

Good Shabbos Everyone. It was during World War II in March, 1944. The winds of war blew across the Atlantic, drawing United States forces into ground battle. R' Leizer Cohen was then thirty-six years old, married with three children. So, when an official looking letter from the United States Army appeared in the mail one day, R' Leizer did not become alarmed. But he was curious. R' Leizer opened the letter, wondering what the Army could possibly want from him.

When he read the contents, his face slowly lost its color until it matched the white paper in his hand. It was a draft notice! R' Leizer was overage, but the Army was understaffed. He was to report to the downtown Chicago address on Saturday morning. Anyone who failed to respond to the summons would be arrested. "On Shabbos?" R' Leizer whispered to himself. "There are no Jews downtown." But there was no getting out of it.

And this was just the beginning! How could he keep Shabbos—let alone observe all the mitzvos—if he was drafted into the army? Despite his misgivings, R' Leizer gathered his belongings that Friday afternoon to spend Shabbos in a downtown hotel. He brought along Shabbos provisions—candles, wine, challah, a siddur and a chumash, etc.

After his lonely Friday night meal, R' Leizer took out his chumash to review the weekly Torah portion, parashas Vayakhel. He reached the verse "Lo sevaaru aish b'chol moslwoaichem b'yom haSlinbhos—do not kindle a fire in all your dwellings on the Shabbus day (Shmos 35:3)."

For some reason, R' Leizer's mind refused to leave that verse. "Do not kindle a fire..." he kept repeating to himself. R' Leizer's eyes soon closed, but his mind still dwelled on the verse even in his dreams. "Do not kindle a fire..."

R' Leizer awoke the next morning, his heart heavy with dread. After davening alone in his hotel room, he joined thousands of people in the induction center waiting to be examined by the Army doctors. It was a long day. R' Leizer was examined by doctor after doctor. For the first time in his life, he wished he wasn't in the best of health, but he passed each examination with flying colors.

Late in the afternoon, R' Leizer was seated opposite an obviously Jewish psychiatrist. After some routine questioning, R' Leizer voiced his concern about joining the Army. "Doctor, I'm an Orthodox Jew, and I'm very worried about how I'm going to be able to observe the Sabbath and all the other commandments in the Army. And who's going to take care of my wife and three children?"

R' Leizer waited for a response, but the doctor just shrugged, unmoved. R' Leizer watched him reach into his pocket to pull out a cigarette. As the match flared in the doctor's hand, the words of the chumash from the night before flashed through R' Leizer's mind. "Do not kindle a fire..." "Doctor, you look Jewish. Why are you smoking on Shabbos?" R' Leizer admonished him. The doctor rolled his eyes. "Listen, it's been a long day—will you give me a break?"

But R' Leizer did not relent. He continued to expound on the prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbos, that it was absolutely forbidden, and how could a Jew dare to do such a thing? As R' Leizer ranted on, the doctor furiously scribbled a few notes on the file in front of him. "Here," he said, interrupting R' Leizer mid-sentence. "Take this to the doctor in the next room."

The next doctor also appeared Jewish. R' Leizer handed him the file and sat down. The doctor looked down at the note, then peered up at the man seated opposite him "Your name?" he began. R' Leizer responded dutifully to each question until this doctor, too, took out a cigarette and lit up.

The verse flashed again in R' Leizer's mind. "Do not kindle a fire..." R' Leizer couldn't hold himself back. "Doctor, you look Jewish. Why do you smoke on Shabbos?" The doctor looked up suddenly from the file and stared at R' Leizer "What?" he asked, incredulous. "Why do you smoke on Shabbos?" R' Leizer repeated. "Don't you know it's forbidden?" The doctor shook his head in disbelief.

"Oh, boy! You're too nervous for the United States Armed Forces. We don't need guys like you. Go home." Relieved, R' Leizer left the army induction center. He was so excited that he ran over four miles back home, where he told everyone about the miracle he had experienced. He went on to raise his family which continues to light up the world with mitzvos and chessed ... without of course ever "lighting up" on Shabbos!

We read about the holiness of Shabbos in this week's Torah portion Parshas Emor. When describing the Yomim Tovim (holidays) the Torah begins with the holiest holiday: Shabbos. Although it is difficult for us to measure in such a way, the commentator the Chasam Soifer writes that there is more holiness in one minute of Shabbos than in all the Yomim Tovim combined! Hashem tells us this week: "For six days labor may be done, and the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation, you shall not do any work; it is a Shabbos for Hashem in all your dwelling places."

From this verse we learn many aspects about Shabbos. Shabbos is called a "convocation" which means "gathering." From here we learn the importance on Shabbos to spend time with family members with whom we may be too busy during the week to spend time. From the fact that the verse mentions "in all your dwelling places" we see the importance on Shabbos to be at home and not seek entertainment out in the world. Be being with our families at home on Shabbos, we Jews have been able to maintain a strong family unit throughout the centuries. This is only one of the benefits of keeping Shabbos properly.

Let us all therefore be inspired to make Shabbos "a day of complete rest..." **Good Shabbos Everyone.**