

Third Place Winner - TIE
Division I – 7-9th Grades
Righteous Among the Nations
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Within a short time 48,000 Bulgarian Jews were saved from destruction. If it wasn't for one man, four members of the delegation of Kyustendil and some church leaders who chose to do moral good; thousands of Jews would have been sent and deported to death camps. This is the courageous story of Dimitar Peshev, "Righteous Among the Nations."

In 1940, the Bulgarian parliament promoted the "Law for the Protection of the Nation" which in turn, was followed by a number of racial orders against its Jewish citizens. Jews could no longer hold employment in many major jobs, and less than 1% of the Jewish population could go to a university. Dimitar Peshev, the Vice President of the Sbranie Bulgaria's Parliament, even favored Bulgaria's alliance with Germany and supported the anti-Jewish legislation. Under this law, Jews were no longer eligible for Bulgarian citizenship.

Peshev's doubt began on March 8, 1943. A close Jewish friend arrived at his door requesting his help in saving the 8,000 Jews of Kyustendil. This incident marked Peshev's turning point. It was at this moment when he realized that the Jewish people of Bulgaria were in danger of extinction at the hands of the Germans.

Dimitar Peshev decided to take action. He went to Parliament, bursting into the office of the Bulgarian Minister of Interior. After a fierce argument, Gabrosky the Minister issued an order "annulling" the deportations of Jews from Bulgaria. Dimitar then proceeded to argue with each prefect's office that the deportation order would not be executed. In order to save all 50,000 Jews from deportation, he obtained the signatures of 40 members of Parliament and presented his government with a letter of protest in which he openly informed against the idea of deporting all the Jews from Bulgaria. After this righteous act, Dimitar Peshev was sentenced to 15 years in jail, but after one year in prison the court freed him when they learned about his courageous role in saving the Jews.

After many years Dimitar was bestowed the title, "Righteous Among the Nations." When asked why he prevented the Jewish deportation he said, "My human conscience and my understanding of the fateful consequences both for the people involved and the policy of our country now and in the future did not allow me to remain idle. And I decided to do all in my power to prevent what was being planned from happening; I knew that this action was going to shame Bulgaria in the eyes of the world and brand her with a stain she didn't deserve."

Dimitar Peshev risked his job and even his life to save others before himself. Dimitar fought a lot; his enemies threatened him that if Germany recovered from the defeat of Stalingrad, he would've been thrown over to the Gestapo. But, through his persistence and moral deeds he saved 48,000 Jews from being sent, and deported to death camps. Dimitar once said, "I decided to do whatever I could to prevent the plans from being implemented."

Through his fierce battle, Dimitar's legacy has directed me to know that the popular opinion is not always right. This problem correlates to the fact that in today's world, popular views are not always as wonderful as they seem. One example of this is that there has been a wide spread amount of misinformation throughout the world. As a person, I seem to always follow the popular opinion because I'm afraid of being wrong. I'm afraid of being called out on my views that I think are right. Even Dimitar was brought upon to believe the "right view", but whenever he saw his Jewish friend begging for help, he put aside his old beliefs and in turn, saved the Bulgarian Jews from extinction.

One time during school I was playing Jeopardy with my team. As a candidate of my team I had thought of an answer. I was about to propose my idea but I got pressured out and instead got told another interpretation. I backed down thinking that the majority view was right. They submitted it and as it turned out, I was the one who had the right answer. Unlike Dimitar who opposed pure pressure I gave into it .

Reading through Dimitar's story made me have a new view in life. Even today, 40 years later, he influences me to no longer be the same as everyone else. His actions have inspired me to make my own choices and to not always believe in the acceptable choice. I've been too focused on following mindlessly, when I can be making changes. Dimitar has taught me to think outside the box and to always question everything. I now believe that something that everybody believes is right, may not always be right. There was once a old saying that your actions have consequences, but even though Dimitar lost his position and became a political outcast he still chose to do moral good. This is the lesson I think Dimitar has taught us to do. Doing nothing and following like sheep won't get us anywhere. It will do exactly the opposite. If we stand out and make our own choices, we can all even become "Righteous Among the Nations."

Bibliography

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