

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's parsha Vaeira, the Torah tells us how Hashem promises to redeem the Bnai Yisroel from slavery in Egypt. Hashem tells us "and I will take you for a Nation..." (Shemos 6:7) The commentator the Ibn Ezra explains that the Bnai Yisroel will become a nation when they received the Torah at Har Sinai. The Torah was given as the Jewish Nation's "Constitution", l'havdil, in that it defined us as a Nation.

The following inspirational true story shows how one Jew showed his dedication to the Torah even under the most trying of circumstances. Rabbi Yitzchok Zilber was a man who could not say "can't." With that trait as his primary qualification, he led the organization called Toldos Yeshurin, which brought thousands of Russian immigrants in Israel back to their long-lost, cruelly suppressed heritage.

The strength to take on this task was refined in the crucible of Russian labor camps. In 1955, Reb Yitzchok was arrested under false charges and sentenced to hard labor. When he arrived in camp, he quickly discovered that the bleak surroundings and backbreaking work were only a small part of the menu of misery. Besides all that, he was surrounded by common criminals and anti-Semites. He was the camp's only religious Jew.

All of this, though difficult in the extreme, was secondary. The primary problem in Reb Yitzchok's mind was how to carry on as a servant of Hashem when he had been pressed into slavery for the Soviet Union. How would he put on tefillin each day? How could he find time for daily learning? What could he do to avoid desecrating Shabbos in a place where labor was the essence of every waking hour? These were his life-and-death necessities, and Reb Yitzchok set about finding ways to fulfill them. These were the issues on his mind even as he packed his belongings for the sad journey to the labor camp.

Therefore, he had come prepared. A small pair of tefillin, a Tanach and Mishnayos were well hidden among his possessions. He only had to find a place and time to use them. Upon arriving at camp, he learned that his coat was to be kept in a coat room. He decided to keep his tefillin hidden inside his coat.

Each day, he would come to retrieve it, find a secluded place and spend a few precious moments donning his tefillin. Although this arrangement carried great risk to the Reb Yitzchok's life, to him it was a comfort and a relief. He could wear his tefillin every day. The next challenge was avoiding work on Shabbos. There was no hour, let alone day, of rest at the camp.

However, Reb Yitzchok saw a window of hope. He would apply for a job as a water carrier. These were the men who carried buckets of water from the pump outside the camp to a large tank that supplied the camp's needs. It was a backbreaking chore, but it had an advantage. There was a quota of water that had to be supplied for each day's needs. If he could fill the tank on Friday with enough water for Shabbos as well, he would be able to refrain from working on Shabbos.

The key to the plan, however, was that he had to work alone. Only then could he be sure that no one would notice his absence. Reb Yitzchok decided that this was his best hope. Although he dreaded the prospect of drawing any attention to himself and thereby raising questions, he had to ask for the job if he wanted it.

He approached the officer in charge of the water tanks. "I would like to begin working as a water carrier," he said. "Why should I take you as one of my workers?" asked the officer. "Because I am a very hard worker. I am willing to do by myself everything that all of these workers did together." "You think you could do the work of six men?" the officer responded.

"I know I can. Just give me the chance and you'll see." Eager to see the foolish young prisoner fail at the impossible task he had set for himself, the officer acquiesced. Reb Yitzchok thus began doing the work of a horse, indeed, six horses. But his work did not break him. Instead, it invigorated him tremendously, because through this job, he was able to keep the holy Shabbos.

Even with these two facets of his spiritual life in place, Reb Yitzchok was not satisfied, for he had no time to learn Torah. To him, this was an untenable situation. A Jew must learn every day, regardless of circumstances. But there was no time on the clock for him to fulfill this obligation. Work started at 5:30 a.m. and wasn't over until 7:30 p.m., and in all that time, there was no free moment.

Still, Reb Yitzchok thought, there had to be a way. And he found it. He calculated that if he ran with his buckets instead of walking, he would be able to do an hour's work in 45 minutes. With those extra 15 minutes, he would have time to learn. True, 15 minutes was not much time, but with 14 hours in the workday, he would end up having learned three and a half hours a day.

Reb Yitzchok was energized by his plan, rushing through the drudgery to reach the fabulous hourly reward of Torah learning. He found a hiding place behind a curtain in a small storage room, and there he engaged in his life-sustaining passion. *to be continued...* **Good Shabbos Everyone.**