

Good Shabbos Everyone. Last week we began the amazing true story of a Jew named Hershel who observed the mitzvah of tefillin during the most difficult times of World War II.

At one point during the end of the war years, Hershel found himself hiding in a cave with several others. One morning, just as Hershel had finished praying, and his Tefillin were being passed from hand to hand, they suddenly heard the barking of a dog and heavy footsteps approaching their underground hideout. German soldiers were on the prowl, with their bloodhounds. Suddenly, the footsteps were directly overhead. Hershel and his friends froze with fear and held their breath.

The next moment, to their horror, a huge dog slid through the hidden entrance and appeared right in front of them. With bated breath they awaited the inevitable! But they could hardly believe their senses as they looked on and saw the dog standing there motionless, looking bewildered, as if it didn't know why it was there at all, and forgetting all it had been trained to do. Hershel shook himself out of his state of shock. Seeing that the dog made a turn for the exit, but found it hard to maneuver in the cramped space, Hershel made a sign to his friends to squeeze themselves together, and with a gentle push helped their uninvited guest to make his exit, just as the armed Nazi "dogs" outside whistled for their four-legged comrade.

Soon the heavy footsteps of the Nazi soldiers began to fade in the distance. Hershel and his friends began to breathe more freely, and thanked G-d for the wonderful miracle of their escape. "That dog must have been an offspring of those Egyptian dogs that did not sharpen their tongues against the Jewish slaves marching freely out of Egypt when the hour of liberation from Egyptian bondage came for them," remarked Hershel to his friends, when they recovered from the terrible nightmare they had just experienced.

The days and weeks dragged slowly by. Hershel and his friends spent the long days in the cramped bunker, daring only at night to go out for a breath of fresh air and for food. They prayed long and earnestly -- they certainly had plenty of time. They also studied Torah, without the benefit of books. Fortunately, the Yeshivah students among them had not lost their memory during the years of suffering. They had studied well at the Yeshivah, and they could recite from memory whole passages from Torah and Talmud and discuss them.

The war was still raging and many areas were still under German occupation. But Romania was already in the hands of the Red Army since August of that year, and hundreds of Jewish refugees who had survived the Holocaust came to Bucharest, the Romanian capital. Hershel, too, decided to seek refuge there.

On his arrival in Bucharest, Hershel found there refugee Rabbis, Chassidic Rebbes who, with the aid of the American Joint and other relief organizations, were trying hard to restore the shattered life of the Jewish community and of the broken refugees -- broken in body but not in spirit. Kosher kitchens were set up, Torah schools for youngsters were organized, and Talmud classes for adults. Offices were set up to help refugees trace surviving relatives. There was so much to be done! Hershel threw himself wholeheartedly into the relief work. He was given the task, along with several other young men, of going to outlying towns, townlets and villages in search of Jewish children and bring them to Bucharest.

He would never forget -- he related later -- a certain incident, which convinced him again of the special protection G-d had shown him in the merit of his Tefillin. This happened when he, together with a friend, was taking a group of children by train to Bucharest. The train had left Debretzin and was speeding towards Grossvardein. Somewhere along the track the train suddenly turned a sharp curve. Hershel was standing on the open platform of the train, clutching his small valise in which he kept his Tefillin. As the train swerved, he lost his balance, and in trying to steady himself, his valise flew out!

Hershel was horrified. All through the war years he had guarded his Tefillin at the risk of his life, and now, suddenly he had lost them! Hershel immediately told his friend that he would have to take care of the children without him, for he was going to get off at the next station and walk back along the rail tracks to retrieve his valise with the Tefillin. Then he would follow on to Bucharest by the next available train.

His friend tried to dissuade him. "Where will you go to look for your valise?" he argued. "Who knows if you will find it? Besides, you will probably be able to get Tefillin in Bucharest. Please, think it over. Don't do it." But Hershel remained firm in his decision. Hershel hoped and prayed that the next station would not be too far off. As if in answer to his prayer, the wheels of the train began to grind and screech to a sudden full stop. A red signal light had caused the train to halt in the middle of nowhere, until the line ahead would

A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda "Anyone who brings merit to the masses, no wrongdoing will come into his hands."

be clear for the train to continue on its way.

