

Good Shabbos Everyone. We open our discussion of this week's Torah portion *Pinchas*, with a brief review of a topic we have discussed in recent weeks. We are referring to the power of our righteous Torah leaders to uplift us spiritually.

In our portion this week, the Torah tells us how Hashem commands Moshe to count the Jews. When commanding Moshe to count the Jews, the Torah uses the word "Seh-oo." (Bamidbar 26:2) The word "Seh-oo," can also mean "*to uplift*." As in the verse in Psalms "*Lift your hands in the sanctuary and bless Hashem.*" (Tehillim 134:2) In order to learn a spiritually uplifting message from this parsha, let us try to understand the verse in the following way: Hashem is giving Moshe Rabeinu (our teacher) the power to uplift the Jews. As the verse states in the parsha: "*Uplift the entire assembly of the Children of Yisroel...*" (26:2)

Since the time of Moshe Rabeinu, Hashem has appointed in every generation Tzadikim (the exceedingly righteous Rabbis) to lead Klal Yisroel. Just as Hashem gave Moshe Rabeinu the power to uplift the Bnai Yisroel, so too does Hashem give the spiritual leaders of every generation the power to uplift Jews.

The following amazing true story demonstrates the tremendous power of our Torah leaders to elevate us. A very successful businessman, a Chabad Chassid by the name of Rabbi Chaim Gutnick who lived in Sydney Australia, was invited by the small Jewish community of "Adalide" to serve as their Cantor for the High Holy Days. Rabbi Gutnick was in a dilemma.

True, he had a pleasant voice, but he also had four small children at home, and had no desire of becoming a Rabbi or a Cantor. "They have a few months, let them find someone else." He thought to himself. Two weeks later he was surprised to see in his mailbox a letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, addressed to him.

The Rebbe wrote that he was disappointed to hear that Rabbi Gutnick refused the Adalide community. The Rebbe advised him to accept the offer, and not to forget the Egyptian Jews there. (The community in Adalide got Rabbi Gutnick's name from the head Rabbi of Sydney, who also advised them to write the Lubavitch Rebbe if Rabbi Gutnick refused.) Needless to say, he took the job.

When he arrived in Adalide the morning before Rosh Hashanah, the first thing he did after getting settled in, was to go the Synagogue to meet everyone and get acquainted with the place.

After everyone had left, he sat down in the back of the quiet Synagogue, opened a Torah book and began learning. No one was in the building except him and the caretaker. A perfect preparation for Rosh HaShanah. About two hours later he heard the door open, and turned to see a middle-aged woman entering. She approached, apologized for the intrusion, and explained that although she herself was not Jewish, there was a Jewish girl outside who wants to know where the holiest place is in the Synagogue?

He pointed to the Ark in the front of the room, she thanked him, went outside, and returned seconds later escorting a blind girl of about fifteen years old.

She led her silently down the aisle toward the Ark, and when they reached the front of the room, the girl fell to her knees put her head in her hands and began weeping.

"Please G-d, send me a sign. Please, send me a sign. If you are there, and you hear me, send a sign!!" After a few minutes she stood up, dried her eyes on her dress sleeve, and was escorted by her companion back out of the Synagogue.

Rabbi Gutnick was frozen from the incident. The room seemed a hundred times more silent than before, until the caretaker happened to enter.

"Oh, it must be one of those Egyptian Jews" he said to Rabbi Gutnick after he heard the story. "Nothing to get excited about. A small group of them arrived a while ago, but they don't seem to want to have anything to do with us. No big loss if you ask me. We tried to be friendly but they just keep to themselves."

Suddenly the Rebbe's words flashed in his mind "Egyptian Jews". He ran outside to see if she was still there, but there was no trace.

The next evening Rabbi Gutnick led the Rosh Hashanah services, and after they were finished, the Synagogue president requested of him that they stand by the door and bless everyone as they exited. The only people that didn't file past, were a group that sat silently in the back corner waiting for everyone, including the Rabbis to leave.

"Oh, those are the Egyptian Jews," whispered the president when he noticed how Rabbi Gutnick was staring. "If I were you, I'd forget about them. Let's go."

