Chaim Kesselman and R' Mendel Futerfas, held farbrengens there. Since R' Mordechai had grown up in a small town near Uman, he had a warm place in his heart for Breslover Chassidim: He hosted distinguished Chabad Chassidim as well as Breslover Chassidim. It was thrilling to watch the scene as great Breslover Chassidim such as R' Levi Yitzchok Bender and R' Chaim Binyamin Brod, farbrenged with Chabad Mashpiim like R' Mendel Futerfas, R' Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, and R' Peretz Mochkin.

"On those nights, the mashke flowed like water," recalls someone who spent time in R' Mordechai's house.

"They danced on the table until the light of dawn."

His daughter-in-law, Yehudis Sirota relates:

"I once asked my mother-in-law, How can you live like this, when they farbreng at night - you have little children?" She looked at me and said in amazement, "Farbrengens have to be held somewhere, so why shouldn't they be held in my house?"

As time went by, R' Mordechai made connections with government officials in Tashkent. He used these connections in order to obtain documents for refugees, and to arrange exemptions from the army, etc. Every effort in this regard entailed great expense to keep people quiet.

His Mesiras Nefesh

R' Mordechai's mesiras nefesh was famous. He didn't hesitate to help any Jew. He underwent frequent interrogation by the NKVD, and was asked questions about various people.

Generally, after his release, he would hurry to tell the person about whom he was questioned so he would be prepared.

At one of the interrogations he was asked about Rabbi Dovid Okunov (may Hashem avenge his blood). Between the lines, he understood that the NKVD wanted to nab him. That same night, R' Mordechai told him about the danger and R' Dovid fled from Tashkent to Charkov in the Ukraine. When the NKVD came in the morning to arrest him, he was gone.

The Chassid R' Mulle Pruss of Kfar Chabad also relates how R' Mordechai saved him from danger twice, for which he could have been sent to Siberia. R' Mordechai put himself in danger, without thinking of the consequences, the most important thing being saving a Jew.

Chinuch

Although the government authorities insisted that every child attend school seven days a week, R' Mordechai's children avoided attending school on Shabbos, each time with a different excuse.

The boys learned in Tomchei Tmimim which was founded in Tashkent after Anash arrived there. The yeshiva was in private homes and Anash collected money and seforim to sustain the Yeshiva.

R' Zev Sirota:

"Until age 13 I attended public school, but when the war began and Lubavitcher refugees arrived, I switched to yeshiva. I learned in Rabbi Zalman Leib Estulin's class, and with the Rav in Tashkent, Rabbi Zalman Buber (Pevsner). "Of course the yeshiva was illegal and

everything was done secretly so that outsiders wouldn't know about it. We diligently learned Nigleh and Chassidus."

When the war ended, many of the Polish citizens returned to Poland via Lvov. R' Mordechai was afraid to leave Russia with forged passports and after much deliberation, he decided to remain in the Soviet Union rather than face the danger of leaving illegally.

"Man's footsteps are planned by Hashem." The fact that R' Mordechai Sirota and his family remained in Tashkent because Divine Providence assigned them the task of spreading the wellsprings in that city, to the Jews who remained.

Brissim And Chuppos

"Every Jew who was afraid to have a bris in his house, came to us," says R' Mordechai's daughter, Mrs. Rochel Klein. "And whoever was afraid to hold a proper chuppa, came to us too. We made countless brissim and chuppos. The Mesader Kiddushin was Rabbi Zalman Buber and the Mohel was Rabbi Chaim Marinovsky z'l. "I remember how one morning, an unfamiliar old Jewish woman knocked at our door. She whispered that her son, a high-ranking general, had had a son, and that the family wanted the bris to take place on the eighth day, but they didn't know where to have it done. 'If we make the bris in our house and are caught, it will be terrible,' she said. We didn't even know her name. Naturally, my parents offered to have the bris done in our house. "On the eighth day, the general and his wife came. R' Chaim Marinovsky quickly did the bris and the general left immediately while his wife and the baby stayed with us for a week until the baby healed. My mother devotedly took care of the mother and baby until they returned home. "We usually didn't know who the Chasanim and Kallahs were, or who the babies and their families were. We didn't know their names or where they were from. My father helped all Jews and risked his life to do so.

Baking Matzah At Home

Every year before Pesach, R' Mordechai and his family would bake matzos. At the beginning of the winter R' Mordechai obtained a large quantity of kosher for Peach flour. This was a nearly impossible task since this was at a time when it was difficult to buy a kilogram or two of flour in the stores, but R' Mordechai got hundreds of kilograms of flour. He did it through having the proper connections and by giving gifts of money or vodka. It was dangerous nonetheless.

One year, the police came to conduct a search since they heard that the Sirota family had a large quantity of flour. Money and persuasive talk saved the flour.

The baking began about two months before Peach and was done mainly at night out of fear that the secret police, who patrolled the area by day, would hear the noise. Yet there was fear that a neighbor or a police officer who happened by, would notice what they were doing.

