

Good Shabbos Everyone. On Rosh Hashana, there is a custom to eat an apple dipped in honey. Before eating the apple dipped in honey we say a declaration: "May it be Your will, Hashem, our Hashem and the Hashem of our forefathers, that You renew for us a good and sweet year." (Shulchan Oruch, Hagah 583:1) Many also have the custom of dipping bread into honey through Simchas Torah.

Rosh Hashana is a time of teshuva - introspection and examination of our deeds and resolution to change for the better. Teshuva is a mitzvah of the highest order, as the Torah tells us in this week's portion Nitzovim "You shall return to Hashem your Hashem and listen to His voice..." (Devarim 30:2) If we want to have a good year, we must do Teshuvah. The following inspirational story told in the first person by Reb M. M. Gorelik (of blessed memory), will inspire us to do real teshuva before Rosh Hashana.

I was imprisoned in a labor camp in the far north of Russia. The crowding in the bunk was terrible and there wasn't even enough air to breathe. I went out into the yard in order to get some fresh air and was met with 60 degrees below zero temperatures; all that could be seen was snow, snow, snow. It was Rosh Hashana and one thought plagued my mind and heart: Where is my wife? Where are my children?

The K.G.B. had told me terrifying things about my family. They had said, "Your wife is dead. When our men came to her house to take your children from her - because she cannot educate them in the Soviet spirit - she adamantly protested and went into a panic. In her great emotion she had a sudden heart attack and died. But don't worry. Your children are with us, in a Soviet orphanage where they'll get an excellent education in the spirit of communism. There will be none of your Jewish nonsense and religious stupidities."

When they saw that I believed them, they continued to torment me, saying: "Where is your Hashem for whom you sacrificed your wife and children? Where is He? Why doesn't He save you from our hands?" I wanted to cry but I had no tears. I kept all the pain deep inside. I felt that in another moment I would die from a broken heart. I decided to speak my heart to Hashem before my end, before I left this world of falsehood.

I began: "Master of all, today is Rosh Hashana and we don't say 'Al Cheit' asking You for forgiveness from our many transgressions. But under the circumstances I cannot wait until Yom Kippur. I ask forgiveness for every day and year of my entire life in this world of falsehood. And You, in Your great mercy, forgive me also for saying Al Cheit today, on Rosh Hashana."

I began to emotionally recite my unique Al Cheit: "For the sin of organizing a secret school; for the sin of organizing workplaces so Jews wouldn't be forced to work on the Sabbath and holidays; for the sin of organizing factories in which they worked a few hours and in the rest of the time they taught children Torah; for the sin of arranging documents for those children so they wouldn't be caught and be sent to where I am now. "I sinned greatly against these wicked people, but I did it all in order to preserve Your Torah and Your commandments, so please forgive me for my sins. Please allow me to express my final request: Tell me where my wife and children are. What has happened to them? Show them to me so it will be easier for me to leave this false world. Show me Your kindness. "And one last thing. Today is Rosh Hashana. Merciful Father, give me the opportunity to fulfill today's mitzvah of hearing the shofar."

Then, a voice resounded in my heart so clearly, I was sure it was a voice from heaven. It said, "Don't be sad and don't believe those wicked ones. Your wife and children are alive and are at home, as always. You will see one another with joy and success." I cried out, "Hashem! Please change Your rules of nature! We can hear long distance via the radio. Do me this kindness, let me actually hear the sound of the shofar."

Suddenly, I saw before my eyes a large synagogue with a bima in the center, and on the bima stood the Lubavitcher Rebbe blowing the shofar. T'kia - my heart cried wordlessly at this sound. Shvarim, t'rua - my crying intensified but without sound. My heart stopped beating in anticipation, and once again I heard: shvarim, t'rua. I stood there, drinking in this awesome and holy sight. I cried deep in my heart: "Father! Have mercy on us! Father! Rescue your children who need help..."

And then tears began to burst forth, copious, warm tears. I cried out before Hashem for my troubles, for my wife's difficulties, and for the children, who did not sin, and for my brothers and sisters in these same straits. During those moving moments, there was no snow and ice covered camp, no guard dogs or human-animals who patrolled the fence. What I saw and felt was only Hashem, the holy Torah, the Rebbe blowing shofar, and many Jews who were listening to the sound of the shofar and were crying from the depths of their hearts. The Rebbe, too, was crying.

Many years passed and with Hashem's kindness I remained alive. I was freed from the labor camp and returned home. I found my wife and children alive and observing Torah and mitzvos despite the dangers they endured while I was away. More decades went by and miraculously we were freed from that hell.

Together with my wife and children we arrived in Israel. I travelled to the Rebbe in New York at my first opportunity, to pray in his synagogue on Rosh Hashana, to thank him for praying for us, and for his blessings that encouraged us to be strong. I entered "770."

I saw before me a large synagogue with a bima in the center. The Rebbe prepared himself to blow the shofar as thousands of chasidim watched in awe. It was utterly silent. The Rebbe went up to the bima. He took three bags with him that contained letters requesting blessings, many from Jews in the Soviet Union requesting a blessing to be able to leave. The Rebbe covered his holy face with his talit and cried. He cried for all the Jewish people. The Rebbe began to blow the shofar. T'kia, shvarim, t'rua... It was the same vision I had seen in the labor camp decades ago. But this time it was not a vision!" **Good Shabbos Everyone.**