

**Good Shabbos Everyone.** Tisha B'Av, which falls out this year on Monday night to Tuesday night, commemorates the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem some two thousand years ago. In a certain sense, Tisha B'Av has become a national day of mourning for the Jewish People. Many tragedies have befallen the Jewish people on this sad day. For example, the expulsion edict from Spain and the formation of the "Final Solution" which brought about the Holocaust and the virtual destruction of European Jewry.

One of the more famous survivors of the Holocaust was the Bobover Rav Reb Shlomo Halberstam, whose tenth yohrzeit just passed. The Bobover Rebbe was one of the greatest Chassidic Rebbes and Torah leaders of recent memory. On December 31, 1973 at a grandchild's engagement celebration, the Bobover Rav told the following amazing story of how he and his son Reb Naftuli Tzvi, of blessed memory, survived Nazi persecution during the tough times of the second world war.

"It would be impossible to retell in one night the entire miraculous story - with all its myriad details - of how we were saved. But perhaps, in honor of this simchah, the engagement of my son Harav Naftulche's (Naftuli's) daughter, it would be fitting to show gratitude to the One Above and to publicize just one aspect of our miraculous salvation.

It was the late spring-early summer of 1943. We were smuggled across countless borders throughout our ordeal — from Lemberg to Bochnia, from Poland to Czechoslovakia, from Czechoslovakia to Hungary, from Hungary to Romania... And it wasn't just crossing the border in the middle of the night. We had to swim through streams of water - all at the risk of being showered with bullets by the border guards. On seeing the flare of gunfire from the border patrol, who could have dreamed at the time that we would survive, build families and eventually many off our children? Therefore, out of gratitude to Hashem, I will share one ordeal that I experienced with my son, who was a bachur of twelve at that time.

We fled disguised as gentiles, so at first glance we would not be caught. We had hired non-Jewish agents to smuggle us across the border. With us was my mother; my grandmother, the Limonover Rebbetzin; and other family members. Obviously, we traveled in separate wagons so that they wouldn't realize we were from one family. Since I was dressed like a gentile, I hoped it would be difficult for our enemies to discern my Jewish identity. Nevertheless, my heart was pounding as we rode along with our smugglers toward Neimark, where other smugglers were waiting for us.

We arrived at the border on Friday afternoon. I had in my possession gentile identification papers, as well as Hungarian citizenship papers. I kept my Hungarian papers well hidden, and I had some money with me as well just in case I would need to grease some pockets. We were standing there at the border Plashow and a number of officers were guard there. They could not distinguish me as a Jew but they seemed to notice that Naftulche had Jewish features.

Since many Jews were giving away their children to gentiles at that time, the guards surmised that I was a gentile who was smuggling out a Jewish child. They pointed in Naftulche's direction and hissed, "Mali Zhidak (little Jew)." Then they ran off to summon a higher-ranking officer. The officer asked to see my papers and as he scrutinized them, I anxiously watched the people all around me board the train. I knew that if I missed the train and didn't cross the border that night, all would be lost. So I turned to the officer and said in Polish, "I'm not coming with you! I have to catch the train!"

The officer insisted, "You're coming with me." I mustered the gumption to answer, "Come board the train with me and I'll show you everything there because I have to catch the train!"

I had in my possession a forged letter from the head of Bochnia's Gestapo, authorizing me to travel. The handwriting, the signature and the SS insignia were all forged, but I took the chance and showed it to the officer. "Herr officer," I told him, "I have to go now." Then I took out a thousand zlotys and handed it to him.

When I saw that he was still hesitating, I added another five hundred and said to him, "Here's 1,500 zlotys — now let me go. You saw my papers already." This time it worked. Satisfied with his small fortune, he left me alone and I boarded the train. We arrived in Neimark Friday afternoon.

Packed into my rucksack were manuscripts from my grandfather, the Djikover Rebbe, Harav Moshe Pshevorsker's tefillin, and the Sanzer Ray's walking stick. I guarded these items carefully, hoping they wouldn't be confiscated at the border, But Hashem had His plans. Suddenly, a raid was conducted by Gestapo officers and we were token off the train. I knew that my mother and the rest of the family were in other cars, so I looked around to see if they too had been removed from the train. But I didn't see them and didn't know where they were. They handcuffed us and led us to the Gestapo office. There was such a tumult among the officers.

