

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's portion *Beha'aloscha* Hashem commands Aharon through Moshe to light the large Menorah in the tabernacle. In commanding Aharon, Hashem uses the interesting word "*Beha'aloscha*." Rashi explains that the word "*Beha'aloscha*" contains the root meaning "to go up," (as in "*an aliyah to the Torah*.") Thus the Torah chose the term "*Beha'aloscha*," to indicate that when applying fire to light the Menorah, one should make sure that the flame on the Menorah goes up -- "*aliyah*," and burns on its own, before removing the source flame from the Menorah. If lighting a candle with a match, for example, one would leave the match burning on the candlewick until the flame of the candle burns high.

When we look deeper into the symbolic meaning of the verse, we begin to see a beautiful, spiritually uplifting meaning of "*Beha'aloscha*..." We read in Proverbs that "*The soul of Man is the lamp of Hashem.*" (Mishlei 20:27) We see that the soul is compared to a lamp. Similarly, the Talmud tells us that the soul of a man is called a candle. (Shabbos 30b) We can now begin to delve into a deeper mystical level of understanding of the verse "*Beha'aloscha Es Ha-Neros*..." -- "*when kindling the lamp*..."

Every Jew has a soul which is a spark of Hashem From On High. Hashem is the Origin of the Holy Fire, which is the Source of Life. Hashem keeps the pilot light of the soul alit as long as we are alive, however, we as individuals are responsible for making sure that the Holy Flame of the soul burns high. Let us now re-read the verse based on our new-found understanding... "*when kindling the soul, you shall make sure that the flame of the soul burns high*..." The following true story will inspire us to kindle our souls.

Rav Yisroel Spira, known as the Bluzhever Rav was a beam of spiritual light in the darkened evil of the Nazi concentration camps. he recalls:

It was the Lemberg-Yanovsky labor camp, a few days before Yom Kippur. There, as in all the ghettos and camps, the Nazis appointed Jews to supervise the laborers and extract from them the last particle of endurance and strength. The chief Ordnungsdienst (work supervisor) in Lemberg was a Jew named Schneeweiss. Like many Jews in his position, his fawning desire to please his masters in return for an extra portion of bread or an extra day of life often made him seem even more cruel than they. The Nazis, in turn, enjoyed the spectacle of Jew persecuting Jew.

Now, Yom Kippur was on the way. Fasting could be managed. It would mean placing oneself in mortal danger, because food rations were below the subsistence level in any case and the labor required even more than the nourishment that had been normal in pre-war days. The rabbis who were frequently called upon to decide such questions always answered in accordance with halacha: "The Torah requires us to eat even on the holiest of fast days because to do otherwise is to invite death by starvation — and God wants us to exert every effort to live. We are forbidden to surrender to death even though we are too limited to understand the purpose of our living under such circumstances."

Nevertheless, there were always those to whom a Yom Kippur, a smuggled pair of tefillin, a blast of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, a secretly baked morsel of matzah, a bit of oil for a Chanukah flame, a minyan, were worth an encounter with a bullet or, worse, a whip. A group of such people approached their spiritual leader in the Yanovsky camp of Lemberg.

"Rav Spira, Yom Kippur is coming. What are we to do? How can we desecrate the Holy Day working as if it were any other day?" The Rabbi was moved as he often was by the devotion of his fellow Jews. He would try to help them.

The Bluzhever Rav went to the hated Schneeweiss, "Herr Ordnungsdienst. As you know, it will soon be Yom Kippur. I am a rabbi and it is important for me to observe this day as properly as possible. A group of my disciples in the camp wish to do the same. We do not ask to be freed from labor, all we ask is that for that one day we be given work which will not force us to violate the law of the Torah. We are willing to do extra work on other days to make up for any labor which goes undone."

That simple request was in itself an act of great heroism, for Schneeweiss, no friend of observant Jews, had in his own hands the power of life and death. He could easily have used the "treasonous" request as a means of proving his loyalty to his SS mentors by turning in the "lazy rabbi who was prepared to sabotage the Master Race's war effort for the sake of his Holy Day foolishness."

Schneeweiss asked for time to consider. The next day, he told the rabbi that he could choose a limited number of prisoners who would be assigned to clean the apartments of the camp's commanding officers. But the Ordnungsdienst would guarantee them nothing nor would he defend them if the Germans sensed something wrong. And if there was so much as a speck of dirt to be found anywhere in the house, they would pay with their lives.

So it was that on Yom Kippur an unusual prayer service was held by Rabbi Spira and fourteen young men. The rabbi stood on a window sill polishing the glass while the men were sweeping, dusting, tidying — and all the while he led them in the solemn prayers as he had led congregations for many years in Galicia, but never had the Yom Kippur service been as fervent or as tearful.

At midday, a tray was brought in with food. It lay ignored on a table as the praying and cleaning continued. Then a few German officers entered to admire the work of their servants for the day. They examined the rooms and were pleased — until they saw the food.

"Jiidische Hunde, freszt! Stuff yourselves, Jewish dogs!"

The Jews could not ignore the order. What should they do? Rabbi Spira walked to the officers and explained: "It is our Holy Day, the day when sins are forgiven. As you have seen, we serve you loyally, even on this sacred day, and our work is perfect. But we are required to fast today and we ask of you to excuse us from eating our meal today. Our work will continue and it will not be affected by hunger."

The officers were furious. They sent for Schneeweiss. Quaking, the Ordnungsdienst came to the room. "These dogs refuse to eat their rations. You are responsible for them. We shall return in two hours — and if all their food is not eaten, you will be shot."

Schneeweiss stood up straight and unbuttoned his shirt, baring his chest. "I will not force them to eat. I am fasting myself today. If you wish to shoot me, then shoot me now!"

An officer drew his gun and Schneeweiss stood firm. A shot. He was dead. Hated Schneeweiss had become holy Schneeweiss. Who can estimate the great heights to which every Jewish soul can rise?

Then the Germans turned to the fifteen Jews who were ready for the same treatment.

"You will continue to work. The food will be removed and you will receive not a scrap to eat until tomorrow morning. Go back to work!"

The Talmud tells us: "There are those who acquire their world in many years, and there are those who acquire their world in a single moment." (Avodah Zarah 17a) As long as there is the possibility to do teshuvah, one's past can be fixed. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**