

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's portion Tazria the Torah describes how the kohen was responsible for diagnosing tzaraas, a skin disease which afflicted Jews who had violated Torah ethics. A person who was suspected of being contaminated was to be brought for diagnosis before Aharon the Kohen or to one of his sons the Kohanim. Several verses in the Torah reading describe how the Kohen was to examine the affliction to determine the status of the patient. If a Kohen found the person to be contaminated, the kohen would send the afflicted person out of the camp. Being alone outside of the camp allowed the afflicted metzora to reflect on his spiritual deficiencies, allowing him to do Teshuvah - to repent, and later return to the community. (Stone Tanach, citing R'Hirsch, p.276) The kohen was not a medical doctor, but then again, tzaraas was a skin disease caused by spiritual shortcomings. Thus we see the great role that the Kohanim played in the spiritual lives of each and every Jew. The Jewish nation is sadly still wandering in the desert, in golus - exile. Whom do we look to for spiritual guidance during our current wanderings? Until the Temple is rebuilt (it should be soon) we are unable to consult the Kohanim. Rabbi Aryeh Levine of blessed memory. was well known, both in his homeland Eretz Yisrael and worldwide, for the unbridled love which he displayed to every single Jew. No act of kindness was beneath his dignity; no chesed - kindness too small. In his eyes a Jew was a Jew, and deserved to be treated like someone special. The tales of his kindness are legendary.

One such episode occurred, oddly enough, in a prison. Reb Aryeh had a custom to daven - pray on Shabbos with a group of prisoners. Arriving early Shabbos morning he would spend the next few hours davening - praying with the inmates and sharing with them words of inspiration and Torah. To these disheartened inmates Reb Aryeh's visit was the highlight of the week. Their lives were generally void of spirituality and relatively empty of all meaning. When Reb Aryeh spent time with them, it gave some measure of meaning to their lives. It made them feel special that a rabbi would make such a sacrifice and spend Shabbos with them; it was truly the best day of their week. On one particular Shabbos Reb Aryeh, as usual, trekked to the prison to daven with his unique group. In the middle of Shacharis - the morning prayers, a messenger burst into the room where they had been davening. "Rabbi — you must come — immediately!" the man shouted, urgency in his voice. "It's your daughter. Something terrible has happened." The bearer of the unfortunate news could hardly catch his breath as he had obviously run as quickly as possible to relay the information.

Reb Aryeh apologetically excused himself and hurried home. He walked out of the prison and was instantly directed to Shaarei Tzedek Hospital where his daughter had been admitted. Reb Aryeh's wife greeted him at the entrance of the hospital. She detailed the chain of shocking events that transpired that Shabbos morning. She had been preparing the Shabbos meal in the kitchen when she noticed her daughter lying motionless in the adjacent room. Her head was burning hot and she was completely unresponsive. She retold the frightening episode in its entirety, clutching her Tehillim in her trembling hands.

Reb Aryeh calmed her as they were led to their daughter's room. The child was lying there in a near-comatose state, and the doctors were at a complete loss as to what had happened to her. Around the clock Tehillim (psalms) vigils were organized as word spread throughout Yerushalayim. Heartfelt prayers stormed the gates of Heaven but none seemed to alter her frail condition. Reb Aryeh himself altered his schedule so that he could spend maximum time at his sick daughter's bedside. A stressful week passed and there was no apparent change in the young girl's condition. Shabbos came and Reb Aryeh decided that although he had not left the hospital for any other reason, he had to be at the prison minyan. How could he not? The prisoners waited an entire week for his visit. Leaving instructions as to where he could be found, he set out for the prison. As soon as he arrived a buzz filtered through the quarters, "Reb Aryeh is here!"

They couldn't believe he had come. They were painfully aware of his daughter's sad predicament and were shocked that he had come. Gathering around their Rav they inquired about the little girl's welfare. Reb Aryeh informed them that there had been no apparent improvement over the last week and that the doctors were concerned, "Hashem yaazor," (Hashem will help) he declared, the inmates witnessing the sincerity and faith in his voice.

The crowd settled down and Shacharis (morning prayers) progressed uneventfully. After Shacharis the chazzan placed the Torah down on the makeshift bimah (stand) and prepared to read from the Torah. Uzi, one of the prisoners, had the first aliyah. At the conclusion of his aliyah, the gabbai began reciting the Mi she'beirach - the prayer for the person who had the aliyah, pausing to hear the amount which Uzi wished to donate. Uzi looked around the room. His gaze settled on Reb Aryeh and he wondered if he could somehow use this moment to help alleviate his teacher's suffering. And then it hit him. "I would like to offer one day of my life to the daughter of the Rav." Reb Aryeh, startled, turned toward the bimah to ensure that he had heard correctly. "Uzi — but —" Reb Aryeh did not know how to respond. He could not believe what he had just heard. Ignoring his rebbi's protests, Uzi motioned to the gabbai to proceed with the remainder of the Mi she'beirach. The next person who had an aliyah, took his cue from Uzi and the unusually touching scene repeated itself. All those who had aliyahs offered weeks, and even months from their respective lives to Reb Aryeh's ill daughter. Reb Aryeh was completely overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and sacrifice that these men had exhibited. Finally, Maftir was announced and Dov Tamari, a middle-aged fellow with a tough exterior, strode forward to recite the blessings on the Torah. The portion was read and the group turned around to pay close attention to Dov's Mi she'beirach. Most expected him to follow suit and donate another week. Some, however, were skeptical and whispered their reservations to one another. But Dov shocked everyone with his proclamation. "What is our meaningless life in this prison worth when it is weighed against the pain of Reb Aryeh and his sick daughter? I wish to give over the rest of my life to Reb Aryeh's little girl." Not a week or a month. Not even a year. The rest of his life!

Reb Aryeh looked around at these men. Some had made mistakes during their lives, perhaps squandering opportunities given to them. But not today. Today these men achieved more than one could ever imagine. For a short time they did not seem like prisoners, rather they resembled angels. Or maybe, they were simply reciprocating to a special man by giving back a little bit of what they had received. Reb Aryeh returned to the hospital that day and was greeted by the astonishing news that his daughter had opened her eyes. No one was able to explain the young girl's sudden "miraculous" improvement. No one, that is, except for Reb Aryeh. (Reb Yechiel Spiro, p. 220, Touched by a Story.) Let us be inspired by this story to seek out qualified Torah leaders who will help us reach our spiritual potential. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**

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.**