"We caught Zhids!" they kept shouting. We heard civilian gentiles telling each other, "You'll see, tomorrow they'll be hanged and we'll come and watch..." We were taken to the head of the local Gestapo — Kenzhar was his name. When he saw us, he started screaming, "Accursed Jews, you wanted to sneak across the border, didn't you?" He demanded to see our papers, and I took out the document with the Bochnia Gestapo chiefs signature verifying my Hungarian citizenship. He seemed surprised when he saw the paper and then left the room, leaving us with his Polish subordinate.

The Pole turned to me and said in Polish, "Within twenty-four hours you'll be behind bars. Listen to my piece of advice: just confess. Last week a Jew by the name of Rosenwasser was caught with the same type of forged documents from Bochnia. He was brutally tortured until he confessed. What they want to know from you is only the name of the person who wanted to take you across the border. "Look," the Pole continued in a friendly tone of voice, "you'll be treated to a bullet in any case. But why suffer the additional torment? At the end you'll confess anyway under the whip, so do it before they torture you."

We were stripped of our clothing, and our money and all our belongings were confiscated. We were told that soon my son would be separated from me. When he heard this, twelve-year-old Naftuli went over to the Polish commissar and said to him in Polish, "I beg



of you. let me stay with my father."

(the Bobover Rav with his son before the war) At first he refused, but young Naftuli persisted. "Do you have a son?" he asked. "What would happen if your son asked you for something? Wouldn't you grant him his request? I am still a child. Have mercy and let me stay with my father." Somehow his heart softened and he took us both to the same prison cell.

It was Friday night and we knew it was the last night of our lives. Since my yarmulke had been taken away, I covered my head with a sheet and got ready to daven, I sat there thinking, "Master of the Universe, is it possible that I can leave this hell alive? And if I do stay alive, will I be able to appreciate the extent of the Hashem's chessed-kindness" According to all logic, we didn't stand a chance. It was Friday evening, so we downed Mincha and then sang Lecha Dodi. I don't know if I had ever sung such a sweet, stirring Lecha Dodi, because in my mind it was the last Lecha Dodi I would ever recite. I remember davening to Hashem and saying, "We are going to be korbanos (sacrifices), so accept the korban willingly and may it atone for all our sins..."

My heart went out to Naftulche, who was sitting next to me. "He's only twelve years old," I thought. "Does he know what's going to happen tomorrow?" I wanted to make Kiddush but on what? I found a small piece of bread in my pocket and deliberated over whether or not it was permissible to make Kiddush on a piece of bread. And if yes, then what would I use for lechem mishneh? (the double loaves traditionally used at Shabbos meals.)

Finally I decided that it was a matter of pikuach nefesh (saving a life); I felt that I just had to accept the holiness of Shabbos by reciting Kiddush. There was a basin in the room with a quart of water. We washed our hands, made Kiddush on the piece of bread, sang all the Bobover zemiros, and benched.

After the "seudah," I debated with myself about whether to talk to the boy about our impending fate. He had overheard the commissar say that we would be shot, so I decided to prepare him for it. I turned to Naftulche and said, "Naftulche, I ha

I have a request to make. Will you heed my request?" "Yes, father, I'll do as you say," he replied. "Listen, Naftulche," I said to my tender young son, "you should know that a Jewish soul cannot be shot. A Jew has a neshamah that comes from the Heavenly throne and a neshamah can't be shot. The body can be shot, but that is only the outer garment; our essence cannot be shot. Today, I'm your father and you're my son. Tomorrow we'll be two neshamos who were killed al kiddush Hashem. "I want to request something of you. You're a young child, they won't torture you. But me — according to what the Pole said, they're planning to torture me in order to get me to disclose the identity of our smuggler. But I'm not going to tell them. They'll beat me until the blood flows and we'll both cry out, 'Shema Yisrael Hasitem Elokeinu Hashem Echad!' We need to do it b'simcha, just like any other mitzvah, just like we do hakafos on Simchas Torah. I ask of you not to cry but to be b'simcha when we both say Shema."

As I was talking, Naftulche started to cry. "Why are you crying?" I asked him. "I won't be able to watch them torturing my father. I'll ask them to shoot me first."

