

Good Shabbos and Good Yom Tov Everyone. We begin the Hakafos on Shmini Atzeres and Simchas Torah with the words from the verse, "You have been shown in order to know that Hashem, He is the G-d! There is none beside Him!" (Devorim 4:35) The Chassidische Seforim tell us that the whole purpose of the Yomim Noyroim (the Days of Awe) is to come to the moment when we say the words of the verse quoted above. That is to say that the highlight of the High Holidays, namely Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur and Sukkos is when we say the verse above as we take out the Sifrei Torah on Simchas Torah.

Why is that so? What about the Shofar Blowing, Kol Nidrei, Neilah, etc? The answer is the following: The foundation of Yiddishkeit is knowing that "There is none beside Him!" By ingraining in our minds that Hashem runs the world, our purpose in this world becomes clear; namely, to perform the mitzvahs as Hashem has commanded us to do so. The following amazing true story will help inspire us to believe that "There is none beside Him!"

Years had passed since Norman Salsitz had seen chassidim dancing on Simchas Torah. Though he had grown up in Kolbuszowa, Poland with a chassidic background, Norman had left most of his religious practice behind. Still, when he had the opportunity to visit the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn during Simchas Torah in 1965, Norman jumped at the chance.

With a group of friends, Norman made his way through the streets of Crown Heights, ultimately finding himself in the shul of the Bobover Rebbe, Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam, zt"l (1908-2000). Norman watched the Bobover chassidim for a moment before plunging into the crowd, his modern attire making quite a contrast with the long beards and fur streimlach worn by the others in the room.

Norman found a spot where he could watch the action. He observed closely as the Rebbe danced with a special miniature sefer Torah, which he held throughout the evening. Various chassidim were called for the hakafos and then joined in the dance with the Rebbe. Norman watched as a chassid near the aron kodesh, resplendent in a silk coat and flowing red beard, called out a name and handed the sefer Torah to each man honored with the hakafah. As each name was called out, Norman watched the crowd to see who would step forward to accept the sefer Torah. "Zaleski!" Norman heard the man say. He scanned the crowd, but no one was stepping forward. "Zaleski! I give this honor to Zaleski!" Still no one stepped forward. As Norman turned back toward the aron kodesh to observe the scene, he was shocked to discover that the sefer Torah was being held out—toward him!

Zaleski. Suddenly, memory came cascading back. Norman hadn't heard that name in over twenty years. Tadeusz Zaleski no longer existed—it was the name Norman had used when masquerading as a Polish Catholic in the army during World War II. Yet somehow, this chassid, with the red beard, knew that name—and he had chosen to honor Tadeusz Zaleski with his head spinning in bewilderment, Norman stepped forward to accept the sefer Torah.

His friends watched in astonishment as he spun in a dance, whirling around the shul with the Bobover Rebbe and his chassidim. At length, Norman stepped out of the dance and returned to the red-bearded man. As he handed back the sefer Torah, he asked in Yiddish, "Why did you give me the sefer Torah? How do you know me as Zaleski?" "I owe you a debt," the chassid said, "and I'm happy I can repay some small part of it, by giving you this honor." "A debt? How can that be? I don't even know you!" "Oh, yes, you do," the man said emphatically. "Back in Cracow, you rescued two boys who were being held in a coal bin in the police station. Do you remember?" Two boys in a coal bin ... Norman's mind went back, to a time before his escape from Poland—the winter of 1945.

The was coming to an end, and Tadeusz Zaleski had been promoted to head of state security for the county of Cracow and its neighboring communities. Of course, no one suspected he was really a Jew. He spoke perfect, unaccented Polish, and he looked the part perfectly. There was no reason to believe that he was anything other than the Roman Catholic officer he claimed to be.

As the Russian forces liberated Poland, Jewish survivors gradually began drifting back into the cities. The number of Jews began to grow in Cracow. They organized themselves into a communal structure where they could care for the needs of the community. Zaleski could not do anything up front to help the Jewish community—it certainly wouldn't fit in with his disguise. But he was willing to work behind the scenes to contribute whatever he could. In fact, Zaleski's help was invaluable when it came to dealing with governmental abuse.

Rabbi Moshe Steinberg, who was serving as the leader of Cracow's small Jewish community, was among the few who knew of Zaleski's true identity. He told Zaleski about two Jewish boys from a small town outside Cracow who had been arrested on charges of black-marketeering. The police had caught them transporting a truckload of sugar they had confiscated the vehicle and its cargo, and taken the two boys into custody.

And that was the last anyone in the Jewish community had caught sight of them. No one seemed to know what had happened to them afterwards. How had the two boys vanished? Inquiries were made of the police, but no satisfactory answers were forthcoming. Rumor had it that the authorities had kept the sugar for themselves, then turned the boys over to the Cracow militia to be held in the Cracow jail. *Continued next week...* **Good Shabbos and Good Yom Tov Everyone.**