

Good Shabbos Everyone. There was no denying it. Life was becoming more frightening with each passing day. The Germans had occupied the town and the deportations to the concentration camps had begun. Mendel and Moshe were ready when their turn came. They knew that they would not be allowed to take very much along with them.

One item, however, they made sure to take — their tefillin. And they both vowed that come what may, they would strive to fulfill this precious mitzvah every single day. It was not long before the brothers found themselves on a cattle-car bound for Auschwitz. As soon as they arrived at the camp, they were ordered to undress and their every possession, including their tefillin, was taken from them.

Immediately, the two began searching for a way to get themselves another pair of tefillin. They discovered that all religious articles which the Nazis had confiscated had been thrown into a shed on camp grounds. The Nazis often saved such articles because they planned to build a "museum of the Jews" after the war, so that future generations would know that there was once a people known as "the Jews" which the Germans, the "master race," had wiped off the face of the earth.

One day, Mendel noticed that one of the gentiles working at the camp seemed like a fairly decent fellow. He asked the man what his price would be to get him a pair of tefillin from the shed. The gentile replied that he wanted a day's food rations. Mendel quickly agreed.

The next day, the man brought the tefillin and Mendel handed over the little bread and watery soup that was supposed to have sustained him for that day. When Mendel opened the boxes which housed the tefillin he became filled with dismay — they were both tefillin shel yad (of the arm)! He sought out the gentile and explained the problem.

The gentile replied, "Look here, Jew. I took a big risk bringing you those things. And how was I supposed to know that you wanted two different boxes? If you want me to risk it again, it will cost you another day's food." Mendel agreed. He fasted two consecutive days, but he had a pair of tefillin. Mendel and Moshe shared their tefillin with any Jew who wanted to put them on. Before long, as many as fifty Jews a day took turns fulfilling this mitzvah. All were well aware that to get caught would probably mean death. One day, a capo entered the barracks and asked Mendel if he could borrow the tefillin. Mendel had no choice but to give the capo the tefillin. He never returned them. The next day, news spread through the camp that a new transport of Jews would be arriving that day. Well aware of the risk involved, Mendel stood near the barbed wire fence which surrounded the camp, waiting for the transport to arrive.

As soon as the frightened deportees entered the camp grounds, Mendel hurried over to them. "Who has tefillin, who has tefillin?" he asked frantically, as he hurried up and down the columns of people. Finally, one man called out, "I have tefillin."

"Then please, give them to me," said Mendel. "If you hold on to them, they will surely become lost to you, for you will be ordered to hand over your every possession. But if you give them to me, I will do my very best to guard them, and I will try to return them to you as soon as possible." The man gave Mendel the tefillin. The man was old and weak and the Nazis had no use for him. They murdered him that same day. Mendel kept the tefillin and, as in the past, shared them with everyone.

Then one day, it happened. While one of the prisoners was wearing the tefillin, a Nazi entered the barracks. The Nazi flew into a rage. He demanded that the tefillin be handed over and asked to whom they belonged. Mendel raised his hand. "You should really die for this," the Nazi said, "but I've thought of an even better punishment. This afternoon, we're going to assemble all the prisoners in this section. They will all gather in a circle around a fire. And you," he continued, pointing to Mendel, "will throw your 'precious treasure' into the flames!"

He tossed the tefillin back to Mendel and left. The inmates were crestfallen. Some of them went over to comfort Mendel, while the man who had been caught wearing the tefillin begged forgiveness in case he had not been careful enough. Mendel assured him that there was no reason to apologize.

"As for that beast's orders," he continued, "I've prepared for such a possibility." He bent down near his bed and pried up a floorboard. From underneath the floor, Mendel withdrew what looked like a pair of tefillin. "I made these a while back, thinking that they might come in handy some day. Today is the day." That afternoon, the Jews assembled in a circle around a bonfire which the Nazis had set. As the Nazis looked on mockingly, Mendel threw his empty wooden boxes into the flames.

The next morning, he and his friends donned the tefillin, just as they had the previous mornings. It was 1945 and the war was quickly drawing to a close. The Nazis, realizing that defeat was inevitable, had stopped providing even the pitiful rations which they had given until that point. Prisoners had to fend for themselves to keep from starving.

Mendel was dreadfully weakened from all the hardships and backbreaking work he had endured. He lay on his bed with his eyes closed, barely alive. Moshe was in somewhat better health and he rushed about the camp frantically, trying to find even a crust of bread which would keep his brother alive. A German was riding a wagon through the camp. Moshe noticed something fall off the wagon. He rushed over to pick it up — it was a lump of sugar, a precious commodity!

Quickly, he hurried over to someone. "Would you trade me a few slices of bread for a lump of sugar?" The items were exchanged and Moshe ran back to his barracks. He crumbled the bread into small pieces and proceeded to place a few crumbs into his starving brother's mouth. Mendel opened his eyes and looked up at his younger brother with a mixture of love and gratitude. After swallowing a couple of mouthfuls, Mendel attempted to speak. Moshe had to bend down and place his ear near his brother's mouth to hear what he was saying. "Moshe . . . Please bring me the tefillin . . . I haven't worn them today. . ." The next day, the Allied armies took control of the camp. Mendel and Moshe eventually made their way to America, along with their precious tefillin. (Shabbos Stories p.212 R. Shlomo Finkelman) Every Jew has the ability and obligation every day to speak to His creator through the vehicle of prayer. We learn of the obligation of prayer in our weekly parsha Mishpatim. As the verse states, "You shall worship Hashem..." (Shemos 23:25) From this verse, the Rambam derives the source of the mitzvah of daily prayer. (Hilchos Tefilah, 1,1) Hashem hears our prayers, and if we are worthy, we answers our prayers also. As Dovid HaMelech tells us in Tehillim (Psalms) "Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon him sincerely." (145:18) A day without prayer is like a day without food! **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda "Anyone who brings merit to the masses, no wrongdoing will come into his hands."

Avos 5:21 To sponsor a drasha: M. Wolfberg 19 Koritz Way, Suite 212, Spring Valley, New York 10977 (845) 362-3234 **THIS PAPER CONTAINS HOLY WRITING AND SHOULD NOT BE DISPOSED OF IN THE GARBAGE**