

**Good Shabbos Everyone.** In this week's portion *Eikev*, the Torah tells the Jewish nation that by keeping Hashem's mitzvahs "You will be the most blessed of all the peoples..."

Throughout history, we Jews have been prosecuted and killed merely for the fact that we are Jewish. However, no matter what has happened, the Jewish nation has not been destroyed and we remain Hashem's "a *blessed people*." On an individual level, no matter how far a Jew may drift away from Hashem and Torah, a Jew's soul can never be extinguished. In the following true story we will see how one Jew picked a fine time to remember his membership in Hashem's holy nation.

In Russia in 1919, the followers of the Bolshevik Revolution, led by Vladimir Lenin, may Hashem erase his name and memory, struggled against the group known as the Petlyureftzas, led by the vicious anti-Semite Simon Petlyura, may Hashem erase his name and memory also. Each group struggled to establish its sole ruler-ship, particularly in the Ukraine. First the Bolsheviks would storm into a town, killing and injuring people with abandon as they sought to take over the local government. Then the Petlyureftzas would battle with the Bolsheviks and try to oust them from power. If they were successful, they, in turn, made sure to execute all those who had resisted them.

This vicious cycle of fighting and killing continued, and the Jews were always caught in the middle. If the Bolsheviks were the ones in control, they would seek out some Jews of the town, blame them for the existing problems in the city, and put them to death. Then, when the Petlyureftzas overpowered the Bolsheviks, they too made the Jews the culprits, claiming that they had sided with the opposition. So regardless of which faction ruled, the Jews stood to lose as they were tortured and killed by whoever was in power.

It happened one time that the Petlyureftzas stormed a particular city and took control. They laid waste to building after building, after which they rounded up the people in the city to announce new ordinances and decrees. Among their decrees was one ordering that the Jews of the area were to be brought at once to the center of the town - where they would be shot in full view of the townsfolk.

Protest as they did, the Jews were helpless, for the rest of the townsfolk knew that if they didn't bring the Jews to be killed, they themselves would be shot instead. As quickly as they could be found, the Jews were dragged to an open square outside a courthouse, where a Petlyureftza revolutionary leader was shouting about the importance of being loyal to the incoming government.

The local Russian peasants and townspeople gathered in the square to watch the public execution. As he continued to rant and rave, the police lined up the Jews who had been forcefully brought there. Soldiers with rifles took their positions opposite them. The crowd of locals grew larger as the revolutionary leader announced that the Jews were about to be killed for treason. "*We are making an example of these people for all of you to see, so that you will not follow in their ways,*" the leader said.

The crowd grew nervously silent as the Chief of Police barked at the soldiers to ready their rifles. He instructed them to fire at the count of three. "*One!*" he yelled. "*Two!*" Just as he was about to yell "*Three!*" a man jumped from the crowd of onlookers and pierced the silence as he screamed out, "*Wait! I too am a Jew! If you kill them, you have to kill me as well!*"

The crowd was shocked, for the man who had run out in front of the rifles was none other than the town pharmacist. He was loved and admired by all, and until then everyone had taken him to be a gentile. He had never given anyone even the slightest hint that he might be Jewish. People knew that he never distinguished at all between kosher and non-kosher food; his drug store was always open, even on Yom Kippur; and not once was he ever seen in a shul. He was considered to be among the most prominent people of the community, a man whom almost everyone had depended on at one time or another for medical advice and reliable medications.

Quickly a tremendous argument broke out among the townspeople. Many argued that the pharmacist was too valuable a person to the community to be killed, while just as many turned on him and argued that if indeed he was a Jew, then he deserved to be put to death just like the rest of them. Pandemonium erupted as people screamed and shoved each other. Within moments the arguments had turned into fisticuffs, and the Petlyureftzas saw that unless they risked their own lives there was no way they would be able to restore order that day.

The soldiers and their leader, badly outnumbered, had no choice but to leave the courthouse area, vowing they would be back another day. A few days later, however, the Bolsheviks took over and the Petlyureftzas themselves ran for their lives. But those Jews, so perilously close to death just a few days before, were spared. And only because the tiny spark of *Yiddishkeit - der pintele Yid* - suddenly erupted in a man who, at the risk of losing his life, wanted more than anything else to be counted with his brothers. ([Around the Maggid's Table](#) Rav Paysach Krohn, p.112) All the nations of the world who persecuted us have disintegrated into the dustbins of history, the ancient Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Crusaders, the Spanish, the Turks, the Soviets, and the Germans are for the most part just a few paragraphs in a high school history book. Yet the Holy Jewish nation is still here with our rich and beautiful traditions, with our Shabbos, our Tefillin, and our Kosher eating. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**