

Good Shabbos Everyone and a Happy Chanukah Everyone. During Chanukah, we add a special paragraph known as "al ha-nisim" to our daily prayers and to the Bircas HaMazon.

The paragraph describes all the reasons we have to be thankful to Hashem for the miracles He performed for us during the time of the Chanukah. The paragraph begins thusly: "In the days of Matisyahu ben Yochanan, the Kohain Gadol, the Hashmonian, and his sons... when the evil Greek kingship stood against the nation of Yisroel in an effort to make them forget Your Torah..." On Chanukah we therefore celebrate that we did not forget our Torah. The following amazing true story illustrates how one Jew did not forget his Torah.

Our story took place a number of years ago in Flatbush, New York. A very private, soft spoken gentleman, who always sat near the back of the shul, told his rav (rabbi) one day that he wanted to donate a Sefer Torah. The gentleman, Mr. Shimshon Blau, (not his real name) said that he had commissioned a sofer (a scribe) to write a Sefer Torah for him and now the job was nearly complete.

The rav was incredulous. Mr. Blau was not known to have substantial funds and the cost of a new Sefer Torah was more than \$30,000. The rav spoke to the sofer and learned that Mr. Blau had indeed been paying small sums of money over the years and recently had made the last payment. The Sefer Torah would be finished in a few days.

On Shabbos the rav announced the good news to his congregants and everyone went over to Mr. Blau to wish him mazel tov and thank him for his generous gift to the shul. Writing a Sefer Torah is a mitzvah of the highest order; it is a mitzvah, which unfortunately is never fulfilled by most Jews. Plans were made for the Hachnasas Sefer Torah (the dedication of the new Torah scroll.)

A few weeks later on a bright Sunday afternoon, the community gathered at Mr. Blau's home and escorted him as he carried the Sefer Torah from his home to the street where he walked under a chupah to bring the Torah to the shul. Dancing and singing accompanied those who took turns carrying the Torah, and a special meal was tendered in the shul in honor of the occasion.

A few days later, a neighbor asked Mr. Blau if there was a particular reason he decided to have the Sefer Torah written. At first he was hesitant to talk about it, but eventually he relented and told his heartbreaking story.

Shimshon Blau was only 16 years old when the Germans took him, his parents and his sisters from Lodz, their hometown in Poland, to one of the notorious concentration camps. Shortly after their arrival the parents were separated from the children and Shimshon never heard from them again.

He was placed in a slave labor barracks and suffered humiliation and heartache every day. One night as he was lying in bed, a German soldier came in to check on the prisoners. He walked from bed to bed - and then he saw Shimshon. Suddenly he lunged at Shimshon's feet, grabbed his leather boots and yelled, "Those boots are now mine."

Shimshon was shocked. The leather boots had been given to him by his parents shortly before the family had been captured by the Germans. Shimshon treasured them because they were his last connection to his beloved parents. He had no pictures, no letters, no memento that he could hold onto in a private moment for strength and rejuvenation. The gift of the boots had become a precious memory. Shimshon cried uncontrollably. Eventually he fell asleep.

The next morning he went out of his barracks barefoot and found the soldier who had taken his boots. In desperation he ran over to him and begged, "Please give me a pair of shoes. I have nothing to wear on my feet. I'll freeze to death."

He did not dare to antagonize the soldier by asking for his own boots back. Much to Shimshon's surprise, the soldier told him. "Wait here, I'll be back in five minutes with some shoes for you." Shimshon shuddered in the cold as he waited for the soldier to return. In a few minutes the Nazi came back with a pair of shoes and gave them to the startled but grateful teenager.

Shimshon went back to his barracks and sat on his bed to put on his new shoes. He looked them over carefully. They were made of wood, but he knew he would have to wear them regardless of what they were made of or how uncomfortable they would be.

As he was about to put his foot into the shoe, he looked into its instep and gasped. The instep was a piece of parchment from a Sefer Torah! Shimshon froze in terror. How could the Germans be so heartless? How could he step down on the words that Hashem Himself had told Moshe Rabbeinu to write for all generations?

But he knew he had no choice. There was nothing else to wear on his feet and it was either these shoes or frostbite and death. Hesitant with guilt, he put them on uneasily.

Now, years later, Shimshon said, "With every step I took, I felt I was trampling on Hashem's Sefer Torah. I promised to myself then that if I ever got out of the camps alive, no matter how rich or poor I was, someday I would have a Sefer Torah written and give back to Hashem the honor that I took from Him by trampling on His Torah. That's why I gave the shul a Sefer Torah." (Reflections of the Maggid, Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn, p.41)

We can be inspired by this story to always remember the holy Torah that Hashem has given us, instead of trampling upon it. This is an especially important message on Shabbos Chanukah, when we celebrate our victory over those evil forces who sought to make the Jews forget their Torah. **Good Shabbos Everyone and a Happy Chanukah Everyone.**