

**Good Shabbos, Good Yom Tov Everyone.** On Simchas Torah we celebrate the completion of reading the Torah and the beginning of the reading again with Parshas Bereishis. Most Jews today can celebrate Simchas Torah freely and openly. More importantly, we can learn the Torah freely and openly without fear of persecution. We should all take advantage of our freedom to learn Torah without fear of persecution...

Henryk was very young in 1945, when the War ended and solitary survivors tried frantically to trace their relatives. He had spent what seemed to be most of his life with his nanny, who had hidden him away from the Nazis at his father's request. There was great personal risk involved, but the woman had readily taken it, as she loved the boy.

All the Jews were being killed, and Henryk's nanny did not think for a moment that the father, Joseph would survive the infamous destruction of the Vilna Ghetto. He would surely have been transferred to Auschwitz — and everyone knew that nobody ever came back from Auschwitz. She therefore had no scruples about adopting the boy, having him baptized into the Catholic Church and taught catechism by the local priest.

It was Simchas Torah when the boy's father surprised everyone and came back to Vilna to reclaim his son. The heartbroken nanny had packed all his clothing and his small catechism book, stressing to the father that the boy had become a good Catholic. Joseph took his son by the hand and led him directly to the Great Synagogue of Vilna.

On the way, he told his son that his son was a Jew and that his name was Avraham. Not far from the house, they passed the church and the boy reverently crossed himself, causing his father great anguish. Just then, a priest emerged who knew the boy, and when Henryk rushed over to kiss his hand, the priest spoke to him, reminding him of his Catholic faith. Everything inside of Joseph wanted to drag his son away from the priest and from the church. But he knew that this was not the way to do things. He nodded to the priest, holding his son more closely.

After all, these people had harbored his child and saved the child's life. He had to show his son Judaism, living Judaism, and in this way all these foreign beliefs would be naturally abandoned and forgotten.

They entered the Great Synagogue of Vilna, now a remnant of a past, vibrant Jewish era. There they found some Jewish survivors from Auschwitz who had made their way back to Vilna and were now rebuilding their lives and their Jewish spirits. Amid the stark reality of their suffering and terrible loss, in much diminished numbers, they were singing and dancing with real joy while celebrating Simchas Torah. Avraham stared wide-eyed around him and picked up a tattered prayer book with a touch of affection.

Something deep inside of him responded to the atmosphere, and he was happy to be there with the father he barely knew. He held back, though, from joining the dancing.

A Jewish man wearing a Soviet Army uniform could not take his eyes off the boy, and he came over to Joseph. "Is this child... Jewish?" he asked, a touch of awe in his voice. The father answered that the boy was Jewish and introduced his son.

As the soldier stared at Henryk-Avraham, he fought to hold back tears. "Over these four terrible years, I have traveled thousands of miles, and this is the first live Jewish child I have come across in all this time. Would you like to dance with me on my shoulders?" he asked the boy, who was staring back at him, fascinated. The father nodded permission, and the soldier hoisted the boy high onto his shoulders. With tears now coursing down his cheeks and a heart full of real joy, the soldier joined in the dancing. "This is my Torah scroll," he cried.

So, when we are dancing with the Torah this Simchas Torah, let us all reflect on how lucky we are to live free countries where we can learn Torah without fear. **Good Shabbos, Good Yom Tov Everyone.**