Hershel lost no time. He took the welcome opportunity to jump down from the train, then hurried back along the tracks. A few kilometers later, he spotted his little valise in the distance. He rushed forward, picked it up and hugged it with delight. Hershel walked back as fast as he could in the direction of Grossvardein, passing several small stations on the way.

The trains were not running regularly at that time, and it took him several days until he finally reached Grossvardien. At the railway station he found a fairly large crowd of refugees waiting for the next train to Bucharest.

Hershel was about to board the train when someone tapped him on his shoulder and took hold of his arm, saying, "Hershel, you dare not go to Bucharest." It was a friend of his from Bucharest, who had just come from there. The friend told him that secret Russian agents were waiting for him, keeping watch near his home. Several active young orthodox Jews had already been arrested on charges of working against the communist regime, and had not been heard of since. The Russians had begun establishing communist regimes in Romania and in other countries "freed" by the Red Army, and the secret police had begun to arrest anyone on the slightest suspicion of engaging in any "counter-revolutionary" activity.

Hershel grasped his friend's hand and said gratefully, "Thank G-d my valise fell out of the train; otherwise I would now be in their hands..." "What are you talking about?" said his friend, bewildered. "What has your valise got to do with this business?"

"I'm talking about my little valise with the Tefillin in it. Come, I'll tell you about it," replied Hershel mysteriously, taking his friend by the arm. They entered the Waiting Room and sat down in a corner.

Hershel told his friend how he had guarded his Tefillin all through the war years, and how he had lost his valise with the Tefillin when the train gave a sudden lurch, which made him leave the train to retrieve his valise. Had it not happened, he would have arrived in Bucharest a couple of days ago, right into the arms of the secret police! "See? The Tefillin saved my life again!" His friend remained silent and thoughtful for a few moments, then hesitantly said, "Hershel, I haven't yet put on Tefillin today. Would you allow me to use yours?"

"With the greatest of pleasure," said Hershel. He took out his Tefillin from the valise and also a small prayer book, and handed them to his friend, saying, "Go ahead. I'll be back in a few minutes." When Hershel returned about ten minutes later, he noticed that his friend's eyes were still wet.

"I must tell you the truth," he said to Hershel in a very serious tone, and his voice had the ring of deep regret, as he made his confession. "Since the murderous Germans sent me away to a Concentration Camp, I stopped putting on Tefillin. The Germans took away our Tefillin -- they did everything to break our spirit. When we were liberated, the few that had survived, the first thing many Jews asked for was a pair of Tefillin to put on; others, including myself, asked for food. I never got around to putting on Tefillin again. But from now on, you can be sure, I will never again miss putting on Tefillin," he concluded, his voice choking with emotion.

Just before parting, Hershel's friend said to him: "Everything happens by Divine Providence. You thought that our meeting here was arranged by Divine Providence in order to save your life. As it turns out -- it seems I had to meet you in order to save myself too. You see, your Tefillin brought you to me, and you brought me back to Tefillin." Hershel now lives in America. He is a respected businessman and a prominent member of his orthodox community.

Like many other survivors of the Holocaust, he does not like to talk about those terrible years; the experiences are too painful to recount, and words cannot describe them. However, he readily relates the story of his Tefillin during the Holocaust and the many instances when his Tefillin clearly saved his life. "Let Jews know," he says, "how to cherish the Mitzvah of putting on Tefillin daily. After all, it can be done so easily, without any sacrifice whatever." (From "For the Sake of Tefillin, by Rabbi Nissan Mindel)

The commentators tell us that Tefillin symbolize the chains of a servant. It is no coincidence that Tefillin was one of the first mitzvahs we received upon leaving Mitzraim. When the Jewish nation left Mitzraim, we left the servitude of Egypt and became the servants of Hashem. Thus, as it were, we traded the chains of servitude of Pharaoh for the Tefillin straps which symbolize or servitude to Hashem.

Tefillin today are readily accessible to almost everyone anywhere in the world. Let us all be inspired to dedicate and rededicate ourselves to such a powerful mitzvah. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

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