

Good Shabbos Everyone. This week we will tell a story which has relevance to Purim, which although we concluded its celebration earlier this week, we are still enjoying the infusion of simcha and emunah which it has brought us. One of the lessons of Purim is that although the Jewish People has suffered through much tragedy and persecution - Am Yisroel Chai, the Jewish Nation continues its march through history. Although there has arisen in every generation a Haman who has sought to destroy the Jewish people, we have prevailed with Hashem's help. The following true story, as told by Solly Ganor, a holocaust survivor, illustrates the Jewish spirit of survival in a poignant way

"Arriving from Auschwitz in groups of 20, they looked like walking skeletons; triangular faces with pointed chins and sunken cheeks, lips shrunken to thin blue lines, large eyes with a strange luminous sheen. They were known in concentration camp slang as "Musselman," usually the last stage before death.

Their Yiddish accent sounded strange to us Lithuanian Jews. They came from the ghetto of Lodz through Auschwitz, before they were sent to our camp. Our camp was known as the "Outer camp of Dachau, #10," situated near the picturesque town of Utting by Lake Amersee, in a small forest surrounded by green meadows and beautiful landscapes.

I remember the day we were brought there, I thought to myself, "Can anything bad happen amid all this beauty?" But the beauty was in the landscape only; the Germans were sadistic murderers. The Lodz people fell into the same deceptive trap. After Auschwitz, our camp looked like paradise. Most of them died soon after arriving, from hard labor, beatings and starvation, but they preferred to die here than in Auschwitz's gas chambers. The Germans must've been desperate for workers to send these walking skeletons all the way from Poland.

Around March 1945, only a few remained alive. One of them was known as "Chaim the Rabbi." We never found out whether he was actually a rabbi, but he always washed his hands and made a blessing before eating. He knew the Jewish calendar dates, and also knew the prayers by heart. At times when the Germans weren't looking, he would invite us to participate in the evening prayers.

Our Jewish camp commander, Burgin, tried to get him easier jobs. Most people died when they had to carry 100 pound cement sacks on their backs, or other chores of heavy labor. He wouldn't have lasted a day on a job like this. He once told me that if he survived, he would get married and have at least a dozen children.

Around the middle of March, we were given a day off. It was a Sunday. The camp was covered with snow, but Spring was in the air. We heard rumors of the American breakthrough into Germany and a glimmer of hope was kindled in our hearts. After breakfast of a slice of moldy bread, a tiny piece of margarine, and brown water known as "Ersatz Coffee," we returned to our barrack to get some sleep.

Suddenly we saw "Chaim the Rabbi" standing in the snow and shouting, "Haman to the gallows! Haman to the gallows!" He had on his head a paper crown made out of a cement sack, and he was draped in a blanket that had cut out stars from the same paper attached to it.

Petrified, we watched this strange apparition, barely able to trust our eyes, as he danced in the snow, singing: "I am Achashverosh, Achashverosh, the king of Persia!" Then he stood still, straightened himself up, chin pointed to the sky, his right arm extended in an imperial gesture and shouted: "Haman to the gallows! Haman to the gallows! And we all know which Haman we are talking about!"

We were sure that he had lost his wits, like others in those times. About 50 of us were gaping at the "rabbi," when he said: "Yidden vos iz mit aich! Fellow Jews, what's the matter with you?! Today is Purim! Let's make a Purim Shpiel!"

Back home, a million years ago, this was the time of the year when children dressed up for Purim, playing and eating Hamantashen. The "rabbi" remembered the exact date on the Jewish calendar. We hardly knew what day it was. Chaim then divided the roles of Queen Esther, Mordechai, Vashti and Haman among the onlookers. I received the role of Mordechai, and we all danced in the snow in our Purim Shpiel in Dachau.

But that was not the end of the story. The "rabbi" said that we will get "Mishloach Manos," our Purim food gifts. That was hardly likely to happen. But, miracle of miracles, that afternoon, an International Red Cross delegation came to our camp. It was the first time that they bothered about us. Still, we welcomed them, because they brought us the "Mishloach Manos" the "rabbi" had promised. Each of us received a parcel containing a tin of condensed milk, a bar of chocolate, a box of sugar cubes, and a pack of cigarettes. It is impossible to describe our joy! Here we were starving to death, and suddenly on Purim, we received these heavenly gifts. Since then, we never doubted the "rabbi." His prediction also came true. Two months later Haman/Hitler went to the gallows and shot himself in Berlin, while those of us still alive were rescued by the American army on May 2, 1945.

I lost track of "Chaim the Rabbi" on our Death March from Dachau to Tyrol, but I hope he survived and had many children as he always wanted. I recall his Shpiel whenever Purim comes around. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**