

Good Shabbos Everyone. In our portion this week Noach, the Torah tells us of how Noach spent 120 years building the ark. Why did it take so long for Noach to build his ark? The commentators explain that Hashem wanted the people of the generation to have a chance to watch Noach and be motivated to change, to repent, to do Teshuva. Hashem wanted people to see the ark being built and to contemplate the flood which was coming. The following true story will inspire us all to change our lives for the better...

Guy, who recently turned thirty-one, is the son of an electrical engineer in Tel Aviv. In high school he was enrolled in the enrichment program for gifted students. Upon completing his compulsory army service, Guy signed on for an additional five years as an officer specializing in logistics. He studied computer technology at college level, and at the same time, served as director of a private school which prepared students with learning difficulties for matriculation.

Even before Guy was discharged from the service, his parents decided to start observing Torah and mitzvos. It happened when Guy's mother and her sister, Guy's aunt, decided to surprise their own parents with a joint weekend trip to a luxury hotel in Ashkelon. That same weekend, an Arachim Seminar was being held in their hotel. Curiosity prompted them to ask about the program, and they decided to listen in on a lecture or two. The families enjoyed the lectures very much.

When an Arachim staff member phoned them about an upcoming Seminar, Guy's parents enrolled. As a result of what they learned at the Seminar, the senior Lavones decided to become ba'alei teshuvah. Mr. Lavone joined a local shiur for newcomers to Torah study, and Mrs. Lavone attends classes three times a week at a local institute for baalos teshuvah. Guy's younger brother, Tomer, saw how enthused his parents were and decided to attend a Seminar for singles. He came back fully convinced. His sister, Ravit, is also well on the way to teshuvah.

Guy finished off his stint in the army, then enrolled in university. However, he took no interest whatsoever in his family's new outlook on life. He enjoyed his visits back home, joined their Shabbos meals and found the new atmosphere a pleasant one, and he would do whatever he could to fit in with the rest of the family. However, for himself, he was happy with his life just the way it was. After a short visit with the family, he returned to his dorm at school and continued to pursue his studies.

Even so, in the long run, Guy was affected by the change at home. It made him stop to ponder life: Where was he headed? What did he want to accomplish with his life? His parents and his brother and sister seemed very happy in their new life; would he be happy in his own? Very gradually, he also began to draw closer to his Judaism. Without letting anyone know, he began to wash negel wasser in the morning. On Shabbos, he would manage not to write anything down. Here and there, he kept other practices that he noticed his family had adapted. He had some basic knowledge, and was willing to learn and do more, but the pressures of work and his studies kept him from going into the topic at depth. Guy received his diploma in computer sciences at the height of the recession in the field. Two or three years earlier, he would have been overwhelmed with job offers; now, even experienced programmers were suddenly out of work. Under the circumstances, Guy decided it was time to give himself a break.

When Guy's mother, Shoshana Lavone, heard of his plans to leave for parts unknown, her heart was not easy. It was clear to her that her son was not planning a tour of the standard tourist spots. She turned to Guy with a request: "For your sake, and for ours, please keep Shabbos fully, for two weeks in a row."

Guy agreed. In retrospect, when he looks back on those two days he spent absorbing the sanctity of the Shabbos, Guy feels that their special atmosphere accompanied him on his travels, giving him strength to carry on during the trials that befell him, without falling into utter despair even in the valley of death. But we are jumping ahead in Guy's story, Armed with his parents' prayers and good wishes, with a siddur and a copy of Tehillim that his mother slipped into his backpack, Guy took a flight to Argentina.

From there he flew to Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world, located on the archipelago that stretches out from the southern tip of Argentina and Chile as though trying to shake hands with the frozen Antarctic. On one side, Ushuaia is bordered by the meeting point of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans; on the other, by steep mountains topped by permanent glaciers. The region was dubbed the "The Land of Fire" by the Spaniards who conquered the area. They were struck by the campfires the local Indians lit on mountain tops as a means of communication.

Others say the name was given because of the numerous volcanoes the explorers found in the area. Guy arrived in Ushuaia in the middle of South America's summer, when the region enjoys twenty hours of sunlight out of every twenty-four. Even so, there are heavy rains during the season. The combination of melting glaciers and heavy precipitation causes the many rivers in the area to run fast and fierce. The region is noted for its

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spectacular waterfalls and abundant swampland.

