

Good Shabbos Everyone. Preparations for Pesach, which begins Monday night, are in full swing. On the second night of Pesach we begin counting the Omer. We count 49 days of the Omer and then celebrate the giving of the Torah on the Yom Tov of Shavuot. 49 is the Gematria - the numerical value of the Hebrew word "Midah," which means character trait. The Sages tell us that the time between Pesach and Shavuot is a special time to work on ourselves. The following beautiful Pesach story shows what makes great people great, namely, their great character.

Reb Shea was a Jew who lived in Jerusalem several years ago. He was quiet man of great holiness, who performed acts of kindness in unassuming ways. Only after he had passed away did stories surface as to how much he had actually helped so many. In each situation he had made a fellow Jew's problem his own personal problem.

It seems that a number of years before a terrible tragedy occurred in Brodie's Houses, an apartment complex in Jerusalem. Just two weeks before the holiday of Pesach, a young man suddenly passed away, leaving a large family behind. He was a man who had always struggled financially, and now his family was left destitute, with very few relatives in Israel who could be of assistance.

Aside from the terrible travail that the family would have to deal with in the long term, there was the immediate pressing problem regarding the upcoming Yom Tov. Pesach is a time when the father of a household is the dominant figure as he conducts the meaningful Pesach seder for his family. Who now was going to be able to conduct the seder for the bereaved widow and her young children? R' Shea looked for a candidate who would be willing to forgo his own seder at home, but couldn't find one.

Finally, just a few days before the holiday, he located a young man learning in a yeshiva, with no relatives of his own in Israel, who said that he would be willing to conduct the seder for the family. The night of Pesach arrived, and as R' Shea left his home to go to shul he told his wife that he might be a bit detained because he wanted to check, on the way home, that everything was working out at the home of the widow.

Once in shul R' Shea began to look around for the young man who had agreed to conduct the seder, but he was nowhere to be found. R' Shea wondered whether perhaps the fellow had forgotten about his commitment, or maybe he was simply davening in another shul. That would be strange, though, because R' Shea and the fellow had agreed to walk together from R' Shea's shul to the home of the family in Brodie's Houses.

When the davening ended, R' Shea once again searched the shul but he couldn't find the young man. R' Shea left the shul with his children and told them to go on home to wait for him there. He hoped to be home shortly himself. He also hoped that he would meet the fellow outside Brodie's Houses so that he could take him to the home of the widow and her children.

But when he got to the complex, the young man was nowhere to be seen; and when R' Shea walked into the apartment itself, no one was there but the young mother and her children. The children were scampering all over the apartment and the mother seemed to be walking around aimlessly. After waiting a short while, R' Shea decided to conduct the seder himself. He called everyone to the table and then slowly and patiently he made Kiddush, gave everyone at the table a small piece of the karpas, had the children ask the Four Questions, and began to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt - all this as his wife and family, along with his own widowed mother, were sitting home and waiting for him. R' Shea sat with the family as they ate their meal (although he alone did not eat).

He enlivened the table with his conversation and zemiros (songs) until finally the mother and children ate the afikoman. By the time he was ready to leave, some of the small children were already asleep, for he had been there for close to three hours! The young widow thanked him profusely, and R' Shea made his way home.

When he came into his house, his wife, his mother, and his children were waiting for him with mixed feelings. On one hand, they understood that he had probably helped that family in their moment of sorrow. On the other hand, here in his own home he had kept a widow (his mother) waiting, in addition to his own children, who had been looking forward to this night for months. R' Shea began to conduct the seder by once again reciting the Kiddush - this time for his own family.

However, because it was already very late, the children hurried through the Mah Nishtanah (the Four Questions, traditionally asked by the children at the beginning of the seder), they all drank each of the four cups of wine at the proper point in the seder, had their meal, and made sure to eat their afikoman - all before midnight, as is required by halachah.

After their seder was over, the children of R' Shea respectfully approached their father. "We understand that you wanted to help the widow and her family," they began, "but what about your own family? We were kept waiting for hours'. And besides, what about your own mother? She is an older woman, and she too is a widow! Why did you favor the widow there over the widow here?"

R' Shea understood that their questions were justified. Patiently he said to them, "My dear children, your questions are legitimate. I will answer them with a story that happened to me many years ago with the Chazon Ish." This is the story he told them... *To be continued.* **Good Shabbos Everyone.**