

Good Shabbos Everyone. In 1967, Israel's Arab neighbors prepared for war as they threatened to "drive Israel into the sea." Tens of thousands of Arab soldiers amassed at their countries' borders as they readied for what they thought would be a swift devastation. It was then that our generation witnessed clearly what the Jewish people have always known: The Guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers (Tehillim 121:4).

In what became known as the Six Day War, Israel scored a lightning-quick victory and recaptured its most precious shrines, including the Western Wall, the Cave of Machpelah and the tomb of our Matriarch Rachel.

Hashem's ways are, indeed, hidden from us. No one could have predicted that the Six Day War would forever alter the fate of our (then) estranged brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union. But it did.

Though the Communist propaganda machine was working overtime to malign the "Israeli aggressors" and downplay their amazing triumph, the truth could not be hidden from Soviet Jewry.

The Six Day War awakened within many of them a pride in their Jewishness. In some, it inspired the first yearnings to discover the rich heritage and traditions which the Communists had tried their best to eradicate from their midst.

One of those who experienced a spiritual awakening at that time was a mathematics professor named Ilya Essas. Through tremendous determination and self-sacrifice, he mastered the Hebrew language, and in a short period of time amassed an astounding amount of Torah knowledge.

Less than three months after beginning the study of Chumash, Ilya Essas was teaching Chumash to others. Today, Rabbi Eliyahu Essas is a respected talmid chacham who heads the Russian division of Yeshiva Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem. He is considered the "rebbe" of the ba'al teshuvah movement which arose in Russia following the Six Day War.

The members of this movement studied Torah in secret under the Communists. Though well aware that their Torah study and other religious practices might lead to their arrest and imprisonment, this small, dedicated group illuminated the darkness of Communist Russia with a brilliant light.

Once, a young couple, students of R' Essas, applied for visas to emigrate to the United States. The wife was granted a visa, but not the husband. The couple decided that it was wisest for the wife to take the opportunity while it was available and leave the country. Husband and wife parted tearfully, not knowing if and when they would see each other again.

The wife wrote letters to her husband regularly, but the Communists intercepted them and would not allow the letters to reach their destination. Then, the wife heard that a certain Rav was being sent as an emissary by Agudas Israel of America to spend some time in Russia teaching Torah in secret to the ba'alei teshuvah.

The wife wrote a letter to her husband and asked the Rav to deliver it to her husband. He promised to try his best. After arriving in Russia, the Rav located the husband and rang his doorbell. When the husband came to the door, the Rav handed him the letter and told him that it was from his wife.

Tears welled up in the young man's eyes and he thanked the Rav profusely. Then, he took the still sealed letter and placed it in his pocket. "Aren't you going to open it?" the Rav asked. "Yes, but not now," came the reply. "I am in the middle of studying Torah with my chavrusa. When we conclude our study session, then I will open the letter." (p. 184 Shabbos Stories, Rabbi Shimon Finkelman) We can be inspired by the dedication to Torah learning by these souls who lived under such persecution in Soviet Russia.

It states in the Torah this week, "This is the Torah (law) of a person who dies in a tent." (BaMidbar 14:19) There is a beautiful remez - hint in this verse. The verse hints to the attitude one should adopt when he is learning Torah. Namely, when a person learns Torah, he should pretend that he is dead to the world and should ignore all distractions. We can all be inspired by this week's story to dedicate and rededicate ourselves to learning Torah properly, without interruption! **Good Shabbos Everyone.**