In Ushuaia, Guy found himself a companion well-suited to his goal of spending time alone with himself in the bosom of nature. Michael, an Austrian, was an experienced mountain climber. An accomplished athlete in fine form, Michael suggested the two set out on a three-day jaunt along a route that would circle Ushuaia's glacier and meet up with the highway that led to the north. Guy left a message where he was staying that he would be back in a few days' time, and the two adventurers started out.

Their route twisted and turned up the mountain slopes, giving them one breathtaking view after the other. Rivers plummeted down the slopes and gathered in frothy rivers, often forming spectacular waterfalls. They looked down on crystal clear, blue lagoons that appeared untouched since the day they were first created. The original route seemed to easy to Michael. He pointed to the snowcapped peak beyond the lagoon and asked Guy: "Why not circle around that mountain, and come back to our starting point? The scenery there must be spectacular!"

Their new itinerary called for crossing a raging river whose waters were nearly at the freezing point. There was no bridge, only a large, slippery log joined the two banks of the frothy stream. One false move could cause a serious injury - or worse. Guy managed the crossing unharmed; but Michael tumbled into the frigid waters.

For a lesser athlete, it might have proven fatal, but Michael had his wits about him and pulled himself to safety. Together, the two adventurers climbed toward the peak, planning to descend back to their starting point once they reached the top.

However, when they reached the summit, they could see only one peak after the other. Before them lay an entire chain of mountains, with no end in sight. Guy wanted to return just the way they had come, but that was too tame a solution for an experienced adventurer like Michael.

"There must be a pass somewhere between the peaks," he insisted. "We just need to find it, and make our way back." Evening set in. They made camp, had supper from the provisions they had brought with them, and went to sleep. Next morning they arose refreshed, and carried on. They crossed a high plateau, thinking that they had almost reached the road that would lead them back to Ushuaia. However, they encountered an obstacle: a large lake blocked their path.

"No problem," announced Michael. "We'll just have to follow the shore and circle around it." The trek around the lake took them longer than they had anticipated. Darkness overtook them before they had reached their destination. Again they bedded down for the night. The next morning, they continued on their way. When they reached the river that flowed out of the lake, they followed along its banks. Their path led them onward until they reached a huge lagoon, which brought them to a dead stop. Where should they go from here? The expanse of water reminded Guy of Lake Kinneret, back home in Israel's Galilee.

It was about the same size, and brought back fond memories. At this point, Guy would have given a great deal to be in his native land, hiking in familiar territory rather than in the hostile Land of Fire. Now, however, the hikers had no alternative but to follow the shoreline. They plodded on and on, until night forced them to stop.

Exhausted, they ate the last of their provisions and fell into a deep sleep. Dawn woke them to a new day fraught with problems: no food, no direction, and no path to follow. It was then that Guy recalled the copy of Tehillim that his mother had tucked into his backpack. When they stopped to rest, he opened it and began to recite the heartfelt words of David Hamelech. It nourished his soul and renewed his hope.

Michael climbed up to a nearby hilltop to get a view of the area around them. Perhaps he would see a path that would lead to some sign of civilization. On his return, Michael reported that the only way open to them was the riverbed below. They made their way down to the muddy canyon.

Again and again, they slipped and fell, but each time, they helped one another up and slowing moved forward. After twelve hours of plodding, with nothing to eat, they reached another large lake that brought them to a halt. Once again, they would have to tackle the mountain heights respite their weakened state. Frothy streams slashed the steep slopes as they rushed down to the lake below. They continued to climb without having the least hint which way would lead them out of this beautiful, but forsaken land. At one point during their climb, they suddenly heard a deep rumble in the distance. The ominous sound grew louder and louder. Suddenly an avalanche of ice, snow and rock tumbled down the slope only a few feet away from them. How close they had come to being buried alive! It was a terrifying experience, but Michael had still not lost his confidence.

"Just wait," he told Guy. "I'm sure we'll see the road right around the bend." Guy was not convinced. An inner voice warned him that they were heading in the wrong direction. "Let's go up to the summit so we can see the entire region, and find out where we are," he suggested. *to be continued...* **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

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