Can anyone fathom the Creator's miraculous ways? The way our story ended was nothing short of an open miracle, We were up the whole night, and when we saw the sun's rays shining through a small slat, we washed our hands and davened the entire Shacharis of Shabbos. It was about nine o'clock when we heard a knock on the door. An officer walked in, holding a pistol in his hand, and told us to follow him. He led us into the Gestapo office, where the Polish commissar greeted us with uncharacteristic excitement.

"You are lucky!" he told us. "He woke up in a good mood today!" He was referring to the chief, but I didn't know what he was talking about. The Pole took us into his superior's room, and there sat the same man who had called us "accursed Jews" the day before. Now he spoke to us calmly. "You are indeed Hungarian citizens but still, it is illegal to come here without border passes. So you will have to be penalized for transgressing the law..."

As soon as I heard the word "penalized," I knew that we wouldn't be shot. In the end, the Gestapo chief bought us train tickets and sent us back to Bochnia along with a document to present to the border patrol stating that we owed a fine of one thousand zlotys for crossing the border illegally. I was stunned. How had things changed so drastically? First he had wanted to torture and kill me — and now he was sending me back to Bochnia!

When I arrived in Bochnia, I met a youngster, Reb Yeshaya Veitzen (who himself was later killed by the Germans), and as soon as he saw me he cried out "Baruch matir assurim" (blessed is the one who frees the captives) I had left Bochnia under the most clandestine circumstances, but somehow he'd already heard that I'd been arrested. I tried to pretend I didn't know what he was talking about, but he answered, "We heard about everything that happened to you."

As soon as I learned what had transpired that Shabbos morning. At eight o'clock in the morning, the Gestapo chief in Neimark called up the Gestapo chief in Bochnia to find out if Solomon Halberstam was indeed a Hungarian citizen and if he'd been issued a travel permit. In truth, those papers had been forgeries, but through Divine Providence the German commander hadn't been in the office then. A Bochnian Jew named Shlomo Shtruch, who owned a top-quality mattress factory, had close connections with Polish officers. On Shabbos morning at eight o'clock, Shlomo Shtruch was sitting in the Gestapo office talking to the Polish commissar — Kanarski was his name — when the phone rang. Shtruch overheard Kanarski say the name "Solomon Halberstam" as he was writing things down in his notebook. Shtruch inquired what the problem was with Solomon Halberstam.

"They caught him at the border and they're going to shoot him," said the commissar. Shtruch jumped up and shouted, "He's my Rabbiner, You can't let him be killed!" The Polish commissar was impervious. "There's nothing I can do about it. He crossed the border illegally; he's going to be killed." Shtruch wouldn't give up. "Kanarski, you get lots and lots of money from me, and I know about all your activities. If you want ten thousand zlotys for Shlomo Halberstam, you'll have it in an instant. You must save Shlomo Halberstam!" The Pole yelled back, "I'm not losing my life for him. They'll kill me instead!" Shlomo Shtruch made no attempt to hide his anger. He said sternly, "Listen, Kanarski! You have committed so many crimes. You have shady dealings involving huge amounts of money. If Shlomo Halberstam lives, then you and I will live as well. But if he doesn't live, then you won't live and I won't live! I will go to the higher authorities and report everything I know about you. It's your choice. If you want to remain alive, then save Shlomo Halberstam!" "What do you want from me?" the Pole shouted. "Call him back fast, before it's too late!" Shtruch demanded. "I'm going out to make sure the chief doesn't come in while you make the phone call" The Pole picked up the phone and the chief in Neimark. "Yes, Shlomo Halberstam is a Hungarian citizen," he told him. "So what should I do with him?" the Neimark chief asked. "Send him back to Bochnia." When I later heard about this chain of events, I was moved to tears mesirus nefesh that Shlomo Shtruch displayed on my behalf. The ways of Hashem are unfathomable. It was His will that we would survive and build a new generation. And so He orchestrated the incredible of events that led to our salvation." The Jewish Nation is eternal. We have weathered persecution in just about every time and in every place. Jews and Jewish communities have been destroyed by the evil Nations. However, Hashem has promised us that the Jewish Nation, which stays faithful to the Torah, will prevail. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**