

Good Shabbos Everyone. We open our discussion of this week's Torah portion *Pinchas*, with a brief review of a topic we have discussed in recent weeks. We are referring to the power of our righteous Torah leaders to uplift us spiritually.

In our portion this week, the Torah tells us how Hashem commands Moshe to count the Jews. When commanding Moshe to count the Jews, the Torah uses the word "Seh-oo." (Bamidbar 26:2) The word "Seh-oo," can also mean *"to uplift."* As in the verse in Psalms *"Lift your hands in the sanctuary and bless Hashem."* (Tehillim 134:2) In order to learn a spiritually uplifting message from this parsha, let us try to understand the verse in the following way: Hashem is giving Moshe Rabeinu (our teacher) the power to uplift the Jews. As the verse states in the parsha: *"Uplift the entire assembly of the Children of Yisroel..."* (26:2)

Since the time of Moshe Rabeinu, Hashem has appointed in every generation Tzadikim (the exceedingly righteous Rabbis) to lead Klal Yisroel. Just as Hashem gave Moshe Rabeinu the power to uplift the Bnai Yisroel, so too does Hashem give the spiritual leaders of every generation the power to uplift Jews. The following amazing true story demonstrates the tremendous power of our Torah leaders to elevate us.

After the Second World War, most of the Jews who had survived the inferno of Europe went on to settle in Jewish communities around the world, most of all in Eretz Yisroel and in North America. However, some of the Jews ended up in far-flung countries with little or no Jewish community presence. One such Jew was Solomon Fuchs (not his real name). Before the war, Mr. Fuchs was a chassid of the Gerrer Rebbe. Mr. Fuchs survived the war, however his dedication to Torah and mitzvahs did not survive with him. He left the ashes of Europe and made his way to New Zealand, which at that time in the 1940's hosted a tiny Jewish community.

Mr. Fuchs survived the war with a daughter. Although he himself was not religious, he felt that it was important for his daughter to receive a formal Jewish education. Being that New Zealand almost totally lacked formal Jewish educational institutions during the post-war years, Mr. Fuchs was forced to send his daughter to learn in the United States.

Some time in 1949, Mr. Fuchs came to the United States from New Zealand to visit his daughter who was learning in a girls school in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. At the time, Crown Heights hosted a bustling Jewish community. One of the most prolific Jewish organizations in Crown Heights was, and is to this day, Chabad Lubavitch.

When Mr. Fuchs arrived in New York after a journey of several days, he made his way to Crown Heights to visit his daughter. Soon after his arrival, Mr. Fuchs entered a certain building and waited for the elevator to come. He entered the elevator with a Torah scholar who had a penetrating glance. The Torah scholar asked Mr. Fuchs from where he came and what his business was here in America.

The man also asked Mr. Fuchs about the extent of the Jewish community in New Zealand. Sadly, Mr. Fuchs admitted that New Zealand lacked the most basic of Jewish communal services. Specifically, the man wanted to know if there were a mikvah in New Zealand. Unfortunately, the answer was *"no,"* besides of course the ocean which surrounds the country. (The mikvah, a ritual pool, is one of the most, if not the most important institution in a Jewish community. In fact, if a community only has enough money to build either a mikvah or a synagogue, they are obligated to build the mikvah first. A minyan can pray almost anywhere, but only a mikvah can purify the impure.)

Mr. Fuchs was very impressed by the Torah scholar, who happened to get off on the next

A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda

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floor. The two parted with exchanges of blessings and good will. After the man left, Mr. Fuchs asked another person in the elevator who the man was. *"That is the son-in-law of Reb Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shlita."*

Mr. Fuchs went on to meet his daughter. They enjoyed a nice visit together, before Mr. Fuchs returned home several days later. A few years after Mr. Fuchs had visited his daughter, the then Lubavitcher Rebbe Reb Yosef Yitzchok passed away, and his son-in-law, Reb Menachem Mendel Schneerson became the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Under the leadership of the Rebbe, Chabad grew tremendously, spreading out around the world to far-flung places such as Nepal, Morocco, S. Monica, South Africa, Hawaii and even New Zealand!

Meanwhile, Mr. Fuchs's daughter married and began raising a religious family. Mr. Fuchs himself was inspired by the holiness of his daughter's orthodox family. And soon, he decided to return to his Jewish roots, fulfilling the words of the Prophet: *"He shall restore the heart of fathers to children..."* (Malachi 3:24) He gradually increased his mitzvah observance and eventually became fully mitzvah observant.

Some 40 years later, in the late 1980's, when Mr. Fuchs was already a great-grandfather several times over, he made another visit to Crown Heights.

For the first time in his life, Mr. Fuchs had the opportunity to visit 770 Eastern Parkway one Sunday morning, where the Lubavitcher Rebbe used to hand out one-dollar bills to those who came to visit. Mr. Fuchs entered the shul alone and joined the large throng of Jews who had gathered that morning to take a dollar. Mr. Fuchs was alone with his thoughts and he spoke with nobody as the line moved along. When it came Mr. Fuchs's time to take a dollar from the Rebbe, the Rebbe motioned for him to stop. Immediately, the Rebbe asked Mr. Fuchs, *"Nu,"* Asked the Rebbe sweetly in Yiddish: *"Is there a mikvah in New Zealand yet?"*

Mr. Fuchs was floored. He nearly fainted. The Rebbe had remembered the aged Mr. Fuchs who now wore a beard and sported a black hat. The elevator ride some 40 years previous must have lasted for no more than one and a half minutes. (Heard from E.Z.L.)

The one quality which distinguishes a Torah leader is his unbounded love for Klal Yisroel - the Jewish People. Let us seek out the righteous people in our generation and cleave to them, because Hashem has given them a special power to uplift us. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**