

Good Shabbos Everyone. Rav Sholom Schechter, a prominent elderly rabbi, was on a TWA flight to Eretz Yisrael, with a stopover in Athens where he would board a connecting flight. It was two days before Rosh Hashanah, and the last few days in New York had been exhausting. Expending his energy in raising funds, selling sefarim, packing, and preparing for his trip had all taken their toll on this seventy-year-old man. Extremely tired, he fell into a deep sleep as the plane crossed the Atlantic.

He asked to be awakened when the plane landed in Athens, but someone forgot to do so. On board were many people of many nationalities, heading towards many different destinations, so it didn't seem unusual that the rabbi with the long beard remained asleep even as the plane landed in Athens and people disembarked. He remained asleep throughout the stopover and awoke only as the plane roared down the runway, taking off to its next destination.

The captain greeted everyone and then detailed the flight plan. The next stop was Lebanon!

Rabbi Schechter blinked his eyes a few times in disbelief. Lebanon? Were they being hijacked? What had happened to Athens? He soon realized that he had slept through his changing point and unlike a bus, he couldn't just get out and walk back to his correct stop. His baggage was probably on its way to Eretz Yisrael, but he most certainly was not.

This obviously Jewish-looking man would certainly be in danger in Lebanon, a land full of fanatics. He mentioned his predicament to the flight attendant who discussed the situation with the captain and then came to Rabbi Schechter with their advice. They suggested that since all the passengers were either American or European tourists who would in all probability not report the Jewish passengers to the Lebanese authorities, the crew might be able to protect him from being seen by any Arabs who might assist the disembarking passengers, or by Arabs who might come on board to check and clean the plane. He should pretend to be sleeping and blankets would be heaped all around him, covering him almost completely.

As the trip continued, Rabbi Schechter busied himself studying the sefarim he had taken along. When the plane eventually came to a halt in Lebanon, his heart was in his throat. For this landing he was wide awake. He sat trembling with fear, covered in darkness by the two blankets that the stewards provided for him.

No one gave the "sleeping" traveler more than a passing glance and then once again the plane took off, the next stop being India. Rabbi Schechter knew that there were Jewish communities in Bombay and Calcutta, but en-route the captain informed the passengers that due to civil disturbances in India, only those people holding Indian passports would be permitted to disembark.

Rosh Hashanah was only a day off. Checking plane flights and schedules, Rabbi Schechter realized that he had no chance of getting back to Eretz Yisrael on time for Yom Tov. He couldn't help but wonder where in the world this incredible journey might take him. He was confused and emotionally drained. Why was this happening to him? Was this wandering a punishment for something? Or was he destined to accomplish something special at some unknown destination? He would have to get off at the first stop after India, regardless of where it might be. He soon found out - Bangkok, Thailand.

By the time the plane taxied to a stop at Don Muang airport and Rabbi Schechter was cleared through customs, it was only a few hours before Rosh Hashanah. After some desperate inquiries he was told that there was indeed a synagogue in the center of town. He made his way there, hoping that someone would be kind enough to invite him home. The people turned out to be more than kind.

He had no trouble conversing with the congregants, for most of the men who attended the synagogue were in Thailand on business, and they spoke English. He was invited by the president of the synagogue, a Mr. Atlas, to be a guest in his home, and it was there that Rabbi Schechter stayed for the next few days.

At Mr. Atlas' table, Rabbi Schechter ate only some cake, fruit and vegetables, that his daughter had packed for his trip, and matzah, which his host provided. He was introduced to Mr. Atlas' children, two of whom were brilliant young scholars studying at Oxford University in England. Among many things they discussed was the fact that in the synagogue tomorrow, aside from the regular Rosh Hashanah services, there was going to be a bar mitzvah. "This trip gets more interesting every step of the way," Rabbi Schechter thought to himself.

When he came to the synagogue the next morning, he had another surprise waiting for him. Not only was there no mechitzah separating the men from the women, but the congregants were all sitting together. As an Orthodox Jew, Rabbi Schechter prayed alone in an anteroom to the side of the main sanctuary. After Shacharis (morning prayer), he asked the rabbi if he could address the people, to explain why he had not joined them for the prayers. He was granted permission.

"My dear brothers and sisters," he began... *To be continued...* **Good Shabbos Everyone**