

Good Shabbos Everyone. We begin this week the cycle of Torah readings with perhaps the most powerful words of the Holy Torah: "In the beginning, Hashem created the heavens and the earth." The words of this first posuk of the Torah are so powerful that a Jew can use them as a source of spiritual strength in life. When the going gets tough, a Jew can merely repeat these words of this first posuk and be inspired to know that there is One above who is guiding the creation. Belief in Hashem is in fact the foundation of the Jewish faith. As Rambam tells us in the first of his 13 Principles of Jewish Faith "I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed is His Name, is the creator and ruler over all the creation, and He alone created, creates and will create all things." It is through stirring stories such as the following, that our belief in Hashem is strengthened.

As the years past, the orthodox Jewish community of Pottersville, New Jersey dwindled to point that there was barely a minyan. One observant resident who remained in Pottersville was a man named Manny Schwartz. Manny could not bear to leave his elderly father who lived in Pottersville alone. So, Manny and his wife continued to live in the small town in order to take care of Manny's elderly father, even after most of the Jewish community had left Pottersville.

Then one sad day, Manny's father passed away. Until his father's death, Manny had not been all that careful about davening with a minyan during the weekdays. After the death of his father, however, Manny needed a minyan every day to say kaddish. Manny managed, by calling around, to get together nine men, including himself. He realized that he would have to go out onto the streets of Pottersville to look for the tenth man. He knew it was ridiculous and probably fruitless; after all, he knew every Jew who was still left in town. Why did Manny think another Jew would suddenly materialize?

So Manny went out onto the street and looked everywhere for a tenth man. Suddenly, Manny saw a man on the street. Manny knew it was a long shot, but Manny asked him, "Tell me, are you Jewish?" The man nodded yes. Manny prodded the man, telling him: "We need you in the synagogue for a quorum of ten men to pray. You would be the tenth man." The man looked at Manny skeptically and responded: "How can I be the tenth man? I do not know how to pray. The last time I was in a synagogue was at my Bar Mitzvah. You know how many years ago that was? What little Hebrew I knew then, I have long forgotten. I am worthless to you as a Jew." Said the man.

"Fella," Manny told the man, "I must tell you, there is no such thing as a worthless individual. You happen to be a valuable commodity. Because, although you do not know the words, your physical presence alone is enough. All you have to do is stand there while we pray and you have fulfilled your function."

The man seemed hesitant, but after a little more coaxing, he reluctantly came into the synagogue. All the other members of the minyan were relieved when they saw Manny with another man in tow, and someone quickly offered the newcomer a siddur. The man, whose name was Herb, refused the siddur and walked to the back. Herb stood throughout the prayers, his hands folded in front, his posture erect, his shoulders thrown back like a soldier on duty. The expression on Herb's face was serious, as if the proceedings had little to do with him.

Every day following this, for weeks that turned into months, Manny would go out onto the street right before davening and bring Herb inside. Herb would never enter the shul as if he belonged there. Herb always made it look as if he just happened to be passing by. And, every day, Herb would take up the same position in the back of the synagogue with the same earnest expression, the same guarded posture, without ever taking a seat.

Then, one day, almost at the end of the year of mourning for his father, Manny went out to get Herb and he was not there. Manny looked down the street. "Maybe he was delayed," someone offered. Someone else suggested that perhaps he was in Florida. Manny asked around and was told that Herb had suffered a severe heart attack and was in the intensive care unit in the local hospital. Manny was not surprised, since Manny had felt all along that Herb was committed to the minyan. Manny knew Herb would never miss minyan unless he were physically unable to attend.

Manny rushed over to the hospital and was directed to Herb's bed in the intensive care unit. Herb was in a semi-comatose state. His eyes were closed. Manny felt saddened at seeing Herb in such a bad way. Manny realized how much a part Herb had become of the little Jewish community, even though Herb had never even opened a siddur. "Herb, it's me! How are you doing?" Said Manny to Herb. The nurse who was tending to Herb said kindly, "He cannot hear you. He is not conscious." Manny stood a few more minutes in front of the bed where Herb lay and then turned to leave. Suddenly, Manny spun around swiftly when he heard rustling in the bed behind him. Herb had opened his eyes wide and was looking at Manny. Herb lifted his index finger a few inches from the mattress and called out excitedly, "Manny, minyan?" Herb then closed his eyes for the last time and returned his soul to his Maker. (Stories of Inspiration, R.D.Goldwasser, p.235 - names have been changed)

It is through stories like these that our belief in Hashem is strengthened because we can see clearly that there is a hidden spiritual world with Hashem at the helm. Every day in our own lives we can see the Hand of Hashem if we only look. In any case, we can always be inspired by the words of the posuk: "In the beginning, Hashem created the heavens and the earth." **Good Shabbos Everyone.**