

Good Shabbos Everyone. In secular terms, Joe Wallis, or Yossi as he was known to his Israeli friends, was a model success story. Born in Eretz Yisroel, he moved abroad with his parents to New York, before his bar mitzvah, where he grew up in a rough and tumble neighborhood in the Bronx.

He graduated from City College at the top of the class. He married and returned with his wife to Israel in order to serve in the Israeli army. He rose to the rank of captain, and had nearly completed his obligatory service when the Yom Kippur War broke out in October, 1973. Years later, he was a successful business man in Eretz Yisroel, but he still felt empty. One day, as Joe was about to leave his office, he received a telephone call from his wife, asking him to pick up supper on his way home.

Joe left his office at 5:30 and made his way to the Misadah HaPil in Tel Aviv (The Elephant's Restaurant) known for its basar lavan (pork) and pita. It was a hot steamy day and the line to get into this trendy eatery was out the door. Joe figured out just how many portions he would need for his children, who devoured this kind of treat. It was going to be a humid evening, he thought to himself, as he began feeling impatient, uncomfortable and a little out of place...

Joe was surely unfamiliar with this week's Torah portion Shmini, in which the verse states, "And the pig... it is impure to you. You shall not eat it..." (Vayikra 11:7-8) The Shulchan Aruch (the Code of Jewish Law) tells us an interesting thing about the impurity of the pig. When discussing the places unfit for the recitation of holy words (such as a bathroom) the Shulchan Aruch states, "someone who has excrement brought before him, (such as in a bedpan) may not recite holy words; furthermore, the mouth of a pig is similar to excrement which is brought before him, because even if the pig has just come out of the river, the bathing in the river does not help [to cleanse] the pig, because a pig's mouth is like a bedpan." (Orach Chayim 76:3)

...Joe's mind began wandering in the pork restaurant and he suddenly he recalled a story that had taken place decades earlier. He had heard the story numerous times in the family, but now the story loomed larger than ever before. The story was about his maternal grandfather, Shraga Feivel Winkler. He came from Feldesh, a small town outside Debreczyn, Hungary, and was known as the most pious man in his town. He was a melamed (teacher of children) who was revered and respected by all who knew him.

In 1944, Reb Shraga Feivel was taken from his home by the German S.S. and interned in a slave labor camp outside Hungary. He could not contact his family members, and had no idea of their whereabouts. As the War was coming to an end and the camps were about to be liberated, German soldiers wanted to humiliate as many Jews as they could before they were freed. They decided to make an example of Reb Shraga Feivel, whom they sneeringly called "the rabbi of the camp."

The German soldiers summoned Jews from all the barracks and ordered them to form a wide circle. Reb Shraga Feivel was brought to the middle of the circle. One could already see clouds of smoke rising from the Allied tanks and trucks that were making their way to the camps. "In a few hours you will all be free." a German officer announced. "You will be reunited with your families - or whatever is left of them. But you, rabbi," he said, pointing to Reb Shraga Feivel, "you must first pass this test. I have a piece of pig's meat in my hand. If you want to live and see your family again, you must eat this in front of everyone." The German roared, as he drew his pistol, "Otherwise you will be our last victim."

Reb Shraga Feivel had starved himself throughout his stay in the camps rather than eat anything that was not kosher. He existed on water, dirty fruits and vegetables, and anything else he knew was kosher.

He had not eaten meat in years, not even soup that may have had pieces of non-kosher meat in it. Reb Shraga Feivel's fellow prisoners stood by nervously as he was confronted with his life-and-death decision. Some could not bear to watch his ordeal and looked down at the ground. "I will not eat this meat!" he announced defiantly. The sudden crack of gunfire ruptured the air, as Reb Shraga Feivel was killed in cold blood.

Now, in the hot humid evening outside the pork restaurant, Reb Shraga Feivel's grandson closed his eyes, ruminating over the events of that late afternoon, decades ago in that slave labor camp where his grandfather was gunned down. Joe thought to himself, "I am standing in a long line waiting to buy pork - meat that my grandfather gave up his life for.

Had he eaten just one piece of that pork, he would have been reunited with his family that he hadn't seen in over a year. I have my family. I have anything I desire - and I am waiting on line for this? Either I am not normal or he was not normal." And then he thought, "I cannot believe that my grandfather was not normal. I must find out why he would do something that seems to me to be crazy!" He left the line and bought supper at another store. He came home a perplexed and troubled man. After supper, Yossi had a long talk with his wife. They talked about their purpose in life, their future - and the emptiness that gnawed at their souls. They wanted a solution, but where could they find it?

A few days later, Yossi heard about a seminar called Arachim (Values) that was being given by two scientists. Dr. Sholom Srebrenik and Mr. Tzvi Inbal. The academic credentials of the men giving the seminar were impeccable. Joe, who had a scientific bent, decided to attend. For four days he listened, questioned, absorbed, discussed, evaluated, deliberated and reflected. At the end of the seminar he was convinced that the only path for a Jew is an authentic Torah lifestyle.

Yossi Wallis became determined that others would see what he saw, feel what he felt, and understand what he now understood. He asked Dr. Srebrenik, "How can you not be getting this message out to thousands of people? What you have said here is literally incredible." "It's a matter of money," replied Dr. Srebrenik sadly. "If we had the money we could get the message out." "I will take care of it," Yossi said with firm confidence. And take care of it he did. Overnight he became Arachim's General Director, a title he holds until this day.

Today Arachim seminars are given throughout the world. Over the last twenty years it has become one of the most effective kiruv (outreach) organizations in Eretz Yisroel and the Diaspora. More than 120,000 people have attended Arachim seminars and more than 50,000 of them have been brought back to authentic Judaism. Yossi recently estimated that more than 60,000 children have been born to couples who have become baalei teshuvah by virtue of graduating Arachim seminars. (From Reflections of The Maggid, R. Paysach Krohn p.222) **Good Shabbos Everyone.**