

Good Yom Tov Everyone. Tonight begins Sukkos, which we refer to in the nusach of davening as Zman Simchaneinu - a time of our great rejoicing. Being that the Sages chose to refer to this yom tov as a time of "our" rejoicing, perhaps there is message that is calling out to us Jews: Namely, that we should reach out to others at this time of the year to include them in our rejoicing. On the first night of Sukkos, we invite the Ushpizin - the soul of the Avrohom, into our Sukkas. Avrohom represents the mida - character trait of welcoming guests, which is an act of kindness. Let us relate the following true story which illustrates the power of reaching out to other Jews with a show of love.

The year 1935; the place was Yaktrinoslov Russia. Stalin, may his name be cursed forever, had total control of the bodies, minds and hearts of hundreds of millions of Russians. He was revered by them as well as Communists the world over as 'The Luminary of the Nations'. Leftists, and Kibutzniks in Israel actually displayed his picture on their lunchroom walls as the living example of good and progress!

So it was no wonder that the Jew who had been the gabbai of the 'Great Synagogue of Yaktrinoslov' got swept up in the Communist fervor, changed his Jewish sounding name from 'Gershon' to Grisha and got a new job - as an outside informer for the secret police (N.K.V.D). The Party even had him appointed as manager of the apartment building he lived in and he fulfilled his job faithfully; to spy on one of the tenants in his apartment building; the chief Rabbi of the city, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Shneerson. Every suspicious move, every visitor, even every phone call (the Rabbi's phone was tapped) he reported. He couldn't wait to catch him in some 'sin' and even took to occasionally following him when he left the apartment.

In fact, as time passed and Grisha read more and more 'party' literature he came to detest anything that reminded him of his 'dark, past' and it was all rolled up into this Rabbi.

Communism was young, fresh, enlightening the world!! Soon it would free all mankind from the bonds of 'religion' and 'bourgeois oppression'. And the Rabbi was trying to stop it! But for some reason he didn't just make up a story about him and have him taken away, as he could easily do. In fact he still found it hard to actually stop observing the Torah like the Sabbath and a few other commandments. Then, one winter night about half past midnight when Grisha was sound asleep he was awakened by a knocking at his door. 'Who could it be at this time of the night?' he thought to himself. Certainly it wasn't the police; when they paid midnight visits they would almost break the door down so as to petrify their prospective 'victims'. This was a quiet steady knocking. He peeked through the peep hole in the door and thought he saw....His enemy! The Rabbi! What did he want at this hour of the night?!

He opened the door a bit and began to say something, but something about the Rabbi's face and eyes did something to him. "May I come in?" The Rabbi asked and Grisha opened wider. The Rabbi entered, closed the door after him but for some reason Grisha had trouble turning and looking him directly in the face. "Listen Grisha" said the Rabbi putting his hands on Grisha's shoulders "I trust you. I believe you are a friend and I trust you." Grisha wanted to protest. He even began to say that he was an informer, but he couldn't say the word. 'Not only that', the thought crossed his mind like a fleeting black crow, 'maybe now I'll get the incriminating evidence!'

But he looked at the Rabbi's eyes and felt ashamed. The Rabbi continued speaking softly, he was aware of the danger. "Tonight about an hour ago an old woman knocked at my door. Are you listening Grisha?" he shook his head yes.

The Rabbi continued, "I let her in and she began weeping. She explained that her daughter found someone to marry. A Jewish fellow that works in the Communist headquarters with her but they were going to make a civil wedding, not according to Jewish law. But this lady decided that her daughter had to get a proper Jewish wedding and, despite the fact that they are sworn atheists, she actually convinced them to do it. "Of course this is a great risk on their part. If they get caught they will be fired from their work and possibly jailed and murdered. But they too showed up at my door about five minutes later because they didn't want to attract attention. "The situation was dangerous. I had to work quickly but also cautiously. they had to be Jews that wouldn't breathe a word of what happened. I left my house to find nine other Jews to have a minyan present.

"But why..." Grisha tried to protest. He was being spiritually dwarfed in the presence of this old Rabbi. Why didn't he just sit and learn Torah like the other Rabbis. Why were he and these other people, the bride and groom and her mother risking their lives. for what?" Grisha was deep in thought. The Rabbi voice broke through, "I could only find eight other Jews, with me it makes nine. We need you." Grisha realized that the Rabbi was no fool and knew full well what that he was a spy. But now he needed him and he trusted him with his life and the lives of others. It was in his hands. He motioned for the Rabbi to wait, slipped on a pair of pants and a shirt over his pajamas, put on his shoes and followed the Rabbi up the stairs to his apartment.

There were several other Jews, a young man and woman and an older woman as the Rabbi said and eight others. They glanced at Grisha and then at the Rav with confusion. But the Rav wasted no time. He sat the couple down, asked them a few questions, wrote a marriage document, produced a bottle of wine and then told everyone to stand and spread a large prayer shawl (Tallit) high over the bride and groom as a wedding canopy. Then he began the short ceremony. Everything was silent except for the Rabbis voice. It was as though they had entered a time tunnel. He read the marriage document, the groom put a ring on the bride's finger, the Rabbi made several blessings... And that was it. Everyone smiled and whispered 'Mazal Tov!! The Bride and her mother were crying with joy. The groom was crying with joy, the men around were shaking hands and kissing each other in joy.

Only the Rabbi was still. His eyes were afire with love of the Creator. They didn't dare sing or dance lest they attract attention. which would mean death for them all but their hearts spoke louder than words. Then something happened to Grisha that he had only experienced as a child. He felt happy. In moments, one by one they silently exited the Rabbi's house and descended the stairs into the darkness. Until only Grisha was left. He took out his wallet and handed the Rebbe a card. "What is this?" he asked. "This, Rebbe, is my Party Membership card. I don't need it anymore. From now on I'm loyal to you and your G-d. I'm a Jew, Rebbe. I'm a Jew! And no one can take that from me. You were right, you can trust me. **Good Yom Tov Everyone.**

A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda

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