R' Mordechai's daughters relate:

"The entire family was involved in the baking. One rolled the dough, one made the holes, another one worked by the oven, and another one took the matzos out.

"The selling of the matzos began a few weeks before Pesach.

Everybody thought we had a profitable business, but we in the family knew the truth, that all the profits and maybe more than that went for bribes, so we could get the flour and keep the neighbors quiet."

The Sirota matza baking venture supplied matzos for all the Jews of Tashkent for many years.

"We were always very fearful of people informing on us," say the daughters, "and our father constantly used bribes to prevent this from happening. One year, a fire broke out in the bakery and boruch Hashem, miraculously nobody was hurt and the damage was relatively

small." No doubt, the tzedakah and chessed that the Sirota family did, parents and children, protected them from harm.

On 4 lyar 5726 (1966), early in the morning, Tashkent shook from a devastating earthquake that destroyed tens of thousands of homes and killed thousands of people.

R' Mordechai's daughter Rochel relates:

"All the children were home and my mother was outside.

Till this day I can remember her cries, 'get out, get out!' We all left the house and seconds later, the ceiling caved in. Afterwards, when we had ascertained that we were all safe, my mother said that she had seen the earth shake and she knew an earthquake was about to happen. That is why she yelled to all of us to leave, thus saving the entire family."

Leaving The Soviet Union

Over the years, R' Mordechai helped many Jews leave the Soviet Union, after using his connections and giving bribes for exit permits. For some reason, he did not obtain exit permits for himself. It was only after he helped many others leave that he decided that he would ask for one himself. At that time, very few people obtained exit permits and it took a number of years until his request was approved.

His daughter Chaya Goldschmidt relates:

"My husband, my children and I, left for Eretz Yisrael before my parents. When some months had gone by and my parents still did not have permission to leave, I wrote a letter to the Rebbe and asked for a bracha for them. The Rebbe sent me a bracha for them to leave.

Shortly thereafter, on Hoshana Raba 5732 (1971), they left Russia and arrived in Eretz Yisrael."

Upon their arrival, they settled near relatives in Nachalat Har Chabad.

At The Rebbe

R' Mordechai went to the Rebbe for Yud Shevat 5732. He spent a few weeks there and had a yechidus along with his son, R' Yisrael Sirota (today a shliach in Canada). As soon as he entered for the yechidus, the Rebbe smiled broadly and asked him, "Why didn't you bring the table that you farbrenge on so much?"

Helping Others In Eretz Yisrael

After R' Mordechai settled in Eretz Yisrael, his good heart and his need to help others didn't allow him to relax, and he began working on helping those in need. Those who knew him say that whoever entered his home and asked for help of any kind, did not leave empty-handed. R' Mordechai had a small gemach of a few hundred dollars, which he lent to those in need. Many people thought his gemach was large because whoever asked for a loan would get it after a short wait. They were never told there was no money left in the gemach. But the truth was that sometimes there was no money left to lend, and R' Mordechai went to another gemach in the neighborhood, borrowed the money, and lent it to the one who needed it. Many people who were embarrassed to borrow money from various gemachs, were helped by R' Mordechai.

R' Mordechai worked in a factory in Kiryat Malachi and didn't make much money. Sometimes he lived from paycheck to paycheck, but he never pressured those who borrowed money to return the loan.

Mivtzoim

After R' Mordechai retired, he would go out every day to put tefillin on with store owners and passersby in the business district of Kiryat Malachi. Even during the rain and cold, or very hot days, he would go out to put tefillin on with people, so as not to prevent even one Jew who wanted to put on tefillin, from doing so.

When walking became difficult for him, his wife went along to help him. Every day, you could see a heartwarming sight in the center of Kiryat Malachi - R' Mordechai and Rivka Sirota walking and putting tefillin on people.

His Passing

R' Mordechai passed away on 8 Iyar 5751. Hundreds of Jews, who were helped by R' Mordechai, whether in Tashkent or Kiryat Malachi, participated in his funeral.

He had the zechus of his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren continuing in his footsteps, many of whom are shluchim around the world, going in the ways of Torah and Chassidus.

Rivka Sirota

Mrs. Rivka Sirota A"H, was a compassionate woman and a wonderful mother who raised ten children. Despite the enormous difficulties she had to contend with, she hosted dozens of guests in her home for sleeping and meals. She warmly welcomed the refugee guests even when they had no money.

After her tenth child was born, she received a certificate and a medal from the Soviet government for being a "Heroic Mother." After moving to Eretz Yisrael, she helped new and needy immigrants. All her deeds were done modestly, without fan-fare.



Rivkah Sirota A”h lighting Shabbos candles

	<p>Honorary title Mother Heroine</p>  <p>Obverse of the Order "Mother Heroine"</p>
Type	Honorary title
Awarded for	Raising 10 or more children
Presented by	 Soviet Union (1944-1991)  Russia (2022-present)
Eligibility	Citizens of the Soviet Union (1944-1991) Citizens of Russia (2022-present)
Status	Being awarded
Established	8 July 1944

Award for having 10 or more children



R' Mordechai Sirota A"H