The next day, after the morning prayers, Rabbi Gutnick didn't wait for them to come to him. He walked over to where they were sitting, shook their hands and happily wished them all a happy and holy New Year. "And please wish the blind girl a good new year from me also."

Seven days later, the evening before Yom Kippur, the phone rang in Rabbi Gutnick's hotel room.

"Hello, are you the Rabbi?" said the voice on the other end, "I am the blind girl. I want to...." suddenly the phone was cut off.

When she didn't call back he phoned the president, somehow he got her name, address, and phone number and Rabbi Gutnick called her back."Yes?" A man answered, "Who is it please?" "Hello, this is Rabbi Gutnick and...." As soon as he said his name, the phone hung up.

So he decided to take things into his own hands. Although it was already late in the evening, he called a taxi, and a half hour later he was knocking at the blind girl's door.

When it opened he put his foot in, and insisted that they let him enter saying that he took a taxi, and had an important message for them. And it worked! They invited him in, and they all sat down together in the front room.

When Rabbi Gutnick explained what had happened, and how the Lubavitcher Rebbe told him to visit the Egyptian Jews in Adeline, they were stunned speechless; they had never heard of this Rabbi, how could he have heard of them? And who were they that he should even think about them?

But the girl began weeping and whispering, "This is my sign! Thank you G-d!"

After several minutes, her mother, with tears welling up in her eyes, broke the silence and told the following story.

"We fled from Egypt about a year ago, and almost as soon as we arrived in Australia, my husband and I found work here in Adalide. The only problem was finding a school for Betty. You see she is blind, and the only school we could find for her in this area is run by priests.

"At first it wasn't so bad" her father continued. "Tuition was low, Betty was making good progress, and...well Rabbi, we are almost not observant at all, so we really didn't care, as long as she was learning."

"But then things changed," her mother continued. "They began suggesting, and then demanding, that she change her religion and become a Catholic."

"I'm a Jew", Betty said with tears streaming from her colorless eyes, "And something inside me says it's wrong to stop being a Jew. I don't even know what a Jew is! But I'll never stop being a Jew, even if they kill me."

"Then one day they said that she should stop coming to school," her mother continued. "And if she wanted to be so stubborn she shouldn't come back."

"That's when my parents started pressuring me" whimpered Betty. "They said that I had to do what the priests wanted. And that's when I really got confused."

"But what can we do?" Said her weeping mother.

"You can't just sit around in the house!!" said her father "Of course we don't want you to stop being Jewish!! But we aren't so religious anyway and it's for your own good! For your own good!"

"So one day last week when my parents were at work" Betty continued, "I asked the neighbor, and she took me to the Synagogue. I just had to pray to G-d to send me a sign what I should do."

"Then, the miracle happened! A few days later, my relatives told me that you asked about me in the Synagogue after the New Year's prayers. They were all laughing about it, but I was so excited I could hardly move. And then, believe me, it was not easy to get your phone number and call you."

At that point even Rabbi Gutnick was not succeeding in holding back his tears.

He dried his eyes, picked up the phone and called the president again. "You must come now to the blind girl's home, we have to get her connected with Yiddishkeit!"

"What!!?? It's twelve midnight!!" Shouted the president over the phone. "Listen Rabbi Gutnick. You're a good Cantor, but I'm not coming to talk to anyone at twelve midnight, I'm already in my pajamas!!"

"So come in your pajamas," he answered. "You can come any way you want, but if you aren't here soon, you can find a replacement for Yom Kippur."

A half hour later he arrived in the girl's house, and in no time they had a list of ten telephone numbers to call after the Holiday, to set her up with a complete Jewish education. The story had a happy ending; the president found a place for Betty, and her relatives strengthened both their Judaism and connection to the community. The next time that Rabbi Gutnick was in "Yechidus" (private audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe) The Rebbe told him, "That "sign" was for you also! It's a sign that you should leave the business world, and devote yourself completely to becoming a Rabbi!" **Good Shabbos Everyone.**