

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah tells us this week, "...you shall observe them (the mitzvahs) and perform them with all your heart and all your soul." (Devorim 26:16) The verse is hinting to a foundation of Jewish belief: **We must serve Hashem with an intensity.** As the mystical Zohar teaches us "*Hashem wants the heart.*" (Parshas Ki-Seitzei, part 3, page 281b) Practically speaking, when we do mitzvahs, we should always do them with a feeling and a knowledge that we are fulfilling Hashem's will. The following interesting story illustrates how one Jew came to serve Hashem with her heart.

Anat Cohen (not her real name) grew up a typical secular Israeli Jew. By no fault of her own, Anat received virtually no Jewish education. Like most of young people of her age, Anat served her requisite time in the Israeli army.

After her stint in the Army, Anat followed in the footsteps of thousands of other secular Israeli Army graduates and traveled to the far-east to find meaning. Anat soon found herself in India, where she became involved in eastern religions. The ceremonies of her new found religion involved worshiping statues, heavy incense burning and vegetarianism. Nobody could really blame Anat for getting involved with idol worship. She was simply never educated in the ways of Judaism in her native Israel.

Being a spiritual person, Anat soon became one of leading members of the temple. She became an expert in the ways of idol worship. Additionally, Anat was very skillful in attracting young Israelis to join the religion. Soon, it was decided that Anat should return home to Eretz Yisroel to establish a temple for the worship of that idol.

Anat dutifully traveled home and began to seek out a place to start up the worship of that idol in the Holy Land. Anat decided to open up the temple in Tiberius, in northern Eretz Yisroel. While in Tiberius, Anat sought out a suitable apartment where she could live and where the worshippers could worship their carved images.

While touring a new development with the real estate agent, a cement block mysteriously fell from several stories and landed below squarely on Anat's head, killing her instantly.

Although it appeared that Anat had passed away at the scene, the medics nevertheless flew her by helicopter to a hospital in Haifa several minutes away. Emergency room staff did their best to stop the bleeding and revive the young lady, but to no avail.

Six hours later, as Anat Cohen's body lay in the freezer, the unbelievable happened. Anat woke up. At first she thought she was dreaming as she looked around the hospital morgue. But then the pain of the head-blow presented itself, and Anat began moaning in agony. Thankfully, an attendant outside the morgue heard the moaning and wheeled Anat back to the emergency room.

After numerous surgeries which lasted several hours, Anat Cohen was placed in the ICU, but at least she was alive! She woke up several hours after the surgery. The doctors quickly notified Anat's family who rushed the hospital worried sick, but thankful that their daughter was alive.

Anat began her slow road to recovery with much bed rest and physical therapy. While in the hospital she had many hours to reflect on her life. In the six hours that she was dead, Anat reported that her soul had left her body and ascended to the spiritual world. Due to the trauma of the whole experience, she was reticent to share the details about her life-after-death experience. She could say however with certainty that there she knew that there is such a thing as spiritual reward and punishment after death.

Soon after, to the surprise (and relief) of her family, Anat announced that she was leaving the idol worship which she had learned in India. Instead, Anat told her family and friends that she was going to pursue an orthodox Jewish lifestyle. Anat's family was a little surprised, because Anat had never before shown interest in Judaism. However, nobody questioned her after what she had gone through. Little by little, Anat learned about Judaism. When she was first becoming religious, Anat would often spend Shabbos with religious families in order to taste the beauty of the holy day. One Friday afternoon, Anat traveled to Jerusalem to spend Shabbos with a Sephardic family. The hostess introduced herself to Anat and invited her into her guest room so that Anat could get ready for Shabbos. The hostess left the room and went to tend to her own Shabbos preparations. Suddenly, the hostess heard a scream and a thud in the guest room. She ran back to the room where she saw Anat lying on the floor, apparently having fainted.

When Anat came to, she told her hostess why she had fainted. On the wall of the guest room there were some paintings of holy Rabbis. Anat's hand was shaking as she pointed to one picture and asked what the name of that particular rabbi was. The hostess told Anat that the painting was of the Ben Ish Chai, of blessed memory, a leading Rabbi in Baghdad, Iraq who passed away about 100 years ago. She then told the hostess a stunning revelation. Anat recognized the Rabbi in the painting as one of the three Rabbinical judges who sat on her heavenly trial! The details of her life-after-death experience now began to come out. Anat described how when the cinder block hit her in the head, she did not feel any pain. Rather she felt herself being drawn above, while she could see that her body was laying on the ground. She was very confused at first. How could she see herself? She soon realized that she was seeing her physical self through the spiritual "eyes" of her soul. At she hovered above, she watched all the efforts that the medics and emergency room personnel had taken to revive her. Eventually however, he felt herself being pulled even higher, away from the physical world into the spiritual world. Once in the spiritual world she described how she experienced a trial with three great Rabbis who weighed her mitzvahs against her spiritual shortcomings. Anat had never known, but apparently she had descended from some great Rabbis. In the merit of her forefathers, Anat was given another chance on this earth. And that is when her soul reentered her body.

Anat is alive and well and living in Eretz Yisroel a fully religious lifestyle. She tells her story to anyone who will listen, in order to encourage fellow Jews to invest in their spirituality. Although the spiritual world is generally hidden to our physical eyes, Hashem occasionally opens up the curtain just a little bit so that we can take a glance at the Eternal. We can be inspired by this story to always try to grow in spirituality. As we mentioned above, Mitzvahs are like oxygen for the flame of the soul. Everyone should therefore try to take upon themselves more mitzvahs, such as putting on tefillin, daily Torah study, Shabbos observance and kosher eating. Any Jew who does more mitzvahs will immediately feel the warmth, happiness and fulfilling feeling of being more connected with G-d. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**