

Good Shabbos Everyone. The verse in this week's Parsha Tetzaveh states: "Now you shall command the Bnai Yisroel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil, for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually." (Shemos 27:20) This verse perhaps hints to the concept of the Jews being a "Light unto the nations." Hashem chose us to be "for illumination" to be a shining example for the Nations.

Unfortunately, we know that the Jewish nation is not perfect. Although every Jew strives to be a shining example, some fall short. The misdeeds of Jews are often publicized with great fanfare. The explanation of this phenomenon is the following: Dog bites Man is not news. But Man bites Dog is front page news. That means to say that Jews are a shining example, in contrast to other nations whose track record is not so clean. Thus, when a Jew does something wrong, it is big news. The following uplifting story shows one beautiful example of a Jew being a shining example. For over twenty years, Reb Sholom Mermelstein has been a full-time volunteer for Bikur Cholim, an organization which seeks to make more comfortable the lives of ill people. Indeed, the full scope of the chesed - kindness that Reb Sholom does is known only to Hashem.

What made R' Sholom dedicate his life to helping others? As R' Sholom recounts, the inspiration for his lifelong mission comes from an incident that occurred during World War II. Sholom was born in a small, poor village called Pavlovo, near the city of Munkacz. His father, Yitzchok, owned a small farm with just a few cows, yet this was more than many of the townspeople had. Sholom recalls how his mother would get up at five o'clock every morning and milk the cows, to give the poor mothers of the town some milk to feed their children. Sholom also recalls how his grandfather, R' Bentzion Mermelstein, was always performing chesed for others.

When World War II began, Sholom's comfortable life suddenly went haywire. Sholom was taken away from his family and placed in a work camp, where he struggled to survive.

Several tortured years later, when word filtered in that his hometown had been liberated by the Russians, Sholom decided that it was worth taking the risk to escape and head back home. Sholom's escape was successful. But a long, hazardous journey still lay ahead. Pavlovo was 150 kilometers away, and since he couldn't risk taking a train, he needed to make his way there by foot—in the icy, frozen winter. With rags on his feet and the wind knifing through his thin clothes, Sholom nevertheless managed to walk six kilometers every day, seeking shelter wherever he stopped for the night.

One evening, Sholom staggered into a small town, only to discover that the place was filled with Russian soldiers. There was nowhere for him to lay his weary body down for a few hours' rest. Desperate, he started going from door to door, begging for a warm corner out of the freezing wind. But the answer was always the same: "We have Russian soldiers staying with us, and there is absolutely no room."

Sholom finally reached the last house in the village. The small hut was undoubtedly the home of an unruly peasant who wouldn't be pleased by the interruption. Sholom knew that he was risking his life by disturbing the man's rest. But his choices were few: either take the chance, or risk freezing in the frigid night air. So, he lifted his hand and knocked firmly on the door.

The man who answered looked suspiciously at his unexpected guest. "What do you want?" he growled. "I'm sorry to disturb you," Sholom said politely, "but would you happen to have a place in your home where I can sleep out of the cold?" The man shook his head. "Sorry," he said gruffly. He opened the inner door, where Sholom could see a small room with a bed—and a sheep placidly standing in the corner.

"There's only enough room for one bed and my sheep." Sholom could see that the man really couldn't help him. "I guess I'll have to sleep in the woods," he sighed, as he turned to go.

"Oh, you can't do that!" the man exclaimed. "There are wolves in that forest that would eat you alive!" Sholom shivered in fear.

"Could I at least stay beneath the ledge that overhangs your house?" he asked the peasant. "It will give me a bit of shelter." The man gave his consent and went back inside. Sholom, left outside in the frigid air, breathed a silent prayer to Hashem to keep him from freezing during the long, cold night that lay ahead of him.

A short while later, the door opened. "By the way, what's your name?" the peasant called out. "I am Bentzion Mermelstein's grandson," Sholom heard himself reply. He was momentarily puzzled: why had he said that? The peasant grew visibly excited.

"You're Bentzion Mermelstein's grandson, from Pavlovo?" "That's right," Sholom confirmed. "Why, do you know him?" "Of course I do!" the peasant exclaimed.

"Over forty years ago, there used to be a big market day in Munkacz. Many of us would walk for days with our cows to get to the market, and we needed places to stay along the way. Your grandfather always let me stay in his barn, and in the morning, he would offer me a glass of whiskey to help me get through the day. I'll never forget what he did for me."

Then the man beckoned Sholom into the house. He prepared some potatoes, milked a few ounces of milk from the sheep, and handed the food to Sholom. Then he let Sholom sleep on the bed, while he slept on the floor beneath him.

Sholom awoke in the morning, feeling fresh and invigorated from his comfortable night. He thanked the man for his help—and then thanked Hashem for showing him this kindness which had saved his life, in the merit of the kindness his grandfather had performed for others.

Sholom lived to return home safely. He continued to live by his mother's parting words: "Sholom, be a good boy, and always go in the correct path." (Visions of Greatness V, p. 107 R. Yosef Weiss) Let us all be inspired to be a shining example, to be a "Light unto the Nations." **Good Shabbos Everyone.**