

Good Shabbos Everyone. Some people find the preparations for Pesach to be difficult. People complain about all the cleaning and the special details which need to be taken care of for this wonderful Yom Tov. However, in truth, we have a lot for which to be thankful. Let us then read the following inspirational story which will give us more than a little perspective on this topic.

For Jews living in Leningrad during the height of the Cold War, life was nearly impossible. Such was the consequence of Communism. Originally established to provide equality to all men, it accomplished just the opposite. Working long hours the entire week, a man could barely provide for a small family. But when a Jew would try to make a living he was up against even greater odds. Starting one's own business was viewed as entrepreneurship and was frowned upon at the very least. One would immediately be encouraged to close down a business and when that "encouragement" did not work, the next step was a warning by government officials. Soon thereafter, the would-be entrepreneur would be forced to take a job for the government — but one that in no way provided job security for him.

Working in any government job was torturous. If one was 5 minutes late he would be issued a warning and be docked in pay. A second lateness would result in one being fired and spending a short period of time in a local prison. But no one dared to complain, because complaining was a certain ticket to the frigid temperatures of Siberia. Once one was exiled to that barren frozen tundra, he was never heard from again. So one learned to accept his fate without uttering a word of complaint.

Torah-observant Jews lived in terror that their observance, which was forbidden, would be discovered. That was another direct ticket to Siberia. All this pressure forced hundreds of thousands of Jews to stop keeping Shabbos and to leave the fold of Torah. But Rav Yitzchak Isaac Krasik would not succumb. Not from the hunger. Not from the political pressure and certainly not from fear. He was living by Hashem's set of rules. But once, his ingenuity got him in trouble...

On the first Saturday morning of his new job, he had shown up to work with a fake bandage on his head, trying to get excused from work for the day. The next Saturday he came in complaining of another ailment. His manager authorized his sick leave for the first few Saturdays, and then noticed the pattern. Every Saturday Yitzchak Isaac was coming in with a different excuse. Each time another mysterious ailment prevented him from doing any physical labor. Finally the plant manager called Yitzchak Isaac in and informed him that he knew precisely what tricks he was up to. Realizing that he had no chance to plead his case, Yitzchak Isaac quickly shifted gears, as the grim prospect of being reported to the authorities suddenly became an uninviting reality. He pleaded with his boss and the man promised, at least for now, not to report the "crime."

After another few weeks, however, the supervisor fired Yitzchak Isaac from his job. He was now faced with the daunting challenge of finding a job to help feed his family. But no one was willing to overlook the fact that he skipped work every Saturday. Weeks turned into months and the Krasik family was desperate for food. With Pesach approaching the home was completely bare. Not a single morsel of food could be found. The family was starving and their gaunt faces told the heartbreaking story of what they had gone through over the past few months.

As the eve of the 14th day of Nissan was upon them, they were required to check the home for any possible chametz. The thought was ludicrous. Chametz? In their barren home it was silly to think that bread could be found. And anyway, how could he possibly check for chametz at a time like this when his entire family was starving? They needed food and they needed it now! The thought crossed Reb Yitzchak's mind that perhaps this year there was no obligation for him to check for chametz.

Perhaps the entire house was considered a "makom she'ein machnisim bo chametz" — a place where no chametz could have possibly entered. His nephew Reb Meir Dobrovsky came over and they discussed the idea of not checking for chametz since it was obvious that there was no food to be found.

Nevertheless, the notion of skipping bedikas chametz entirely just did not seem right. We check for chametz because that is what Hashem wants from us and not necessarily because of what we might find.

Although his hunger pangs made it feel more like Yom Kippur than Pesach, Reb Yitzchak was determined to fulfill the requirement to search for chametz. As night fell and the stars came out, he began his solemn search. Going through the motions, he walked from room to room searching for chametz. Though weak from hunger, he kept at it. When he was almost finished, he stumbled across a large roll! He could hardly believe his eyes. Where had it come from! It couldn't possibly have been there beforehand. But there it was before his very eyes. He sat down upon concluding his bedikas chametz and together with his family ate a very special bedikas chametz seudah - meal. And as they savored every morsel that entered their mouths, their joy knew no bounds. They had upheld a tradition which had been kept for over 3,000 years. And now they were being rewarded for their efforts. Reb Yitzchak never forgot that lesson. (One Shining Moment, R. Y. Spero, p. 121) When we see the great sacrifices that Jews have made under the most difficult of circumstances, we can all be inspired to make changes in our own lives, to dedicate and rededicate ourselves to observing Hashem's mitzvahs. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**